

Memoirs of Nataraja Guru in Nitya's Love and Blessings (his autobiography, in chronological order) and In the Stream of Consciousness

As a mendicant, Nitya got in a food line, which turned out to be a trick to enlist poor Indians into the British army, early in WWII. He served for some time. This is one of his stories:

In one section I had to deal with, the British were receiving new battalions into the transit camp from overseas, arranging meals for them, posting them to war fronts, and notifying their families in case they were injured or killed. One day I received a message that a convoy of 160 soldiers was coming in that night, and they should be given hot meals. I passed the message on to my good friend Fernandez, the steward, and he promised to feed them.

When the convoy arrived I received them, showed them their tents, and directed them to the mess hall. When I called over, I was told that Fernandez had gone home and there hadn't been any instructions to make dinner for the new arrivals. The hungry men in the convoy were furious. They had to make do with bread and canned fish.

There was no possibility of avoiding a court martial. It was painful for me to join the proceedings against my friend, but I hid my conscience behind the regulations. When the charge sheet was handed over to him and read before the presiding officer, Fernandez smiled in his gentle way and said, "That's okay." When the officer asked him why he neglected his duty he said, "I didn't do it on purpose. I just forgot and went home." The officer told him that forgetfulness was not a valid plea, and that he was liable to be punished with a pay cut and a stint in the army prison. He answered, "It's all right. I don't mind." When the officer went on that it would adversely affect his ability to be promoted, he said "What of it?" He was awarded a three week pay cut and five days in prison. When I nervously took his hand and told him how sorry I was, he consoled me with the reply, "I don't care."

Many years later when I was with Nataraja Guru, he took me aside and told me four great dictums to live by. They were to say “It’s okay,” whenever you were in trouble. If the situation persisted in bugging you, you should say “What of that?” When you are convinced of the imperativeness of the situation, say “Never mind.” If worst comes to worst, say “I don’t care.” I had already learned this from Fernandez, but when the Guru endorsed it I finally realized just how important it was.

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INTO THE MOUTH OF A TIGER

While I was studying in the Senior Intermediate Class, I came to learn of the World Parliament of Religions convened at the Always Advaita Ashram by Narayana Guru in 1924. The first of its kind had been held in Chicago; Swami Vivekananda had attended and received great public glory. I decided to organize a similar two day conference at the Advaita Ashram in Always. I wrote to Nataraja Guru at Fernhill in the Nilgiris, asking him to participate in the conference and give us his guidance. He gladly agreed to come and bring his Scottish disciple, John Spiers.

I felt very flattered, and became enthusiastic in getting as many representatives of various religions as possible. A local industrialist not only agreed to participate but was also willing to share some responsibility. Swami Dharmatirtha, who had returned to India from Lahore after the formation of Pakistan, agreed to come. Two other dignitaries were the two bhikkus I mentioned earlier, people who had drawn me very much to the ideal of sannyasa. One was now the chief bhikku of the Buddhist center in Bangalore and the other was in London. Another Buddhist monk came from Calicut.

With the help of Yusef, a Maulavi from the Ahammadiya Society agreed to come. Reverend T.C. John, my English professor, also participated. Although my class teacher, Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai, who called himself a nationalist, didn’t want to

show any sympathy to religion, he agreed to speak on the need for unity. Two rich devotees of Narayana Guru helped me with money to organize the function in as grand a way as possible, and Mrs. Kumaran Asan agreed to play the role of the hostess.

Finally the opening day of the conference arrived. In the distance I saw a gentleman walking into the courtyard of the ashram smoking a cigar. A swami went running up to him saying, “No, no, no, you can’t smoke here.” Soon they were shouting at each other. I rushed to the spot to make peace. The man who came with a smoldering cigar was none other than the veteran Muslim leader, Mr. K.K. Makkar Pillai. Although he looked furious, he winked at me and said, “My dear friend, you invited us here to share our culture and thoughts with you. Now this swami objects to my smoking. You know most of us Muslims smoke, don’t you? Then why did you invite us?” Soon I could see that Mr. Makkar Pillai was trying to teach us a lesson that the ideal of unity is easier spoken about than accomplished. He said he was purposefully smoking to test the tolerance of the Hindu swamis. Afterwards we had a very pleasant chat. I instructed all the ashram people to give up their taboo for two days.

Nataraja Guru presided on the first day. He reminisced about the First Parliament of Religions held in Alwaye in 1924, for which he was a volunteer. He appreciated our enthusiasm in the revival and continuation of the same tradition. The Guru spoke in English and I translated. The next speaker was Bhikku Buddharakshit. His speech was based on Edwin Arnold’s *Light of Asia*. I was asked to translate for him as well. At that time I knew Kumaran Asan’s Malayalam rendition of the *Light of Asia* by heart. So, instead of giving a strict translation I started singing Asan’s *Buddha Charita*.

The speaker was alarmed that his translator was getting into a rhapsody, and asked the President to switch me back to prose. Nataraja Guru told the speaker that since *Buddha Charita* was so well known to Malayalees, bringing the story of Buddha’s life to Kerala was like carrying coals to Newcastle. Everybody laughed.

The bhikku cut short his speech, but as I was chanting in a sonorous voice, the audience wanted me to continue. It all turned out to be very amusing. Nataraja Guru and I became good friends after this incident, and even talked about my joining him after obtaining my Master's degree in philosophy.

On the day after the Conference Mrs. Asan invited us over to her residence for a break-up party. At the dinner table Nataraja Guru announced his intention to go to Europe in a week. When I asked him about it, he said everything was ready except he didn't have a ticket. I asked him how he could go when he had no money for a ticket, and he replied, "When a leaf is about to come on a tree, does it bother to find out if there will be any space for it?" I thought he must be joking, but he was dead serious.

Later, when Mrs. Asan came by our table, I told her what Nataraja Guru had said. She laughed heartily and asked him how much the fare was. Without showing any particular enthusiasm he just mentioned the amount. Ten minutes later she returned and handed him a fat envelope, saying "Here is your passage money." The casualness with which she gave the money and the apparent indifference with which he put it in his pocket astonished me. The incident once again provoked my fascination with the Biblical passage: "Behold the birds of the sky; they do not sow, neither do they reap, or gather into barns, but the Heavenly Father looks after them."

That was how I came into closer contact with Nataraja Guru and established, quite unconsciously, a karmic link I would never be able to break. Sri Ramakrishna once said that if a lamb is caught in the mouth of a tiger, there is no chance of ever freeing it, adding that a disciple getting in the grip of a Guru is just like that. He can never escape the Guru thereafter. This came to be very true of my relationship with Nataraja Guru.

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Once Nataraja Guru made a comment about people who say grace before eating. Such a ritual can be made meaningful only if we consider all the efforts that are pooled in each morsel of food we eat. The sun and the ocean, wind, and clouds that work together to produce the rain that falls in the farmer's garden, the many workers with whose sweat every grain we eat is brought to the table, the physical, chemical and biological laws that are so well assembled in the preparation of a meal and its enjoyment, can all be remembered with a sense of gratitude. We can take a pledge that with the strength we get from the nourishment of partaking in that meal we will repay our debt by contributing our might to the well-being of others. In this sense paying a debt really made sense to me as being of the nature of justice.

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After taking sannyasa at the Ramana Ashram:

I returned from Tiruvannamalai with my head shaved, attire changed permanently to the sannyasi's ochre colored robes, and a new name earnestly passed on to all around. The world I lived in was outwardly the same, yet inside some steady transformations were taking place. Nataraja Guru described the process as the policeman growing into his uniform to make himself worthy to wear it. It was certainly something like that.

I remembered a couple of pieces of advice Nataraja Guru had given me long before. Youthful sannyasa can end up in the fiasco of youthful folly, and theatrical sannyasa might bring glamour, but its shallowness will be too transparent for the world to accept as genuine. So I decided not to put on any airs and not to justify whatever I was doing to anyone else. The first big change was to restrain my need to impress everyone with my philosophical observations and judgments.

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After giving my cordial salutations to Swami Vimalananda, in a few short sentences I requested him to accept me as a novice of the mission. Swamiji smiled almost approvingly. Then he suggested we go for a walk later. After an hour or so he called me to go with him.

For at least ten minutes he observed a deep silence. Then he asked me, “Do you think there are no gurus in Kerala?” Suddenly I remembered that I’d tried to fit in with the ashram of Sri Narayana Guru at Sivigiri and had become very upset. I had also visited Swami Vidyananda Tirthapada’s ashram thinking I could relate with Chattambi Swami. The atmosphere of that ashram was very parochial, and it in some way prevented me from knowing Chattambi Swami closely. I mentioned the names of those swamis to Swami Vimalananda and said I’d found little attraction to the ashrams connected with their names.

He said that was because all genuine spiritual seekers were running away from Kerala, not wanting to give dedicated service. Then he pointedly asked, “Who is there for Narayana Guru?” He said to himself, “Perhaps Natarajan.” As if he’d made up his mind, he said, “I want you to go back. You are most needed there. Sri Ramakrishna has more than enough disciples. You should not seek power, glory or reputation. If a tree blossoms with fragrant flowers and sweet honey, from all over the forest bees will come. Like such a tree, you should remain where you are. Allow time to bring maturity. You will also blossom. Tomorrow morning you will return. I shall send a brahmachari with you to the bus stand so that you can go back to Ooty and see Natarajan and from there go to Kerala.”

He did exactly as he said he would. The next day when I arrived at Fernhill Gurukula, it was four in the afternoon. Mangalananda Swami was gone. Only Nataraja Guru was there. He was all alone in the kitchen. Seeing me walking in, he poured out a cup of tea for me. He held out the teacup and a biscuit. When I relieved him of both the items, he abruptly asked me if I came

prepared to join him as his disciple, to which he added, “You have been preparing yourself to be a sannyasi all these years. Are you ready now?”

This was a moment I had long been dreading. I was not at all prepared. Nataraja Guru was ferocious and uncompromising, and I had always had a horror of him. My powerful attraction to his wisdom was counterbalanced by my repulsion of his personal idiosyncrasies. The way he had always thought of me as his disciple was very irritating. In every way he was an absolute contrast to Dr. Mees, who was an ideal, loving Guru. With hesitation I said, “I have to think.”

Nataraja Guru looked very offended. Shaking with anger, he said, “I knew this. I knew this. Narayana Guru told me he would have nobody and I would have nobody. So all the enthusiasm you showed these several years was only a bluff. You have no pressure. Your engine is at Runneymede.”

It was an insult. Runneymede is a station on the steep mountain railway up into the Nilgiris. Engines usually stop there for an hour to get up a head of steam. So I understood the sarcasm in the analogy. I was furious. In the white heat of anger I slammed the cup and saucer down on the table. Instead of running out of the kitchen, though, I bent down and touched both his feet and said, “Take me. I am giving myself to the Guru for whatever it’s worth.”

He laughed uproariously. Then he became suddenly calm and said, “That is right.” Thus my surrender to the Guru’s cause and my initiation all happened in a comic manner. Now many years later I understand that the gravity of my gesture and all its implications were a million times greater and more profound than I realized. Suddenly it occurred to me that Ramana Maharshi had probably advised me to read about the Great Tibetan Yogi Milarepa in order to prepare me to be the disciple of Nataraja Guru, who in so many ways resembled Marpa, Milarepa’s fiercely absolutist guru.

Nataraja Guru had no inside or outside. His anger, humor, and compassion all manifested spontaneously. He was never

apologetic or regretful. He certainly didn't believe in the conventional Christian philosophy of "do good, be good," nor in entertaining people with pleasantries and well-mannered behavior. On the other hand, he welcomed encounters that opened up areas of vital interest in a philosophical point or problem, as in the case of Socrates and his group of young followers like Plato.

The next day when he was sitting musing, I asked him, "Guruji, what is our relationship?" He said, "In the context of wisdom teaching I am your guru, and you are my disciple. In social situations you are you, and I am I, two free individuals who are not obliged to each other. When I teach, you should listen and give full attention. Don't accept until you understand. If you don't immediately understand, you should have the patience to wait. There is no question of obedience, because my own maxims are 'Obey not' and 'Command not.' Instead, understand and accept." That was the lifelong contract I maintained during the twenty-one years of our personal relationship and another twenty-six years of my relating to him as the guiding spirit of my life.

GURUKULA GRILLING

That evening Guru spoke to me very gently to compensate for the unkind words he used before my final submission. Then I retired to my room. Ooty is extremely cold at night, and there is no heating system. I lay shivering a long time before finally dropping into a sound sleep. I stayed under the blankets even after sunrise. Suddenly the aroma of coffee came strongly to my nostrils. When I opened my eyes, I saw Guru standing before me holding a tray with a cup of coffee and a few biscuits. With more than a touch of sarcasm he said, "I know it's rude to disturb a sleeping man, but perhaps it's not wrong that I offer you a cup of coffee."

I shot up from my bed nonplussed, because I'd never heard of a guru waiting on his sleepy disciple. Shame-faced, I relieved him of the tray and carried it down to the kitchen, which was in the cow shed. There I saw he was preparing to cook. Onions, carrots and eggplant lay in small piles. When he took his seat at the

kitchen table, I picked up a carrot. As I was about to cut into it, he asked me, “Who is the chief cook? You or I?” I thought he was in a humorous mood, so I asked him, “Are you the chief cook?” He said, “I am, so you have to take instruction from me as to what dish I am planning. Otherwise, you will be only wasting these precious carrots.”

The table also held a pile of sweet peas. He showed me one and said, “The pea has to go with the carrot. The size of the carrot should match the pea. The pea is spherical, and the carrot pieces are meant to be cubes.” It was the first time in my life I’d heard of two items going into a dish having to match. He went on, “Preparation of food is an art. Eating is a social event. Whoever cooks food should have an idea of the person for whom the food is made. In the unfilled belly of the eater is sitting hidden a negative hunger which is to be positively matched by the food given to them. You should have in your mind an imagination of the hunger you are going to appease with the serving of food you are going to make.”

Jokingly I told him, “I don’t know how hungry you are, and anyway we are only two hungry souls here.” He said, “In the Gurukula we don’t cook several times a day. We make only one meal, and before eight o’clock we have to clear out of the kitchen. Ooty being a cold place, guests are to be expected only after ten o’clock. If a guest comes, we cannot cook again for him. We can always just think of two extra guests to be fed. So we will cook for four people.” Then he outlined the plan of the curry he was making. I took the knife and started cutting neat cubes of carrot to match the peas.

Guru asked, “In what did you specialize for your Masters?” I replied, “Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta.” He further asked, “How do you distinguish Ramanuja’s Vishista Advaita from Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta?” As it was a serious question, I sat back, put the knife and carrot down and began to give a description of Advaita Vedanta and then make a comparison with Vishista Advaita.

At first I felt a little scared, because I wasn't very sure of my presentation of Advaita Vedanta, which in my mind was lying spread out through several volumes of books such as the Upanishads, Sankara's commentaries, and the haphazard manner in which it comes in the Vedanta Sutras. I thought I should take a couple of hours to gather my thoughts on this very complex subject.

As I talked I noticed the guru was becoming increasingly impatient and annoyed. Then he blurted out, "Do you think with your hands?" I don't like being treated like a two-year-old. I've always been quick tempered, and hot blood rushed to my face, but I choked back my anger and said meekly, "No, I think with my head." "Then can't you continue cutting the carrots and also speak?" In school I'd learned to do one thing at a time. I didn't know of the possibility of keeping one's mind on two different planes and operating efficiently in both. Seeing my hesitation he said, "Once you have cut one carrot cube, thereafter until you come to the end of that job, your mind has only to work in a repetitive pattern for which you require only a little of your surface consciousness. For you to present what you have learned of a system of philosophy, you are only recalling to your mind a certain scheme according to which thoughts are arranged. There can't be much effort in recalling an image already made. You are articulating with your mouth and not with your hands. So your speech is not interfering with the cutting of the vegetable. There is initial difficulty in a number of arts when two hands are asked to perform separate activities. But that difficulty is overcome with practice."

As I began struggling to cut carrots and address the question, every idea I presented was immediately taken up for criticism. My attempt was made to look so comic that I couldn't convince Guru of the validity of a single one of my thoughts. He kept hammering away with incisive questions and comments, all the while expertly preparing rice and a curry of sweet peas and carrot cubes to go with it. He also made a very tasty side dish with the eggplant and

onions. His simple lesson went a long way in helping me to distinguish the higher and lower selves of man. Over time I learned that one can do any kind of work in the transactional world and yet remain completely absorbed in contemplative communion with one's higher Self.

In the back of my mind, I had the idea I had nothing new to learn of philosophy from Nataraja Guru, because I'd completed a program in Western and Indian philosophy at a university, while he had only studied geology and zoology and had taken his doctorate in psychology. For five years he had taught physics. So I took it for granted that he had no proper understanding of Eckhart or Leibniz, Spinoza or Kant. I extended his imagined ignorance to the Indian schools of thought, such as those of Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva.

On that very first day of my life as his student, Nataraja Guru ripped apart all my claims to a meaningful knowledge of philosophy. He was a brilliant logician who not only knew the basic writings of all the philosophers, but over several years he had been making a thoroughgoing criticism of each one's stand. He had a scheme of correlation to grasp the interconnection between each philosopher as well as how contemporary science was affecting the philosophical visions of Europe. In his mind Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva were all touchstones to examine the merit or demerit of Narayana Guru's philosophy. I felt like a total ignoramus. All my pride of learning philosophy in the university was completely shattered, and I very quickly realized I had to relearn all of Eastern and Western thought under his tutelage.

As the morning meditation was at nine o'clock, only a little time was left for us to take our baths. In India, bathing and washing clothes are done simultaneously. The necessities of life should take only minimum time and attention, since only then are you free to live according to your wishes for the rest of the day.

Often during the day Guru was missing, and I didn't know where he had gone. Only after a couple of days did I discover that

he was doing all the chores by himself. He would sneak away to the cowshed to take the cows out so they could graze on the lawn, clean the cowshed and put the refuse in the compost pit. He was also chopping firewood, filling the water drums, and even sweeping the floor. I wondered why he didn't ask me to do such menial tasks. Then I remembered his policy of not commanding and not obeying.

After figuring this out I offered to clean the cowshed and take care of the cows, and he readily agreed. Thus I began to taste the hardship of living in a gurukula. It was difficult to become disciplined again, but I had already experienced something similar living in the army barracks. Although there was a lot of work, my new way of life was not altogether unpleasant. Each day the focus was on some important value of life, and very indirectly Guru was giving directions to relate one value with another. Thus each day became a study in values and their interrelationship.

The very first lesson I learned from Nataraja Guru is that certitude resides at the core of consciousness. In spite of syllogisms that descend or ascend between generalities and particulars, there is always a middle term whereby certitude is established. What is called proof or certitude is not a tangible thing, but only refers to actuality or reality. Reason moves, as it were, in a vertical axis that is both transcendental and immanent at one and the same time, and is also fully subjective in status.

In my philosophical studies I surmised that I should sit with the Guru every day, notebook and pen in hand, taking down notes. That was not his way of teaching. In fact, he didn't believe he was teaching philosophy at all, but simply showing how to place oneself in a living situation with a meaningful orientation between oneself and every other person who was sharing one's living space.

He had his own memory of what Narayana Guru had elucidated in the course of their guru-disciple dialogues. That was a great treasure, which he was guarding with zeal, and I consider it fortunate that he shared it with me.

Nataraja Guru was skeptical of Indian authors, especially those who wrote in English or translated from Sanskrit to English. He had already started revising Sankara's text and commentary on the Vedanta Sutras with me, and I thought I should study at least two Upanishads and Vedanta Paribhasha with him.

Vedanta recognizes several methods of obtaining valid data. The first is *pratyaksha*, direct perception. Nataraja Guru wanted me to scrutinize it even outside the system of Vedanta, as the stimulus-response theory of Western psychology doesn't fit in with the Vedantic theory of perception. In Vedanta the self is the perceiver and the non-self is the perceived. In the act of perception the self assumes the form of the perceived object, implying the temporal and spatial placement of the object is within it. This automatically brings in the reflexive aspect of seeing what one believes. At the same time, in the perception of a representative image there is an implied superimposition that changes the character of the self. The pure status of the self gets changed into that of a perceiver of the non-self.

Where the old Vedanta school went wrong, it provoked a number of criticisms by other schools such as the Nyaya system, the four schools of the Buddhist system, and those of Ramanuja and Madhva. Consequently the field bristles with questions and paradoxes. Guru was seeing the implications of all of these simultaneously. He presented each problem in great detail, leading me by the nose all the way. Together we would hash it out to arrive at a solution that was absolutely agreeable to both of us.

At that time I didn't even know how to read a Sanskrit textbook properly. It must have been hard for him to listen to my Sanskrit readings. He had to correct me every now and then, taking the book from my hand to read out the text and corresponding English translation. Invariably he would become annoyed at the translation and carefully retranslate the text before restructuring its meaning. It was a laborious process. What he was after wasn't mere justification, but a restatement of each line to clearly reveal

its intention, in order to pave the way to constructing a metaphysical framework for it.

It was very difficult to go on with this kind of exercise day in and day out. Guru was not trying to conform to any author we were studying, he was in the process of constructing his own unique philosophy. To sit in class with him for two hours taxed the brain to the utmost. Living with a guru is well known as an intense form of agony, but at the same time one cannot have a greater blessing on this earth.

In my final examination for honors I had stood first in the university, but after a half hour's discussion with Nataraja Guru I was convinced that what I had learned in the classroom was completely useless, and I should start over again from the beginning. In the course of each day's study, many things I thought I was sure of were to be given up as erroneous assumptions. When I first came to him, he told me it normally takes twelve years under the supervision of a guru for a disciple to cultivate a right formation of philosophy. Considering each day's grilling, I think I was lucky to get closer to twenty-four years instead of only twelve.

THE SWAMI FROM SCOTLAND

One evening Nataraja Guru's soul mate John Spiers arrived from Bangalore. During the four or five days he was there, I marveled at his rapport with Guru. All the irritations which Indian admirers and disciples usually brought were totally absent, and a sort of global atmosphere immediately unfolded between them. John always brought the latest information on world politics, as well as recently published books on poetry, philosophy and mystical topics.

The joy they shared could be described as two philosophers' mirth. No streak of personal ego-tainted defense or protest was in their conversation, and yet they were having a dialectical interaction bringing together what in India is described as the anterior skepticism, *purvapaksha*, and the posterior conclusion, *siddhanta*, like an exchange of shafts by two expert archers. Except

for when they were sleeping, this type of dialogue was continuously going on over cups of hot Nilgiris tea, which John never tired of brewing and pouring into our three teacups.

When John left for Bangalore, Guru suggested that I go and live with him. “We cannot conduct the future of the Gurukula confined to Malayalam. You should also be able to speak and write in English. Now you have a golden opportunity to polish your English by apprenticing under John.” I wasn’t sure which was better for me, to remain with Nataraja Guru for morning and evening grilling or to go stay with John, who was still a stranger. The prospect of improving my English and using John’s fine library held some attraction.

Finally I went down to Bangalore. John’s Gurukula was on the side of a hill. It had no well. Water had to be brought in buckets from an abandoned well half a kilometer away. The well wasn’t kept clean and the water was somewhat greenish in color. It was dangerous to drink, so John boiled it and strained it through a cloth. It was horrifying to drink that water.

Each day at least four to six buckets had to be carried to the Gurukula, and climbing the hill was very tiring. In those days I didn’t wear any footwear. Wherever you walked on the hill there were sharp thorns ready to pierce the soles of your feet. Another irritation was that John was a chain smoker. Nothing was more disgusting to me than to sit by someone who was always smoking.

Trouble between us began almost immediately. After our first lunch, John removed all the plates and washed them. I thought he was doing it by way of courtesy. In the evening when he offered a cup of tea, I left it there unwashed. John was an ex-Calvinist from Scotland, and he believed strongly in disciplining his wards. He asked me why I hadn’t washed my things and why I didn’t say thanks when he offered me food. I tried to defend my Indian behavior and ways of thinking. That made him angry and soon there was a hot exchange of words. I thought the issue had blown over but at about ten o’clock that night he came back to it,

accusing me of “ethnic ego.” We got into a serious altercation. Then John shouted, “I didn’t invite you. You can go away!”

Being young and hot-tempered, I felt very humiliated. Even though it was nearing midnight, I took my shoulder bag and walked away. In front of the Gurukula is the road to Bangalore. There was a tree there with a stone bench underneath. I sat on it, wondering what I should do next. I knew Nataraja Guru would not appreciate my return.

It was drizzling, but I started walking towards the city. Near dawn I came to a temple infested with monkeys. As it was raining, I went inside and found a place that wasn’t too wet where I could lie on a stone slab and sleep. Thus my initiation into Gurukula life led me right back to the road again. As I was well used to the life of a mendicant, freedom savored sweet in my mouth.

I thought it was another God-given opportunity to visit temples of traditional architectural beauty in the Karnataka area just as I’d done in Tamilnadu. Slowly I found my way, gravitating towards Maharashtra. As I was wearing sannyasi robes, wherever I went there was easy acceptance. People were very cordial and full of love.

Meanwhile Nataraja Guru wrote a letter to my father that I’d left the Gurukula although I’d been sent to John Spiers with all good intentions. My father became very depressed that I was back on the road once again.

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By the beginning of 1954 the atmosphere at the college had become rather suffocating. Although nobody directly asked me to resign, there were several pinpricks. I thought I would wait for Nataraja Guru’s counsel before taking an initiative. And although I thoroughly enjoyed my sessions with the students, I felt an urge to walk away from institutions and find the freedom to go into whatever pleased my inner self. The call to go into an elaborate comparative study of Narayana Guru with all the major

philosophers of the world was becoming irresistible. Moreover, my stance for equality was getting me into hot water with the administration.

A few days later Nataraja Guru came to see me again. When I told him how smothering the college atmosphere was and how I felt like revolting against it, Guru said, “An educational institution is a sacred place. When you were in need of it, the Vivekananda College opened its doors and welcomed you. When you leave it, you should go out with dignity, without regret and without malice to anyone. Give your blessings to the students and say goodbye in good taste to your colleagues.” He added that leaving a position should always be considered a promotion, like leaving a short ladder to get onto a taller one. So I tendered my resignation with good grace.

Though as usual Nataraja Guru had said exactly the opposite of what I’d expected, it was sound advice. If he hadn’t cleared my mind I’d have felt very angry and frustrated. Afterwards I learned firsthand of the Benevolent Grace that guided me to leave my academic career behind when I revisited Vivekananda College twenty years later. I went to the philosophy department and saw all my old friends sitting on dirty chairs in musty rooms and looking no brighter than the fossils displayed in the biology lab.

A couple of days before Nataraja Guru’s arrival on that occasion, I had received a letter from my sister, Subhashini, that she had chosen the man she wanted to marry and that the wedding should be performed at an early date because of my father’s worsening condition. It had been quite some time since I’d seen my father, so I thought of going to stay with him until after the wedding. Nataraja Guru agreed to solemnize her marriage.

My father was sinking each day. He was literally having heart failure. Every day it failed, and every day it was revived. By his bedside my father had the manuscript of his last book, his reflections on Narayana Guru’s teaching. He expressed a desire for Nataraja Guru to write an introduction for it. After the wedding, when all the guests had departed, my younger sister, Sumangala,

read some of the poems to Nataraja Guru. The next day as he was about to leave, he wrote a short introduction, which my sister read out to my father. Then he lay back peacefully, and Nataraja Guru took leave of us.

I remained with my father, sitting on his bed. I'd had no sleep for a few nights and was very tired. I leaned on the wall and dozed off. My mother gently nudged me. When I looked into her eyes, she looked at my father, and I could see he was dead. There was no other reaction from my mother. She just accepted it. Thus within twenty-four hours there was a happy wedding and a not so happy death in the same family.

Guru read of my father's death in the paper the next day. He sent me a card saying, "This is typical of the incidents in the life of an absolutist, to have the plus and minus aspects balancing and canceling each other out, leaving the absolutist in the silence of a neutral zero." To me it was the snapping of the last link with my family and harkening to a new call to accept the greater freedom of my life's mission. I returned to the Varkala Gurukula as a regular member of the ashram.

* * *

NATURE ABHORS A VACUUM

Nataraja Guru was very pleased that he could count on me as a responsible person to take care of the Gurukula headquarters at Varkala. Although Varkala was called the headquarters, nothing much was happening there in those days. Guru went ahead and printed new stationery, putting his name as the Guru and Head of the Gurukula and my name as coordinator.

Nataraja Guru was waiting for his sixtieth birthday to officially adopt sannyasa even though he had been living as a sannyasi all his life. Around this time the high court of Kerala drew up a scheme for the Shivagiri Mutt to be managed by a trust. This, in effect, brought an end to the guru-disciple hierarchy there. Nataraja Guru considered the move contrary to Narayana Guru's

Will and Testament. It was to continue that spirit that the guru-disciple hierarchy was instituted in the Gurukula.

Guru deeply respected the lineages of teachers found in a number of the world's religions. His intention was to institute a lineage of gurus with himself as the model disciple of Narayana Guru and with the line to be continued by John Spiers, Mangalananda Swami and me. He also wanted to make the Gurukula more independent, with a clear-cut rejection of the other institutions named after Narayana Guru. Several such institutions seemed to him to be doing no justice to the Guru's name, only using it for some sort of reflected glory and sometimes taking advantage of it in a very inappropriate manner.

We started publishing an English newsletter called The Gurukula Bulletin, whose tone was highly critical of the other major organizations bearing Narayana Guru's name. Being young and egoistic, I took the criticism to another degree of exaggeration, and in all my speeches I was vehement in denouncing the lifestyle of the people connected with those organizations.

When Guru saw that I was transgressing all limits of dignified criticism, he corrected me. He told me whenever I was facing people, rather than hurling angry shouts at them I should visualize only the Guru or God in my heart, and all my speech should be like a supplication directed to this image within. In public I had always spoken like an angry Marxist. Now that style of speech was to be substituted with a more contemplative and lyrical tone. This new attitude led to a wholesale change in my behavior, and before long brought me more friends and fewer enemies.

Nataraja Guru decided to make the Gurukula convention an annual feature for all those who wanted to have an absolutist relationship with Narayana Guru's ideals. With the same intent he also formed a new group of disciples called The Yellow Fellowship or the Vishala Gurukula. All who registered to join gave a token fee of one rupee on the first of January in recognition of their spiritual loyalty to the ideal of one human family. I felt

very enthusiastic about it because it gave me the chance to relate with many people, either personally or through correspondence.

John Spiers soon started printing Values magazine in English, and Guru suggested we have a Malayalam counterpart with Swami Mangalananda as editor. As the swami was mostly traveling, I took charge of the Malayalam monthly as its working editor, while Mangalananda Swami contributed articles and poems. Every month Guru provided an article, which I translated. This was very helpful for me to tune in and turn on to the Gurukula scene.

During the last thirty years the Gurukula has produced a literature of its own which stands as markedly different from anything thought of, written, or presented by anyone else. I cannot adequately thank Nataraja Guru for his wisdom in programming such a course of studies, which has been elaborated year after year. It is an ever-growing wisdom heritage that commenced with the publication of Values in 1955 in Bangalore and Gurukulam Magazine in Varkala shortly thereafter.

Also at that time Nataraja Guru's *Word of the Guru*, the first readable book in English on Narayana Guru, was printed in Bangalore. I went all over Kerala with bags full of books to sell, since the printer had to be paid and the kitchen pot was to be kept boiling. Afterwards I felt sorry that I sold most of the books to people who never bothered to read them. But Guru didn't want to discourage me.

After I managed to get a little profit out of the book, I went to Quilon and bought a couple of tins of good varnish and paint. The small Gurukula building was whitewashed and painted, and the doors and windows were varnished. When Guru revisited Varkala after a three months stay in Ooty, I thought he would be pleased with the excellent work I had done. After the first few minutes of greetings and pleasantries, he looked into the kitchen store. There was no rice, no dahl, no oil, and no vegetables. Then he asked me, "Can you distinguish the essentials from the non-essentials?" Prudence being the better part of valor, I didn't dare answer. Then he continued, "Which is better, to sit in an unwhitewashed building

with the doors and windows unpainted and take some hot kanji, or to have a well-decorated room with nothing to eat?” It may sound trivial, but that simple incident caused me to change my normative notion for evaluating the hierarchy of values.

In the evening I thought I should borrow money from someone to buy rice and provisions, but Guru didn't allow me to go. The only thing available was a little wheat flour for making paste to glue the wrappers of the magazines. With it I made one chapatti. After the evening meditation, I placed the chapatti before Guru and offered him a cup of *jira*, cumin water. I thought he would be annoyed, but he looked pleased. He tore the chapatti into four bits and took one quarter. The other three quarters were given to the three of us who were staying there. “It's good to have an empty stomach for a change,” he said.

All night I sat on my bed wondering how we would eat the next day, since Guru didn't like the idea of borrowing money from anyone. At five in the morning I heard a commotion at the gate, and coming out saw it was a bullock cart. Someone was bringing green bananas, coconuts, half a bag of rice, and all kinds of vegetables. This surprise gift from some good Samaritan made me see the validity of the economics on which Nataraja Guru based the superstructure of the future Gurukula. I became absolutely convinced that without any manipulation the natural benevolence hiding obscurely in public life can come like a miracle and fill any vacuum.

Next day when I brought this subject to Guru's attention, he said, “If you are brave enough to create a vacuum, nature abhors it, and the vacuum will immediately be filled.” My life for the last thirty years testifies to the truth of this. I have witnessed it again and again. Those who think they can understand the Guru just by reading his books are as fanciful as someone who takes a bottle of water from the ocean thinking that they can experience the ocean in the bottle.

GENDER BIAS

Since in those days I was very much influenced by the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and other literature of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, I was thinking of celibacy as a sacred discipline that sannyasins should invariably follow. Moreover I had been strictly brought up with archetypal notions of Indian morality and spirituality, which made me very cautious about getting into intimate relationships with females. Consequently I always preferred the company of small children.

I started a new feature in the Gurukulam magazine called The Children's World. Occasionally I took time to go to different cities or townships to organize children's groups, and I was able to keep in touch with children by publishing reports from each group. Some of the youngsters who got in touch with me as far back as 1954 are even now my close associates. I have seen their growth, education, marriage, settling down with appropriate careers, and even the education and marriage of some of their children. Although I was not particularly intimate with my own family, the close relationships I have had through the Gurukula have given me a sense of solidarity. Now my friends are spread all over the globe. At first the ideal of a global human family was only a dream, but now it has become an accomplished fact.

During my stay at Varkala, boys and girls from the Shivagiri High School would come to the Gurukula every noon to eat lunch and rest in the shade of the mango trees. As they hadn't much to do until the school bell rang, I started telling them stories. Soon it became a regular program where we'd share an exciting tale for half an hour each day. For this purpose I mined stories from Grimm's *Fairytales*, the *Panchatantra Tales*, *Katha Sarit Sagara* (a compendium of Indian stories), the stories of Vikramaditya, *The Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, and also selected stories from the Mahabharata and the Upanishads. Some of the best novelists and storytellers from that part of Kerala have told me they were regular listeners, and I feel very gratified that the seeds I was unintentionally sowing fell on fertile soil and brought forth good harvests.

One time a teacher at the Shivagiri school made up a story about one of the girls being intimate with me, so the girls were told keep away from the Gurukula. Even baseless gossip about my integrity or motivation was enough to make me upset and frustrated for many days. I was shamefaced, but when Guru heard of it he took me straight to the school and challenged the headmaster to prove any indecent behavior on my part. As Guru was shouting furiously, all the teachers and students came rushing in, including the girl in question. Guru pulled her next to him and asked her to declare whether she was in love with me. She was bold and said she was just one of the many drawn to the Gurukula because of the loving atmosphere there, and that the story had been made up by one of the teachers out of jealousy. In fact, he married her two months later. Nataraja Guru's bold action and full support of me was so impressive that the headmaster and teachers never said another word against the Gurukula.

Some girls from the neighborhood used to come to help with chores, and another time someone told a tale about one of them. Being so touchy about such subjects, I thought the place could be kept above all suspicion simply by prohibiting all women from visiting the Gurukula.

When Nataraja Guru came back from Ooty, he found that once again only boys were coming and no girl was to be seen anywhere. He asked me why, and I told him the neighborhood wasn't cultured enough to appreciate girls visiting the Gurukula, so I'd banned them.

Guru was outraged. "Half of the human population is women. They have as much right to be here as men. The consolations of wisdom have to be made available to men and women with equal justice." Then he asked me to never be bothered about what happens to one's body, what is written in books, or what people gossip about.

He sent somebody to bring the girl who was the victim of the gossip and told her, "This is a cruel world made by men to suit only their convenience. In this world women are subjected to many

kinds of oppression and persecution.” As a guru and father figure he gave her permission to tell good and beautiful lies to save her reputation, adding, “Men are weaklings and monsters without the courage to listen to truth or to look upon natural relationships with reverence.”

Truth being absolutely essential to sannyasins, I was shocked when Guru said that women have the right to tell lies. He told me, “These women have to be wives or mothers when they go to their homes. A home is made up of many members with different attitudes and values, and among the members of a family there will always be abnormal and subnormal people. To keep the harmony of the home, the woman has to tell many lies so that a tyrant father may not kill a son or daughter or a suspicious husband may not break up the marriage. It’s a mother or wife’s duty to wean family members away from anger, jealousy and retaliation.” The panacea Guru endorsed was a creative lie that a sensible woman could invent and apply appropriately. Thus once and for all the Gurukula was opened to both men and women.

That incident helped Guru to see my lopsidedness in matters of sex. Later I went with him to visit a family. There were many women in the living room. They were there mainly to see Guru, so I preferred to sit alone outside. Guru noticed I wasn’t in evidence, so he came out on the verandah, took my hand and brought me to the room with the many giggling girls. He introduced me to them, asking each one to give her name and shake hands with me. Touching them was eerie. What I noticed most were cold hands wet with perspiration. I wasn’t even courageous enough to look them in the eye. There were peals of embarrassed laughter on all sides.

Then Guru asked me to stay and talk. Some of the girls were fascinated and moved quite close to me. Guru turned to them and said, “He’s young. Don’t trust him! He may elope with you.” It made everyone laugh, but I thought it was cruel for him to tell such embarrassing jokes.

Guru later told me a story about a young and attractive swami of the Ramakrishna Mission who was observing absolute sexual abstinence. Once while traveling in a train near Paris he intrigued a French woman, who suddenly flung herself in his arms and kissed him. The embarrassment and shock was too much for him, and he had a stroke then and there. Afterwards the paralyzed swami was brought back to India, where he gave talks warning all the youngsters there that crude *brahmacharya* can build up pressure until one explodes like a boiler bursting. It was his task to explain to young people how they can let off their libidinal pressures without infringing on their morality.

This caused me to look at this very difficult subject in a new light. Guru asked me to acquaint myself with the theories of Freud and Havelock Ellis, although not to take them too seriously. When I first went through the pages of Ellis' theories, every chapter was shocking to me.

Now when I look back at what I acquired from the Indian community in my youth, I realize what a sick society it is that has so much built-in sexual repression. As sex is taboo, nobody provides any sex education. There is no way for youngsters to learn even how natural impulses can be sublimated into the most beautiful experiences. When I think how Guru helped me to surmount these difficulties step by step, I am filled with an enormous gratitude that cannot be adequately expressed.

MY FIRST SERIOUS BREAK WITH THE GURUKULA

I have always felt great compassion for all. Even at the slightest hint of irreverence, injustice or cruelty, tears would come to my eyes. There was always a sob inside. At the time I thought of it as a highly spiritual quality. Needless to say, Nataraja Guru didn't like my emotional sloppiness, even though he himself sometimes became sentimental in his admiration for Rousseau, Bergson or Kalidasa.

In Guru's mind there was a hierarchical arrangement of values, while as a democrat I was enthusiastic to see everyone have

an equal voice. These two ideals came into conflict every now and then. At times it brought me to the edge of neurosis. Whenever I had an ideological disagreement with him it became difficult for me to breathe, so I always found some excuse to run away to a far off place like Kanyakumari or some mountain wilderness.

After a short stretch of such travel, I returned to Varkala with a more intense resolve than ever to relate myself as closely as possible to Nataraja Guru. Many people, especially sannyasins, cautioned me about what they saw as his aggressively shocking behavior, but the more I was cautioned the firmer was my intention to go more deeply into his discipline.

I saw in myself a certain dignity and a slightly exaggerated self-respect. I took pride in coming from a family of poets and teachers, and on that account felt I was a person of high sensibility and cultural finish. From the very beginning Nataraja Guru felt I had a bloated ego and a mask of spiritual benevolence. He described my meek way of always remaining polite as sheer hypocrisy. Usually he made a frontal attack on anyone who appeared hypocritical, and didn't keep a disciple waiting long to be told what was wrong with him. He used to say, "A drastic disease needs a drastic cure."

Since my time with Dr. Mees I had emulated his behavior, speaking in a low, lisping voice and attempting never to humiliate anyone. At the Kanva Ashram I had given him my unreserved love and attention, and though he had by now passed away I still considered his memory very sacred. Seeing the tenacity with which I was holding onto Mees' personal charms, Nataraja Guru would make scathing remarks about the cultivated mannerisms of Dutch aristocrats, and speak especially disparagingly of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, the homes of the Mees family. When these indirect attacks weren't helpful in dissuading me to stop emulating Dr. Mees, he hotly turned on me and demanded that I not lisp, showing me how I could shout or bark like a dog and make myself less pretentious. I never realized he was trying his best to deflate my ego and take away my idealized concept of a master, so our

conversations always ended with my shedding tears or walking away from the scene feeling as if my heart would burst in a thousand pieces.

Despite his efforts, my admiration for Dr. Mees continued unabated. At the time I had some fixed ideas about a “true guru” and “true disciple,” and believed I should hold to them with Nataraja Guru. I worshipped him like an apostle of Jesus Christ. But Guru didn’t like what he called my sentimental exaggeration. He thought it best to rough me up and squeeze out of me all devotional excess. For instance, at the prayer hall I continued the Indian habit of prostrating before a guru. One day he made the outlandish suggestion that I only touch his feet at our first meeting and the last, such as when he or I was leaving on a trip.

My method was to listen to him with rapt attention and record all his words, which I considered most precious. I started keeping a notebook containing each day’s dialogue with Guru and his conversations with visitors. Slowly the book was filled, and I was happy to pore over it again and again. My spiritual growth was reflected in the pages of that book, and I took pride in sharing it with whoever I came across.

Two other youngsters were staying with us at that time. One had a master’s degree and was aiming for a doctoral degree in some aspect of mathematics. The other was a teacher of Hindi. Slowly I realized they bore a grudge about my position in the Gurukula. Whenever Guru and I were engaged in a lively dialogue or when he was speaking on some spiritual topic to visitors, I wouldn’t pay any attention to my associates. I felt it was enough to record and ponder over those delightful words of wisdom.

As I had no job or means of income, when Guru was away I would come to an impasse when the provisions ran out. Sometimes children of the neighborhood brought me a little rice or tapioca at noon, and in the night they might bring kanji or boiled green gram. I saw the two friends disappearing at the lunch hour and again at dinnertime while I remained hungry in the Gurukula. At first I didn’t know where they were going, but then I found out they were

eating at the Shivagiri Mutt. This made me highly irritated and alienated.

The gentleman who wanted to take his doctorate got into an altercation with Guru and left in a huff. The concealed rivalry of the other associate became more and more glaring as days passed. He had been with Nataraja Guru for a long time, and therefore had a natural grievance that I was usurping his place as the Guru's confidante.

A girl from the neighborhood used to come and help in the Gurukula kitchen. One day I saw her crying. When I asked the reason, she spoke of the other man's misbehavior. In those days I had an exaggerated sense of morality and thought a person drawn to passion should have no place in an ashram. So I went and promptly reported the matter to Guru.

I expected him to get annoyed and reprimand the man then and there. Contrary as always, Guru laughed heartily. He took my interest in correcting the other man as evidence of sexual jealousy. As I prided myself in my moral behavior, the allegation was too harsh for me to accept. To my mind I had been maintaining a high degree of purity and was beyond blemish. Not only was Guru not seeing my virtuousness, he was bracketing me with an evil man. He was characterizing me as a cheap person with a mean outlook. I felt very hurt.

That night I was fretting and fuming about the injustice of it all. Guru lost his temper and said, "How can you ever understand the true meaning of sex and have a healthy view of it when you yourself are the son of a repressed schoolteacher?" The more I tried to explain myself, the more he found reasons to disbelieve me. I thought, "What's the use of speech if words cannot convey truth, even to your Guru?"

In the evening talk he maintained that all Kerala was a society of repressed people with an exaggerated notion of sex, and stressed that only a mentally healthy person could appreciate sex and be proud of it. Guru's sermon not only sounded radical, it struck me as being downright perverted. I thought of leaving the

place at once. Only a few days previously I'd been traveling on a fast train holding the precious book of dialogues with Nataraja Guru, when it had fallen from my hand and been lost forever. Now I felt a redoubled loss, as if Fate wanted me to break away.

Seeking consolation, I went to see a friend who was the parson of a nearby church. He thought it was a good opportunity to draw me into the fold of Christianity by aggravating the sense of misery and disadoption that was brewing in my mind. He was about to go to a convention in Kottayam where a famous American missionary called Billy Graham was giving people a three-day Christian experience. Seeking release from the sense of bitterness brought about by the incidents in the Gurukula, I joined up with the parson.

As I had been fasting the previous day, when I arrived at Kottayam I was dead tired. Billy Graham's convention was not like anything I'd ever seen before. He had his agents screening everyone. All those who had some emotional problem were gathered in by a couple of agents. They were preparing the minds of the most miserable ones to be dedicated that very night to Jesus Christ. The parson also acted as an agent, and I was soon handed over to Graham's assistants to prepare me for a confession and immediate baptism.

Billy Graham's appearance on the podium and dramatic oratory was calculated to cast a spell upon his listeners. It was almost like mass hypnosis. All were lined up to go one by one for a personal interview and confession. I found myself in a line of several hundred people who were being led by the nose, as it were, to the feet of the American missionary.

The two people who were taking care of me were continuously whispering in my ears about how much Jesus loved me and the rare opportunity I was getting to confess to the great Billy Graham. Disgust grew in me, which brought me to the point of nausea. I was gripped by a sudden fear that I had been deceived and was being trapped. When I got almost to the cubicle where the

confessions were taking place, I turned and ran out. The Christian agents ran after me. Like a fugitive I bolted into the darkness.

Feeling absolutely wretched, I somehow made my way to a public building. In the night it looked haunted. Although I was hungry and thirsty, I decided to just stay there alone. Meanwhile the parson was frantically searching for me. He finally got to the same building, where he found me sitting on the verandah, leaning against the wall. He persuaded me to go with him to sleep even if I didn't want to eat.

He took me to the house of a friend of his. The friend's mother seemed to be a very generous woman. She insisted I should eat before going to bed, and after the hot meal she cooked I felt relieved not only of hunger but of all the negative emotions which had brought my spirits so low. I slept well, relieved of the heavy sense of tragedy I had been feeling.

The next day when I returned to Varkala, there was already a rumor in the air that I'd run away from the Gurukula and been converted to Christianity by an American missionary. As I walked in, Guru met me at the front door. He started teasing me as if he really believed I had run away and become a Christian.

I decided to go home. Without explaining myself I went straight to my room and packed everything. Then I headed out to the front gate intending to prostrate before Guru and take my leave. Seeing my bundles, Guru said I didn't have permission to take anything from the Gurukula. I said I wasn't taking anything other than my own books and clothes. He called to the other man, who I totally despised, to call the police, since I had probably stolen some books. This made me so furious I threw the bags down and cried, "I don't want anything from here! Take it all!" Then Guru said, "All right, take those bags inside," and someone did.

I started walking down the road. He followed me, saying "You are mad, absolutely mad. It is dangerous to allow a madman loose in society." I stalked on. He shouted, "Suppose a tiger in a circus wants to run into the street, will the circus man allow it? Like that, I am the ringmaster and you are the wild tiger. Get back

in your cage!” I didn’t see the humor of his comments, so I just kept walking.

Then Guru caught up with me and tenderly held my hand. “If you really are going, I can’t let you go scot-free. I should punish you.” I agreed, and held out my cheek like a martyr. He slapped me lightly twice. Like an ideal Christian I turned the other cheek, and he slapped me again. Then, in a prayerful voice full of benediction he said, “I am beating you so that the world will not beat you.”

I was still determined to leave him, and I started to turn away. He held my hand with the utmost tenderness and said, “Wherever you go, always remember Narayana Guru’s words *alapamatram akhila* (it’s all a meaningless sound in the air). After all, what we hear from others is only the air vibrating. It can sound like praise or blame, but that is only our interpretation. True spirituality is to cancel out all pairs of opposites and maintain one’s equanimity.” My feet faltered. My anger was gone. Peace and a sense of great blessing came. I recalled how Ramana Maharshi had asked me to read the story of Milarepa, and remembered all the painful days of Milarepa’s intense mortification, which had brought him so many changes. But I decided to continue on into silence.

I hitchhiked home and told my mother that I would remain in the one-room outbuilding my father had built for me, completely cut off from the world, observing silence. From the next day onwards I would not talk to anyone. My reasoning was that I had been with the wisest and noblest of all people in Nataraja Guru, and if my words didn’t bring him sufficient reason to believe me, there was no longer any reason to talk.

* * *

After eighteen months of deep silence I was once again on the road.

Before heading north I wanted to visit the Narayana Gurukula in Varkala, and the first man I wanted to greet was Nataraja Guru. Guru was taking his evening meal when I walked in. He couldn't believe his eyes. He got up, rushed to the door, took me by the hand and said in a loud voice, "Here is the return of the Prodigal Son. Is there no Michelangelo to paint this scene?"

I decided not to break my silence. I just looked into his eyes. He made me sit next to him and he set a plate of kanji and green gram before me. After partaking of the food, I went and sat with him in his room. The other people in the Gurukula were very confused not knowing if I was a friend or an enemy. But Guru was truly in the mood of a prodigal son's father. Of course, he had no fatted calf to be killed and given in a feast for me, but his love was irresistible.

SOMANAHALLI

It was hard to tear myself away from Guru, but I decided to spend the night alone. When Guru went to bed, I walked over to the nearby Shivagiri High School and slept in one of the classrooms, which was in an unfinished cottage. In the morning I took a bath and put my wet clothes in a convenient place to dry. I had only two sets of clothes, a shoulder bag, a notebook and pencil, and the complete works of Narayana Guru in Malayalam.

When I got back to the Gurukula, Guru was giving the morning class. He asked if anyone there knew the significance of Karu, which comes in the first verse of *Atmopadesa Satakam*. The question was clearly aimed at me. I wanted to tell him that it was the same as Spinoza's substance, but I wasn't going to break my silence. Guru probably saw the struggle in my eyes, so he said, "If Nitya were speaking, he would have equated Karu with Spinoza's substance." He spent the class elaborating the nuances of the term. When the class was over, without saying any formal goodbye, I simply touched his feet and walked into the road.

I took a train to Trivandrum and went to the Medical College, where my sister was doing her residency. Since I wasn't talking,

she was rather sad and didn't say anything either. As I was leaving she dropped an envelope in my shoulder bag. I walked back to the railway station, feeling very tired. I was sure I was leaving Kerala forever. From the envelope that my sister had given me, I took one rupee and bought a second-class ticket to Kadakkavur, where a friend of mine was seriously ill. That left a balance of twenty-nine rupees. Feeling totally exhausted I got into a compartment and soon was fast asleep. I was still asleep when we reached what I thought was Kadakkavur. The train stopped with a big jolt at the station, waking me up. I looked out. My God! It was Varkala.

Sitting confused, not knowing what to do, I looked at the boarding passengers. Who should I see but Nataraja Guru? He walked up and stood before me with his cane, bag, overcoat, and a French beret. As I wasn't speaking, he didn't say anything, but with his hand made a gesture that could be interpreted as "Are you coming with me?" I was befuddled, embarrassed and crestfallen. I remembered Francis Thompson's poem *The Hound of Heaven*. I thought, "Here is the Hound again. I cannot escape him." The best thing was to surrender once again, this time absolutely. As the ticket examiner was passing, Guru asked him to give me a ticket to Bangalore and gestured to me, asking if I had money. The cost of the ticket was twenty-nine rupees, exactly the amount I had left.

When the train stopped at Kottarakara, a friend met us at the station and gave us some ripe bananas. I was feeling very hungry. Guru didn't bother to ask if I'd eaten supper; he rightly guessed that I had not. He very generously gave me five bananas. That wasn't his habit; usually he'd only give one.

When we arrived in Bangalore, Guru said, "As you haven't resumed talking, it's not good to drag you around the city." So without visiting Padma and Kumar's and the Shekharan's houses, which was part of his routine, he took me to a newly constructed house in Jayanagar. When he opened the door we heard a big humming in the room, as if an airplane was about to take off. I couldn't believe my eyes: thick dark clouds of mosquitoes of all sizes flew around us. Guru opened all the windows as fast as he

could and I joined him in driving the mosquitoes out with our towels.

After a few days at Jayanagar, I started speaking again. Only then did I discover I'd lost my capacity to speak fluently. In any case, most of what was important to people no longer mattered to me, so it was easy to keep quiet. Frequently I had to wait and recollect my forgotten vocabulary in order to complete a sentence. If I said two or three words and paused, Guru would complete the rest.

Guru thought I should stay in a place that would go well with my silence. He took me first to John Spiers place, and after lunch we walked to Somanahalli, where the village headman received us. After giving us tea he took us to see the land he wanted to donate, where there was a hutment. The mud walls were just half raised, and while the roof was thatched with coconut leaves, the floor had not yet been made. Inside and outside the room was the same. There was grass and thorny bushes in both places.

Guru went and cut some palm leaves, spread his towel on them, and told me he had made a bed for me. I was moved by his loving care, but I didn't think a disciple should have his guru doing his work for him. I brought more leaves and made another bed, leaving the one Guru had made for him. It was already dark. Guru gathered some dry firewood and made a fire. He had a small mobile kitchen unit with him: stove, kettle, tea powder, sugar and milk powder. Whenever we went to a new place it was symbolic that Guru would make tea. Putting sugar, cumin and water in the kettle he made a sort of tea. Then, like Father Christmas, he pulled four laddus out of his bag. He said two were for us to eat then and there, and two were to be kept for morning.

As we had no light, we went to bed early. An hour later I heard Guru say, "Nitya, stay where you are. Don't move." All the ants for miles around had come for the two laddus, and there was a thick blanket of them. Guru threw the laddus out and asked me to try to stand up without crushing any ants.

Both of us were still standing waiting for the ants to leave when the wind began howling outside the hut. Quickly a big downpour began and all of a sudden there was sky above our heads. The gale had blown the roof away! Torrential rain poured down on us like a waterfall. We both stood there stunned, eyeing the soaking mud walls that were to be our ashram. There was nothing we could do that night except get drenched to the bone.

In the morning there was no need to take another bath. We wrung out our clothes and went and sat under a banyan tree where there was a stone bench. Guru got into a philosophical monologue on heat and cold, pain and pleasure, victory and defeat, and praise and shame. He said there was a gradation in all these dualities. I was in no mood to go into subtleties as I was shivering with the cold.

We went and found the village headman, and he gave us a room to stay in while his people thatched the roof again. He also had a provision shop where Guru bought a big pot with a lid on it which could be my main store of rice, sugar and other provisions, another pot for water, and some aluminum utensils for cooking. An arrangement was made that I would be sent rice and other provisions periodically.

The next day Guru left, and I moved back to the Somanahalli Gurukula. My plan was to cook lunch and dinner at the same time, then go to the nearby river to take my bath. I always came back with a bucket of water and then ate. One day when I returned I found my food stolen and my water pot lying empty on its belly. My books were torn and my ink was spilled. I had no idea who would be so hostile to me. Never in my life have I felt so helpless and lonely as at that moment.

I looked around for the culprit. Suddenly I got the creepy feeling that someone was looking at me. I ran outside. To my horror I saw half a dozen monkeys sitting on the roof, wondering what my reaction would be to their assault. There were also thirty or forty monkeys in a nearby banyan tree. I lost all my orientation and just shrieked and cried. The monkeys on the roof rushed to

join the ones in the tree. I ran towards the tree and somehow managed to climb it. Most of them jumped down. A monkey grabbed one of my slippers and ran away with it to the next tree. I thought I would go mad. I put on the other slipper, ran to the other tree, and threw stones at him. Finally he threw the slipper back in my face.

After that I was very cautious not to leave my food unguarded. I would take it to the riverside and eat there after my bath. But this didn't dissuade the monkeys. When I returned to the hut, I saw that the lid of my rice pot had been pulled off. I looked inside and what did I see? They had pissed in it!

Like Robinson Crusoe who in his loneliness was always looking for a companion, I kept my eyes turned in all directions, praying that some other human being would turn up to keep me company. Then one day, like a godsend, Yengta came. He was a ten-year-old shepherd boy. He only knew the Kannada language and I didn't, but silence was a better language than words. Yengta gathered firewood for me, and I cooked rice for both of us. He became almost my babysitter, and guarded the hut from monkey attacks. He thought that they were all Hanumans, monkey gods, so it was a sin to throw stones at them. The only offense permitted was shouting. Yengta knew the language of the monkeys, so he made a peculiar noise that had a magical effect on them.

On exactly the forty-first day Guru reappeared. I had written to him of my tribulations with the monkeys, so he brought firecrackers. He would also point his walking stick at the monkeys as if it were a gun. This tactic had a good effect, as the monkeys thought we were hunters. However, after a couple of days, they discovered that there was no coordination between Guru's stick and the firecrackers. Then Guru said that we should confuse them by changing our tactics. Instead of shouting at them, we should give them peanuts. I still don't know what effect this had, except to teach me to look upon tragedy as a kind of joke.

Guru was very fond of Yengta. He asked him whether it was fair for the monkeys to eat my food and pass urine in the rice.

Yengta always said that eating food was fair because they were hungry, but that passing urine was unfair. On hearing this, Guru would laugh and laugh and laugh. Guru would make him repeat his judgment several times a day, and he would laugh each time. Thus I began to get used to the monkeys.

Guru, Yengta and I always took our meals together. On the first day when Guru offered rice to Yengta, he asked, “Sir, is it my fate that I should eat rice?” On hearing this, Guru’s eyes became moist. He translated Yengta’s words into Malayalam for me, and said, “Look at the pitiful state of this boy. He has eaten only ragi before and not rice. He now looks upon that as a tragedy. How fateful to eat rice!”

Then he asked me, “From where does wealth come?” I didn’t say anything. “It comes from Yengta, the shepherd boy who grazes sheep. Milk and wool, meat and leather come from sheep. Similarly, rice, corn, barley, wheat and ragi, cultivated by poor farm hands, give us our sustenance. This is the true source of wealth.”

For the next two weeks Guru elaborated on this subject. He knew of my previous affinity for Marx and Marxian economics. After a week, Guru said, “If you want to change the world, you should change its economic pattern. Pockets of bounty and scarcity cannot and should not exist side by side.” He decided to write a book called One World Economics. Famished and undernourished Yengta did not live long, but the inspiration that came from him grew into something that turned out to be of supreme importance in my outlook on life. I still cherish the memory of Nataraja Guru treating Yengta with love and tenderness.

The day after Guru arrived he designed a kitchen that was to be attached to one side of the hut. His plan was to have a semi-circular room on each end. The entrance from the hut to the new kitchen was not through a proper door but through a crude gap in the wall. After finalizing the plan, we gathered stones by the river and brought them to the building site. We were like two-legged donkeys, lugging the heavy buckets of stones. Guru said, “St.

Francis used to call his body ‘my brother ass.’ Now we can say the same thing without any exaggeration.”

The soil at Somanahalli is a mixture of clay and sand, gooey when wet and hard as steel when dry. Guru showed me how a wall could be erected without a mason. Every day we worked a couple of hours building the kitchen walls. Then he showed me how small gaps could be left and fitted with broken glass for windows. Every time I put bricks and mud together, these lines from Kumaran Asan’s *Duravastha* came to my mind:

On the hillock stands a stooping shack like a pale, battered mushroom;

As you get closer and closer you will find it more and more irksome to the eyes;

It is not circular, angular or square;

In it there is not a trace of architectural art.

There runs a clumsy mud wall around it, not higher than a foot;

No one cared to give it a finishing touch;

One can even see in the wall the finger prints of its creator.

During Guru’s visits, every evening was like a lover’s meeting. There was a stone slab under the banyan tree at the roadside where we would sit together, sometimes until nine at night. We would have our special concoction of boiled water with cumin and molasses, filling our cups again and again from the kettle and sipping it a little at a time. Often Guru would tell me stories of his days with Narayana Guru, which were very helpful for understanding his glorious insights, as well as the pathetic social setup to which he belonged. He shared many secrets of the Guru’s writings, giving me an ever-deepening sense of his philosophical excellence.

Nataraja Guru also narrated several anecdotes that revealed the crudeness, shallowness, and downright thick-headedness of the community that clung to the Guru. Even though his own father

founded it, Guru showed me clearly that the SNDP Yogam was nothing more than an outright caste organization. Although they often quoted Narayana Guru's great dictum, "One caste, one religion, one God," they were so soaked in their own caste identity that it was impossible to bring them out of its quagmire. Even the most educated and cultured among them were afflicted with deep prejudices against members of other communities. Because of their social paranoia, they couldn't trust anyone. They interpreted everything in their lives in terms of persecution meted out to them by more powerful castes. Guru thought it was an incurable disease of their collective social psyche, and that the stigma associated with the tapping and distillation of toddy was at the back of people's minds in this matter.

Keralites have always been of this *karmabhumi*, and they never tolerated any contemplative before or after Narayana Guru. Even Sankara had to go north to find acceptance. There was no dearth of devotional worship for Narayana Guru, but there was no one to listen intelligently to what a really wise man had to say. One night Guru talked about the kinds of crucifixions gurus undergo in India, where they aren't defeated by being hung on a cross but by being put on a pedestal as a god along with the 330 million other gods of the Indian pantheon.

* * *

My enthusiasm for Sufism made me go slow with my publishing projects, but the Islamic Literature House did print the stationery for my proposed magazine free of charge. At that juncture, Nataraja Guru returned. I could see he was dissatisfied with my distractions, however he was very circumspect in correcting me. He simply said, "Will any free and healthy young man who has all the time of eternity at his disposal agree to tie a heavy boulder around his neck and commit himself to such a tragic blunder, requiring him to find money month after month to publish some fanciful trash?"

Upon hearing this, the only prayer in my heart was for him to stop giving me advice. But afterwards, when I replaced John Spiers as the editor of Values, I became retrospectively thankful to Guru for warning me against faceless readers from whom it would be difficult to get the next month's subscription money.

* * *

I told Guru that a friend had arranged for me to go to Bombay. He said he was familiar with such tricks, that it was a mild form of disadoption, but he didn't want to stand in my way. "Disadoptions and adoptions take place in the Gurukula now and then, but the ship goes sailing on. The Tao leads it wherever it wants. All that you have to do is keep feeding the fire, sitting inside the flame itself, and throwing down all the libations in your hand without any kind of miserly reserve. Everything then takes care of itself when left alone." Then he dropped the subject. For the week before I left he told me many more detailed anecdotes about his relationship with Narayana Guru, rounding out my store of knowledge about their time together.

The day before my departure, Guru asked me what the rail fare between Bangalore and Bombay was. I told him the amount, and without any hesitation he gave me exactly that much. Then he gave me ten rupees for food. Some time later he gave me five more. When I was about to leave, he gave me one and a half rupees, and when I touched his feet and said goodbye he gave me a quarter of a rupee more. His only advice was to respect signs and to have reverence for money, but I don't think I remembered these valuable pieces of advice quite when I should have.

* * *

Swami Kashikananda had been honored with several academic awards. To study *Vedanta Paribhasha* with him was to undergo a rigorous discipline of familiarization with both Vedanta

and Sanskrit grammar. Afterwards when I returned to Fernhill, I made another study of *Vedanta Paribhasha* with Nataraja Guru, which gave me a chance to see the difference between the traditional orthodox way of learning Vedanta and critically studying it using western methods of inquiry. Guru questioned many things taken for granted by most Vedantins, and although I was often irritated by his skeptical remarks, getting into deep discussions and answering his scathing questions pared away all the dogmatic aspects of Vedanta, which thereafter became a very convincing philosophy to me.

* * *

AN EXPERIMENT IN EDUCATION

My friend and benefactor Hari Kishandas began to spend more and more of his time with me. He included me in his public functions of social or educational importance. Once I told him about Nataraja Guru's D.Litt. in Child Psychology from the Sorbonne, and gave him the gist of Guru's thesis, *The Personal Factor in the Educative Process*, including his theory of one world education and the one teacher school.

Guru's one teacher school was based on three principles. First was the theory of negative education emphasized by Jean Jacques Rousseau in his famous book *Emile*. Second was the necessity of maintaining bipolarity between teacher and taught and not disciplining a child before its adoption of the teacher was complete. This idea was based on the gurukula system, where guru and disciple establish a rapport called *parasparya*. Third was the natural education of Herbert Spencer, which honors a child's spontaneous liking for certain subjects and its natural inclination to go constantly and consistently in a certain direction of preference. Nataraja Guru suggested there be one teacher for every ten children, and that the same teacher stay with them until the tenth grade and teach all subjects. The idea is that the rapport between

pupil and teacher is not severed at arbitrary intervals but continues to evolve.

I proposed that we could start an experimental school for children between the ages of three and six. Fascinated by the idea, Hari Kishandas took me one day to the governor of Maharashtra State, who was a Gandhian living a spiritual life, studying sacred books and practicing spiritual disciplines. He was very attracted to Guru's theories and promised to help us start our one-teacher school.

* * *

THE DANCE OF NATARAJA

Every Fall Hari Kishandas assisted his guru by making elaborate arrangements for a Vedanta Conference in Amritsar. One year I invited Nataraja Guru to go along, and one of his Belgian disciples, Paul Gevaert, who had been staying at Fernhill, agreed to join us. After the Conference, Hari Kishandas took us to a spiritual camp at Lonavala on the outskirts of Poona. The camp was a very peaceful place, and it was a great experience to visit Kaivalya Dhamam Ashram, founded by Swami Kuvalayananda, which has a treasury of the finest books on religion, philosophy and science in Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi and English. There were several scholars taking full advantage of the library and giving lectures.

When we returned to Bombay, the Marathi teacher in our school invited Nataraja Guru to come to her house, where her husband had invited several of his scholarly friends to meet him. While she cooked, we sat in the kitchen watching the ritualistic way in which she prepared the food. She sat as if performing a puja, surrounded by graphic designs drawn on the floor. Once seated she wouldn't get up until the entire meal was completed. She never spoke. When the food was ready she ritualistically prepared our seats for us. The quantity and quality of each item, which she served as if offering it to gods, was quite elegant.

Guru was a great admirer of traditional Marathi homes, and he somehow connected the culture of the women with Kalidasa's classics. I had never noticed that cooking, serving, and eating could be such an aesthetically and spiritually perfect art. The day closed with a satsang, during which Guru gave a touching interpretation of traditional Hindu family life.

Next day the second teacher came to pay homage to Guru. From her behavior Guru presumed that she was head over heels in love with me, and he decided to nip that sentiment in the bud for the good of both of us. He spoke very affectionately, gave her a paternal embrace, and said, "If you give your heart to this young man, you will regret it later. He is an irresponsible sannyasi who is wandering in all the three worlds. He cannot be restrained by anyone. If you give him your heart, he may inadvertently leave it somewhere and forget it."

His warning had the desired effect. After Guru had gone, she wanted to know all about sannyasa. I wrote an explanatory letter in the form of a dissertation, which clearly showed what a woman can expect from a sannyasi and how he may conduct himself without breaking any of his vows of celibacy and chastity. Upon reading it she became extremely upset. She invited me to have tea with her at a restaurant where poets and writers often met, but she was so upset she couldn't say anything. So we decided to part. When we came out of the restaurant, I got into a bus and left her standing dazed by the roadside.

I never saw her again. What happened to her from that day on is an absolute blank in my mind. If Guru had not come along at that very moment and set me back on my path, my life might have been very different.

This wasn't the first time Guru had come into my life like a destroying Shiva to separate his disciple from the snare of karmic entanglements. Wherever I proved to be successful or was becoming admired, he had a knack for sabotaging the situation. Once I asked him why he was doing this, and he told me his name was Natarajan and he was only doing his duty, adding "If Shiva

doesn't demolish, Brahma won't get a chance to create again." I have to admit that whenever he intervened to get me to terminate a program it always led to another program of greater spiritual value.

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A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

Just about then Nataraja Guru returned from a trip to Europe with his head full of ideas. It seems God had been conspiring to make him fully acquainted with all of world literature. While he was in Europe, one of his loyal disciples was driving him around in Brussels when her car broke down right in front of the Royal Academy of Science. As the repairs were going to take some time, Guru walked into the Academy, where a conference was going on. A group of highly placed scientists, linguists, and philosophers were conferring on how to develop a common methodology for the interdisciplinary sharing of knowledge. Guru told them that this was the most important subject in his mind also, and he was soon busy working out a scheme for a universal language. Some of the delegates asked him to submit his thoughts in a monograph, and the conference officially commissioned one of their own scholars to write a similar dissertation.

When Guru got back to India, he wanted someone to discuss all his ideas with. He found me ready to join him in Fernhill, where day in and day out we could discuss the problem threadbare. He had started translating and commenting on Narayana Guru's *Darsanamala* in 1925, not long after it was written. That brilliant work provides a coherent framework for the integration of all scientific and philosophical visions of existence, and so was perfectly suited to Nataraja Guru's purpose, which was to use it as the basis for what he called an integrated science of the Absolute.

After thirty-five years of continuous study and meditation on *Darsanamala*, Nataraja Guru was ready to make his final translation and commentary. I entered his room at 4:00 each morning and always found him sitting on his bed, eager to reveal

his latest vision. He spoke like Niagara Falls, and I had a hard time writing down everything he said. During the morning class I would read out his dictation, and he would spend the whole afternoon tinkering with it and typing out a draft of the monograph. Each night I was asked to read it and offer suggestions. It was his habit to go to bed at nine o'clock, but from all day four until nine we were pondering subtleties and reading from books of heavy language. I thought my poor aching head would burst!

Whenever he disagreed with a point some author had made, he would ask me to justify the views. One of his favorite techniques was to treat me as if I was actually the author. Suddenly I'd find I was being addressed as Plato or Descartes or someone, and he would be shouting questions at me about my position. Pleading innocence was no use. It only infuriated him. I had to defend every idea of the philosopher I was projected to be. When this finally drove me crazy I would walk away, even go to the bathroom, but no sooner would I get inside and close the door than I would sense his presence outside. He would continue the harangue as if we were still sitting properly in the classroom: "Nitya, probably what A. J. Ayer meant was...."

A. J. Ayer, Carnap, Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein, Whitehead, C. D. Broad, T. H. Huxley—all those names became like nightmares to me. I wished they had never been born! Guru was a good physicist and mathematician, so he could thoroughly enjoy Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica*, the most unreadable book I ever saw. When I read it, whenever I'd come to an equation I'd just skip over it. If anybody had asked me if I'd ever seen Iblis or Satan I'd have said they looked just like equations.

Guru had a trick for correcting my negativity. A neighbor's daughter would come around hungering for a biscuit or a banana, and he would present the problem of the moment to her, minus the equations. He used the Socratic method, putting simple questions one after the other. She invariably answered correctly, showing how easy it was to understand not only Russell and Whitehead, but

even Wittgenstein! I would have given anything if only she had never come grinning into Guru's room. All the same, his simplified lessons for her were very illuminating, and I always rushed to my room to make a note of them.

Of all the tragedies that have come upon mankind since the dawn of human history, one that is a perennial disaster is the diversification of human language. In the Bible this is alluded to as the curse inflicted on the proud craftsmen and builders of the Tower of Babel, wherein God foiled their attempt to excel His creations. This legend puts its finger on the agony of being unable to communicate one's heart's secret to another.

The problem becomes most readily apparent when people go to another country and cannot speak the language. When they have need of something as trivial as a cup of water, they have to resort to the language of gestures. Nataraja Guru was a constant traveler around the world, and from his own experience he could recall instances when he was baffled and embarrassed and looked upon as a dumb animal.

It was Leibniz who made the first attempt to evolve a universal language based on mathematical logic. Of course he didn't succeed, and other scholars have largely given up the task as impossible.

Nataraja Guru thought that creating a bridge between different disciplines and between people across all barriers of communication was an urgent need of the hour. A friend in America sent him a cutting from the Saturday Evening Post magazine of January 1960, which quoted Dr. Holton, Professor of Physics at Harvard University, as follows: "Science advances faster and faster every day, widening the gulf between science and culture. To restore them to some kind of reciprocal contact within the concerns of most men—to bring science into an orbit about us instead of letting it escape from the field of our common culture—that is the great challenge before intellectuals today. And nothing better illustrates the urgency and difficulty of this task than the false images prevailing about science." The role Guru wanted to

play was of a peacemaker between science and other disciplines like religion, philosophy and the arts.

Whenever Guru said something that was easily acceptable, I would nod my head affirmatively. Once Guru asked me what I was doing, and I said I was agreeing with his statement. He pointed out that I wasn't using words but I was communicating all the same. "That means you can communicate with words and you can also communicate with gestures like nodding, pointing a finger, and many other expressions of your eyes, hands and face."

He went on, "Do you know how a two-year old child tells his mother how he saw a man falling off a bicycle?" While I was trying to imagine the situation, Guru suddenly fell down and held one leg up. "This is how the child speaks. To the child, situations are dramatic, and enacting a scene gives a clearer description of a situation than merely using words. But words are also images, since each suggests a conceptual picture. The limitation is that in each language group, different sayings, sound intonations, and acoustic devices are used to conceptualize an image. That's the reason word language is narrow and regional.

"Before we coin a word, we live the actual situation perceptually and conceptually. That means that when we use a sign, both the sense organs and the preconscious mind reciprocate to interpret it." For that reason Guru called the language of signs, forms or gestures proto-language. He called the language of words meta-language.

For a couple of months, Guru was looking at everything with a view to understanding the evolution of both meta- and proto-languages. He talked about the two-way traffic between proto-language and meta-language, showing how when a word is borrowed from one language by another, it is likely to lose its proto-linguistic implication. He reminded me of Bertrand Russell's idea that war situations arise because people of different countries can't communicate in meta-language alone. "Where words fail, guns fire." Guru considered peace the most urgent condition required for the development of culture, and suggested that every

year on the eleventh of November we should have a conference for world peace where people could learn how meta-language and proto-language can be normalized and re-normalized so that hearts can come together.

To Guru the entire world was like a book. One day as we were sitting in the meditation hall, he suddenly ran out of the room. I didn't know what was the matter, so I rushed after him. I found him pelting a crow with stones and pleading with it not to eat the fledglings of a bulbul bird couple that had their nest in one of the pine trees of our garden. The crow was attacking the babies, and the worried parents were crying out for help. Guru said, "That cry is proto-language. With their shrieks the birds are not only speaking to the crow but are also calling to me for help. That means they're using an interspecies language." Guru wordlessly shouted at the crow and threw stones, saying "Look at *my* proto-language. The crow clearly understands what I mean."

At other times Guru wouldn't say anything. Instead he'd just take an ink pot and dip a brush in and draw picture after picture, just to show how a few lines could tell a story which otherwise would require several pages of text to narrate. He asked me why donkeys don't send their children to Harvard or Princeton to learn to bray elegantly. "How many words does a crow need to transact its business throughout its life? Man has huge dictionaries, like the Oxford Edition with more than a million words, and yet feels the poverty of spoken language. Rather than a dictionary we need a structural map of words. Look at words like expression, impression, compassion and repression, and how easy it is to make a map of their structure."

Thus we went from subtlety to subtlety in our study of *Darsanamala*. Day and night, wakeful and dream experience were all saturated with Guru's goal of unifying everything seen, heard and imagined. Each day as I listened to him I felt like an ignoramus and a fool who had not yet known the world even a wee bit.

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JOURNEY TO THE HIMALAYAS

Whenever I stayed at Fernhill I was given the old six-foot square cottage that Nataraja Guru had lived in for the first twelve years of the Gurukula. The walls as well as the roof were tin sheets, and anyone who came to visit me thought it was a horrid place. It was known as the Icebox.

After the autumn harvest in the Blue Mountains, there would be frequent rain and howling winds. Part of my little window was broken and when the wind roared through the broken pane it sounded like a pack of jackals howling in the thick woods nearby. Then all of a sudden everything would become silent. Nights were fascinating because of the alternation of the shrieking winds and serene silence. To add to the charm the moon would peek through the small window above my bed as if it wanted to lead me to a far off place for some romantic adventure.

One such stormy night took place right before Guru and I were to begin a journey to the Himalayas. In my excitement about the trip I fancied I was going to the shores of Galilee to walk hand in hand with Jesus, and I remembered his words about freedom: “the wind bloweth where it listeth.” Another gust roared through my windowpane, and I wondered, “Where does the wind come from and where does it go?” I mused how we are like the wind, not knowing which land of phenomenal becoming we have come from or where we will go when we depart. It suddenly occurred to me that every morning when we wake up we are free. We have no schedule before us. We can do as we like. To really know that was true was a profound realization.

My pillow was too flat, so I folded it into a more pleasant position. Again the wind climbed to new heights, and to the music of its terrifying blasts I danced between wakeful consciousness and dreams. At last a corner of my mind melted and I sank into the soggy marshes of a disturbed slumber.

The pleasing aroma of hot coffee roused me from my sleep. My good friend John Spiers was standing before me with a tray of coffee and a special kind of pastry made only in Ooty called a barkie. When I got to the kitchen I saw that all were prepared for a traveling spree. John and Swami Mangalananda were leaving on their own trip, and soon bade farewell. I became sentimental and tears rolled down my cheeks, so I turned away as they disappeared down the Gurukula road.

Guru smiled at me. It was time for us to go, too. He announced that Paul was going to accompany us. For a moment I was puzzled: we barely had enough for two tickets. Seeing my bewilderment Guru said, “Buy third class tickets. Then we’ll have enough money.”

Soon we were all on the train. Our idea was to go first to Madras and from there allow Chance to decide our onward route. Our trip eventually covered a whole year and took us from Madras to Delhi to Amritsar in the Punjab, then from Amritsar to Dehra Dun, Hardwar, Mussoorie, Rishikesh and several other places on the banks of the Ganges and Jamuna rivers, before we headed back to Varkala.

The Blue Mountain Express, with its open carriages, is more like an amusement park ride than a train. Outside cows and horses were grazing. Guru called my attention to a horse mounting a mare. A cow was intensely watching the mating couple. Guru said, “Look at that, Nitya. Sex is vertical, so it holds an interspecies interest. It seems nobody understands it. In the behavior of living beings there can be no norm of morality. All behave according to their inner promptings. Therefore it is immoral for anyone to judge the morality of another’s sexual behavior.” He turned to Paul and said, “You can consider a prostitute as the counterpart of an Indian sannyasi. In principle, both are absolutists.”

Whenever I traveled with Nataraja Guru, I always kept a writing pad handy so his words wouldn’t just fly away in the wind. Seeing me ready with pad and pencil, Guru started dictating his

introduction to *Darsanamala*. At the time we had no idea it was to become his magnum opus, *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*.

He began, “Truth and happiness should get into a confection. That is the objective of knowledge. *Darsanamala*, which is placed in the hands of the reader, is a string on which the pearls of visions are strung, and it should become an incomparable vision of truth that a knower of Brahman can wear as a testimony of his realization. It should be like a pearl of priceless worth which has nothing equivalent to it in the three worlds.”

Another book similar to *Darsanamala* is the *Vivekachudamani* of Sankara. Kings and emperors used to decorate their crowns with rubies. *Vivekachudamani* means the great crest-crown glory of a rishi of discrimination. Its value is not quantitative but qualitative. Sankara gives the example of a king wearing civilian dress playing a game with a group of his retainers. The king and his guards look alike, but in their heart-of-hearts everyone in the company is always conscious of the status of the king. Thus the sage, while being outwardly like everyone else, can at the same time be in full possession of incomparable wisdom.

What wisdom schools should do is help people to access such higher truth, whether in the physical sciences or the study of ethical values. Knowledge should promote in everyone’s mind a conception of truth that can enhance human dignity. It is for that reason Sankara named his book *The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*. Narayana Guru’s *Darsanamala* is a priceless garland of visions with the same motive.

People differ in their tastes and tendencies, but truth remains the same, once and forever. Those who see truth as relative and piecemeal find only fragments of luminosity. They are not true visionaries. As the Upanishads say, they go from death to death. There cannot be two contradictory truths, or one truth that is different on different occasions. And although we speak of sat-cit-ananda, or existence-subsistence-value, emphasizing the three main aspects of the unconditional verity of truth, there is in reality no separation between them. They are one.

In our daily life we find people with relative degrees of clarity or certitude, but in essence it is one truth that is being reflected in different gradations of brightness or dullness. Like that, we only see different proportions of light and darkness intermixed, never absolute light or absolute darkness. It is the relationship between the two that determines the brightness.

There can be a thousand religions, but the goal to which they are all directed is the same. Different philosophical visions seem to be at odds solely due to the methodology adopted to propound them. When a Vedantin speaks of truth as indefinable, it is just the logician's claim to truth visualized in another way. Parochialism causes differences in techniques of elucidation, for example in the ascending dialectics of Plato or the descending dialectics of Aristotle.

A VISIT TO THE SIKHS

Working on Guru's commentary made the journey fly by, and before long we found ourselves in Amritsar, the spiritual capital of the Sikhs and home of the famous Golden Temple. One day Guru and I hired a horse cart to go to the Savana Ashram, where we met with Guru Kripal Singh. A formidable looking older woman was standing by the guru like a bodyguard, keeping the crowd at bay. Nataraja Guru admired her dignified look and fearless disposition. After an exchange of greetings he asked the Guru, "Why are you called 'His Holiness' Kripal Singh? Are you holy?"

Kripal Singh replied, "I don't say that. Others say it according to their wish."

Guru went on, "Can anyone from any religion come to your ashram?"

"Yes, of course. This is everybody's home."

"Do you observe caste discrimination?"

"No, never."

"Do you allow any kind of worship to be performed here?"

"We don't obstruct anything."

Guru wanted to test him. “Suppose I install an image of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, and offer a burnt sacrifice to it. Would you allow that also?”

Kripal Singh replied, “We don’t deny your right to do it, but we consider such kind of worship inferior and superstitious.” He touched the center between his eyebrows. “True worship should be done only here.”

“That means you give priority to *buddhi*, intelligence.”

“Reasoning and devotion should go hand in hand. Both the brain and the heart are important.”

“Do you insist on doing social service?”

“No. The best service men can provide is to love one another.”

We took our leave and went to the bus stand to go to Tarantaran, where there is another Golden Temple. While we were waiting for the bus, a boy came and reverently greeted the Guru. Then shyly he said, “I have peppermints to sell, six for one anna.” We didn’t want any, but Guru bought half a rupee’s worth to encourage the child in his attempt to live by self-reliance.

We got on a bus with a large sign saying “Non-Stop Bus.” It was stopping every five minutes, so Guru joked, “It’s non-stop except when it stops.” To that he added, “Punjabis are non-murderers except when they kill.” This amused our friend Guru Bachan Singh, who was accompanying us.

At about four o’clock in the evening we reached the city of Tarantaran. It was the day of Deepavali, the light festival. We walked through very narrow lanes where turbaned and bearded men sold different kinds of sweetmeats. All the sweets were thickly covered with black flies. In every shop the pictures of Guru Nanak, Guru Govinda Singh, and Guru Arjun Singh were reverentially displayed.

At Guru Bachan Singh’s residence we were warmly welcomed. After taking tea and resting for half an hour, we went to the Golden Temple. The Sikh custom is for you to wash your feet thoroughly and cover your head with a piece of cloth before

entering. Guru improvised a turban while Paul and I covered our heads with our handkerchiefs.

In the shrine there is a huge book as big as a mattress, propped up with cushions and honored with great devotion. The book is treated as an embodiment of the ten gurus. Devotees were fanning it, and the atmosphere was intense with reverence and devotion. White linen was spread in front of the book, and a continuous stream of devotees was showering it with an endless rain of silver coins. The crowd was quite varied: men and women, young and old, homely and beautiful. All were tearfully singing the same hymn, keeping perfect rhythm. There was a large pond nearby with wide footpaths of marble around it, and in the moonlight the temple and the sacred tank looked enchanted. Guru was pleased by the perfect tidiness of the shrine and the attitude of intense devotion apparent in everyone.

We were next taken to the dining hall, where any hungry soul could walk in at any time of the day or night and eat delicious food at no cost. From all over the neighborhood people donated wheat flour, and about fifty women were continuously baking chapattis, which were served with cooked chickpeas. Tonight being a holiday, though, we partook of a major feast with many dishes.

The next night we went to the house of Dr. Hari Singh. His was a family of traditional physicians, and he was qualified in modern medicine as well. His wife and daughters served us a sumptuous dinner, after which Nataraja Guru was invited to give an elucidation of the Sikh scripture Guru Granth Sahib.

First Hari Singh and Bachan Singh took turns reading out of the book. The Sikh scripture begins with the fundamental assertion that truth is one and identical with the mystical syllable Aum. Further it says that Truth is fearless, does not conflict with any version of itself, and transcends time as well.

Guru began his comments by pointing out the distinction between sruti and smriti. Sruti is an a priori text which presents the perennial wisdom of truth that never undergoes any change either in purport or intention, while smriti refers to particularized truth.

Smritis are codes of conduct, where modifications are to be made in one's behavior in order to adopt the teachings as a matter of practical wisdom. The Granth Sahib is often thought of as smriti, a kind of second-class scripture.

Although Guru was not familiar with the Sikh scripture, I was amazed to hear him discoursing on it with great confidence. He didn't see anything in it other than a clear exposition of the nature of God, and didn't find any instruction that was parochial or merely temporal. Therefore he declared the text to be a sruti and on a par with the Upanishads and other religious scriptures. All the Sikhs were very appreciative of his exposition.

We got to bed very late that night. When we woke up, the bright beams of the morning sun were striking the golden domes of the temple. On seeing this I was reminded of the opening verse of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam:

WAKE! For the Sun beyond yon Eastern height
Has chased the Session of the Stars from Night;
And, to the field of Heav'n ascending, strikes
The Sultan's Turret with a Shaft of Light. (Fitzgerald Trans.)

After a delicious breakfast Guru Bachan Singh hired cycle-rickshaws and took us to a village not far from Tarantaran. On the way we spotted several camels craning their necks at us. The village was built mostly of mud huts, and Bachan Singh said, "Look, Guruji, how poor our villages are. The people here live in darkness and ignorance. Filth is a part of their life."

On hearing this Guru replied, "It is not fair that you speak of the villagers as if they are despicable. They are living the best they can, so please leave them alone. If you want to change their way of life, you will have to take the responsibility of changing the economic framework of the whole world. Only if you can successfully restructure world economics should you criticize the lives of these villagers."

Soon we reached the house of the village chief, but he was away at work. His mother, wife, and daughter knelt at Guru's feet with great devotion. Then they set out couches made of bamboo and coir, with white cloths spread on them. The daughter was the perfect example of human love and reverence, fully immersed in making us comfortable in her home. The first thing she wanted to know was for how many days we would grace the village as her guests. When we said we were leaving shortly, she looked very distressed.

For the first item of refreshment we were served buttermilk with cream. Then the three women made a fire just in front of us and made hot chapattis. The daughter put a big ball of butter on each one. Paul couldn't believe his eyes. Guru said, "Even in New York, London or Paris you don't see anyone serving buckets full of butter, and yet the authorities wail that India is poverty-stricken."

Soon we were full of buttered chapattis and hot pickles. The women insisted we take one more cup of milk. The traditional Punjabi cup is a tall metal vessel that holds almost a liter of liquid. As we were getting ready to leave, the chief's daughter held Guru's feet and said, "Guru, please don't go until my father comes. He will feel very blessed if you allow him to prostrate before you." Fortunately just then he walked in. The whole family paid their respects to Guru, and then we headed back to Amritsar. On the way Guru said, "How can sannyasa in India perish when there is so much reverence and generosity shown to even the humblest of mendicants?"

A Mr. and Mrs. Mehra read about us in the newspaper, and invited us to their home. Their daughter Gita had been presented with a special prize for a music performance on All-India Radio, which her parents proudly showed us. Gita sang a couple of Punjabi songs, and while we were listening in rapt attention our train departed. So the Mehra family offered to give us lunch and send us by the next train.

When we reached the station, a completely drunk man came and offered Guru a banana. Guru received it and blessed him.

Excited by Guru's blessing, he went and brought a water pot with cool water and also a glass, which we kept with us on the train. Afterwards his gift was very useful to us when we were in Hardwar.

We had to change trains in the middle of the night at Buxar. The train only stopped for two minutes, so we threw all our belongings down onto the platform and hastily got off. I had been in a deep sleep and couldn't steady my body on my legs. There were no porters around. Guru said, "There is no time to stand and stare. Get all our things onto the next train." He picked up some pieces of luggage and walked towards it. I was tired and shouted after him, "What's the hurry? There's plenty of time. Somebody will come to help." Seeing me in such an unpleasant mood, Guru kept silent. He carried all our luggage to the next train and put it on the stand.

I was behaving as if I was out of my senses, and went on finding fault with Guru. On such occasions he usually said something terrible, but he stayed calm and simply said, "Nitya is very tired today and he is still sleepy."

I began to feel a little ashamed of my behavior toward him. There was no light in the train, so we knew it wasn't connected to any engine. Paul and I thought of going to find a teashop. Guru told us, "Don't go. The train may leave at any moment." Again I got angry and burst out, "We have two more hours!" Guru said, "Who knows? The train may leave even now."

Paying no heed, Paul and I went looking for a tea stall. Suddenly we heard the train moving. In panic we sprinted after it and just barely leapt aboard as it accelerated out of the station. When we got back to the compartment where Guru was sitting, both of us felt ashamed to our bones. Without looking at his face, we climbed into our berths and wrapped ourselves in our blankets.

Early in the morning the train got to Hardwar. When I woke up I was still in the same bitter mood, and said, "I want to sleep some more. It's four o'clock, and we reach Hardwar only at 10:00."

Then Guru said, “Now it’s confirmed you are mad. Look at the signboard, on which Hardwar is written. Don’t you believe it?”

Cursing under my breath I got up, gathered all our things, and hired two cycle rickshaws. After a short ride, Guru stopped them in front of a house and said, “This must be Ananda Niketan.” I shouted at him, “No, no, not this one.”

Now Guru was sure I’d gone mad. In a gentle voice he said “We were told that the ashram is the fourth house on Jodhman Road. Can you not count the houses? This is the fourth.”

A woman called out to us and I recognized her voice. Once again I was ashamed to note that Guru was right. It was the third confirmation that I was mad.

That night it was so cold I felt as if my skin was being pierced by knives. Our blankets were of little use against the icy blasts. An eighty-year-old woman came and sat by our heads and began her morning prayer, “Hari Aum, Hari Aum....” Disturbed, I sat up on my bed. Guru was sitting as if in meditation. Paul was sleeping like a log of wood.

When day broke, Guru took us to a South Indian hotel and ordered masala dosas and coffee. The shopkeeper was a South Indian Brahmin, and he was very happy to hear that we were going to be his customers for a month. However, he charged us five rupees for the breakfast, so Guru decided we had to cook our own food during our stay.

* * *

MUSSOORIE

While in Hardwar we made plans to go up to Mussoorie, a nearby hill station in the Himalayas. The morning we left I was running a fever. I didn’t tell anyone, and only asked to go to the station in a cycle rickshaw. Guru probably understood my condition, as he made Paul and me ride while he walked. He could be sweet without being sentimental, and his caring disposition was quite touching. It gave me an appreciation of how a guru has to be

matter-of-fact in regard to actions and yet comforting to disciples when they are in distress. Later when I myself became a guru, I reflected on the various situations in which Guru was uncompromising and the ones where he was sympathetic and helpful.

As Guru had been in Europe for a number of years, he no longer shared many of the Indian behavioral traits. When Indians are in a strange place they become extremely distressed and ask everyone on the road for directions. Instead, like a European, Guru wanted to use a map, and he dissuaded me from asking all and sundry about our destination. When I told him there was no map of Mussoorie available, he thought the city authorities were being sloppy and unimaginative.

When we reached Mussoorie all the passengers were asked to pay a city tax, but Guru refused. “Boarding a bus or a train is a contract between the passengers and the transport company. The passengers are to be told in advance if they have to pay a tax,” he argued. The people in the bus thought Guru was just being a troublemaker, and the conductor didn’t know what to do with him. Guru said, “I am the president of the world government.¹ I cannot allow injustice to pass unnoticed.” He refused to get off the bus unless the authorities came and recorded his complaint.

Then he turned to the passengers and called them pretenders who had no self-respect. He lectured them that the world was going from bad to worse because people lie down and take every insult without protest, adding that somehow people in India think they will be looked upon as generous and well bred when they silently put up with injustice and disgrace. Finally a complaint book was brought from the city office, and Guru wrote that passengers should be notified of the tax before the commencement of the journey.

¹ Nataraja Guru was perhaps indulging in a bit of hyperbole, as was his wont. For a short time prior to holding elections he was possibly referred to as president, but he was in fact the philosophical and spiritual advisor and Guru to the World Service Authority, an attempt to legitimize the holistic notion of One World through world government initiated by Garry Davis. That advisory post was later held by Guru Nitya as well.

I thought Guru was going to extremes and exaggerating the irregularities of the authorities, but after two days a letter came from city hall thanking him for his letter and agreeing to put a notice where the bus started, clearly informing passengers how much they would be charged. It was a good lesson to me on how to educate the public as well as the government.

In Mussoorie we wanted to visit Julie Madlocke, a woman Guru knew. After we found our way to her neighborhood, I wanted to go into every house and ask where she lived, but Guru kept on walking and advised me not to bother. I became annoyed, and asked him what was wrong with asking for a little information. “It’s not good to go to houses where people are engaged in all kinds of routines and call them away from their chores. We should also give attention to our own personal intuition. When we come to the right house, we will somehow know it.”

He could tell from my face I was irked, so he started rhapsodizing on the beauty of one of Kalidasa’s metaphors. I thought it was inappropriate to quote poetry when I was feeling angina in my chest and pain in my back. Seeing my disgust Guru said, “We are given intelligence to use. Her house is one and a half miles off the main road. We have now walked a mile and two furlongs. We have to go another two furlongs.”

I was in no mood to listen to reason. I threw my bag down on the road and sat on it. At that Guru laughed and said, “Nitya is very tired. So let us all sit.”

I didn’t want to drop the subject. “When we’re in a strange place what’s wrong with asking the local people for information?”

Guru asked, “Do you know if this is the road to Julie’s house?”

I shouted back, “Only God knows!”

Guru said, “All right, if after walking for one and a half miles we still don’t see her house, we’ll ask.” His insistence on not giving in about something he was convinced of was a lesson I learned only after many years. Now I can easily see how badly I was behaving.

Just as Guru thought, we finished the mile and a half and there was Julie's house. I was the first to walk through the door. She charged at me and locked me in a suffocating bear hug. To get released I squeaked out, "Guru Nataraja."

She laughed loudly and turned to Guru, who told her, "It's several days since Paul has had a kiss. So you can empty all your affection on him." With that I thought I had escaped her, but she wasn't so easily avoided. Before releasing me she gave me a last peck on the tip of my beard. She was like the great serpent of Vishnu with a thousand tongues. The description Narayana Guru gave of Kali could just as well apply to Julie Madlocke:

She has a thunderous voice
that can rout the most murderous battalion,
and her laughter is like a volley of cannon shots.
Her buxom breasts are ready to smother
anyone who comes close.

She was an unforgettable character. All the best books of the world lay scattered throughout the room, with multiple bookmarks thrust in almost every one of them. She gave a non-stop report on the death of her husband and the very many VIPs whom she loved, sometimes one after another and sometimes together. She became particularly voluble when she spoke of her long and continuing admiration for India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

I heard only that much. I don't remember who put me to bed, but I woke up in another room with a high temperature. Guru had told Julie that I was a man of high psychic attainments, and she readily believed him. As I sat alone in the room, she came in and started pleading that I should help her with my psychic powers to live in India forever. All I could do was try to smile.

After a couple of days I felt better, so we walked up the mountain to catch a glimpse of the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas. We climbed to a beautiful spot known as Snow View. Looking north, we all became spellbound. A majestic mountain

soared up, its peaks disappearing behind white clouds. Guru said, “It’s no wonder such immense beauty made Kalidasa into a bard singing the praises of the Himalayas. After seeing this exquisite sight if someone says he has never seen God, he will remain blind forever, without any vision of the divine. This ecstasy that fills our heart itself is God.

“There is no exaggeration in the belief that we can be absolved of our sins by seeing the Himalayas or bathing in the Ganges. When one looks on their august form with sympathy, one’s mind also expands and is sure to be filled with a sense of the Absolute.”

As the early sunset approached, golden threads reflected off the mountain peaks and quickly faded to a gorgeous red glow. We all thrilled in the mountain’s crimson enormity as if we were standing face to face with the very spirit of the mountains.

Coming down we met a handsome man who turned out to be the famous Dilip Kumar Roy, an Aurobindo follower and talented Bengali musician. As we were talking with him, a lady wearing a very impressive garment of gold satin pulled up in a carriage and introduced herself as Indira Devi. She took little notice of Guru, and instead turned to Paul and spoke animatedly in French. When Dilip Kumar found that Paul spoke French, he also began eagerly talking to him. With all the attention, Paul became embarrassed that Guru was being neglected. To spare him, Guru joined in in fluent French. Soon Dilip Kumar and Indira found out that Nataraja Guru was taller than the Himalayas. They invited us all to join them in the Savoy Hotel.

In pre-Independence days the Savoy Hotel was owned by the British and was used only for get-togethers and conferences of British officers. It was famed for its snobbishness, having turned away Nehru three times because of his unconventional sartorial style. When we arrived, Indira Devi introduced us to her father, Captain Kriparam. He was a military officer who was rich enough to buy the hotel, and he exacted revenge on the British by keeping a room for Nehru to stay in whenever he was in town.

Captain Kriparam was delighted to meet Nataraja Guru and invited all his friends to the Savoy to receive his blessings. Indira Devi asked Guru to address them, but he was reluctant.

“Afterwards you may regret asking me to speak. I’m not a conventional holy man. I may topple your apple cart.” Indira Devi was insistent. “Gurudev, our firm foundation is Sri Krishna, so we have no fear. Whatever you say, we will listen to it as the Word of the Divine.”

Guru spoke, and his words were like a fresh shower of pure snow. It was so exhilarating everyone felt they had received an entirely new vision of truth. After the speech Kriparam showed Guru the room he kept reserved for Nehru. He was very pleased when Guru agreed to spend the night in it, though Guru preferred our more humble place with its view of the river twisting and turning around huge deodar trees at the foot of the Himalayan peaks.

The next evening we were invited to a recital given by the gifted singer Dilip Kumar. It was pleasant enough, but went on and on. Kriparam grew impatient, as several VIPs he had invited were eager to listen to Guru. After the recital finally came to a close, Guru spoke on Sri Krishna. Here is the gist of his talk:

The one symbol that intrigues every Indian’s mind is Krishna. I have not seen one house in the whole of Punjab where there is not either an icon or picture of Krishna. As a defensive challenge to the Mohammedan attack on Hindus, the women of Punjab, Gujrat and Rajasthan pose their love of Krishna. This is a great lesson. Nothing else could be such an eloquent counter to the aggressiveness of the prophetic religions.

How many Krishnas are there? The infant Krishna, the cowherd Krishna, the paramour of Radha, the charioteer, and the world teacher Krishna, among others. Describing Krishna as a masterful teacher, as the supreme cosmic Self, and as the butter-stealing infant are all of equal value to Hindus. Some

of these ideas may look puerile, but when you read the Gita and identify Krishna as the all-surpassing Guru, all epithets given to him can be excused as mere poetic extravagance.

The Gita can be described as a Science of Sciences or as a Science of the Absolute. It does not separate wisdom from devotion, or devotion from unitive understanding. It revalues bhakti by saying that the offering of a single flower or fruit or a few drops of water or a leaf can be as good as making multitudinous offerings. Bhakti is looked upon as contemplation of the self rather than as taking the name of God in vain.

Although Indira Devi and Dilip Kumar Roy had promised they could handle anything, they couldn't stand it. They weren't prepared for Guru's absolutist version of bhakti, or devotion, and left the room in a huff. Dr. Garbe, on the other hand, thanked Guru with the words "We have never heard anything so inspiring until this day. As our heart is full, we don't even feel like asking questions."

Dr. Goyal asked, "Some people say the Gita teaches karma yoga. Do you give any importance to karma?"

Guru responded, "Karma, action, is opposed to wisdom. They are opposites like light and darkness. Yet engaging in permissive activity doesn't necessarily affect the mind's purity. All over India people now say, 'Action is the thing.' The government of India is planning to make an action squad of sannyasis. Yes, of course, the government can save some money. What will they do with the money they save? They will buy guns from other countries or spend it on making a bomb."

Hearing this a businessman said, "You yourself are a sannyasi. How can you speak so confidently about India's economics?"

Guru answered, "Please don't come to hasty conclusions. Which is better, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* or *Das Kapital* of Marx? I have recently completed writing a book on One World

economics, and it is not without reading books that I earned my masters and doctoral degrees.”

Hearing this everyone laughed, and the gentleman who asked the question became rather embarrassed. So Guru made some small talk with him to cheer him up. Then he continued, “I’ll give you a good model to love India. We recently attended a major conference, and who did everyone receive with the greatest reverence? Just an old man wearing rags. He had no academic degree, nor any position of importance like governor or manager. His reputation is solely due to his wisdom, but the whole of India bows before him. In no other country is such honor given to a man of his stature.”

That night we all slept well, but Paul didn’t get up even after eight o’clock. The eighty-year-old lady came to our room chanting “Hari Aum, Hari Aum,” and sprinkled some Ganges water on Paul. Paul got angry, but Guru only laughed and said, “Paul, get up and accept this old dame for your guru. In spite of her age, every morning she gets up at half past three. Rousseau says it’s good to wake before the sunrise.”

RISHIKESH

Rishikesh was our next destination. At the bus station I found two convenient seats for Guru and Paul. When I went up to the conductor to buy tickets, he pushed me aside and started selling them to others. I knew that as a sannyasi I should forbear any disrespect shown to me, yet my anger started to build. I argued with myself that my lifestyle is not that of an activist, and I should just forgive and forget. In spite of all my inner arguments, I was clenching my fists again and again, wanting to knock the conductor down. I knew Guru was waiting for me and I thought I should let him know there was a problem. I went back and stood by him, waiting for his attention. Just then the conductor walked up and handed me our tickets. No one knew of my inner struggle, so I could save face.

When we arrived in Rishikesh, I asked Guru if he wanted to go see Swami Shivananda. He answered, “I haven’t taken any pledge to see someone or to not see someone. I’ll look at any person or any thing that passes before my eyes. I will not deliberately close my eyes.” So I suggested we go to Lakshmanjhula and have a bath in the Ganges before paying a visit to the Shivananda Ashram.

Lakshmanjhula is a small hanging bridge over the Ganges, famous with pilgrims. We walked into a small teashop overlooking it. The dining table was of white marble and was so evenly adorned with black flies that it looked as if it was covered with a blanket. The proprietor was very inefficient, making tea separately for each customer and taking a long time to compute each bill. In Kerala, tea vendors serve ten to twenty people in less than five minutes. As usual Guru thought he might offer instruction, and pointedly contrasted the North Indians with the smart people of Kerala. All the same, he admitted, Northerners were pragmatists and were not easily swayed by any arbitrary principle.

Back in town we walked into the Gita Bhavan, where several brightly colored murals of the Ramayana are painted on the wall. Guru explained each of them to Paul and remarked, “Looking at these pictures, Indian women can profusely shed tears, weeping as if Sita is present here and now. For Indians Sita is not just a picture, but is more real than their own selves. Europeans may find this childish, but for Indians what others dismiss as puerile is the very core of their spirituality.”

Next we went to the Paramartha Niketan, an ancient and formidable ashram on the banks of the Ganges where more than 100 people live. The manager received us warmly and gave us a room to rest in. From our window we could see many Europeans going in and out of the Shivananda Ashram across the river. Guru said, “If a shop is open and many customers are going there, it is evident the shop has many commodities to sell. Shivananda Swami must be a generous man who is giving people what they want. Also, the ashram appeals to Westerners because the swamis speak

English and know modern ways.” Was he also catering Vedanta? Guru wasn’t sure. He remembered that the ashram had various kinds of stores for food, stationery, and Ayurvedic medicines. Looking across the river, Guru mused, “This type of disciple is very familiar to me from my time in Europe. Most of them are hysterical. Swami Shivananda is performing a great service by keeping many mentally distracted people in his ashram and thus saving the rest of the country from being exposed to them.”

We took a night train back to Hardwar. The next day as usual we decided to go for a walk. Guru and I waited in the road for a long time for Paul. When he finally came Guru said, “This is Paul’s personal style, making others wait for him. He must have learned it in his childhood. Being one of several brothers and sisters, he would have had to develop tactics to get attention.”

On the walk Paul put the following question: “Guru, how can one develop will power? I can’t say how much I have. If I like to do something, I’m very willful. When I was in love with Nicole, until the day of our wedding I went to see her every day. Even when the snow was falling and the roads were covered with ice, I walked ten miles every night to reach her place. From that I should judge I’m very willful. But here I can’t even make up my mind to get up from my bed and make tea.”

Guru responded, “The first kind of will power you spoke of is willfulness. Real will power does not come from the desire to enjoy any special sensuousness. When there is a steady flow of consciousness directed toward the fulfillment of one’s daily duties, that is real will power. When you have such will power, even if you have to do something not prompted by your personal motivation, you will still perform it with full attention.”

Walking along the banks of the Ganges, we arrived at Kankhal Gurukula. There was a cow grazing by the roadside. Guru held his hand raised as if he was calling the cow. Not heeding his gesture, the cow continued calmly grazing. Guru kept his hand up. After a while the cow raised its head and looked at him. Slowly it

walked towards him and started licking his hand. It became very friendly and allowed him to fondle it.

When we started to leave and continue our walk, the cow was so much affected by Guru's love that it followed us. Guru asked, "How does it know my love and why does it respond to me? Whether it is a cow, a man, or an ant, there is a streak of love always filling the soul and radiating around. Just like the waves of an ocean of compassion, when one's attention is not disturbed by horizontal demands, love flows in all directions. It operates whenever consciousness is closed to our daily behavior. There is a vertical scale of such values. Truth is its highest limit, while compassion is somewhere in the middle. Like a pendulum, consciousness alternates between our appreciation of truth and the impulse to show compassion."

As we walked, Guru continued in his inimitable free-form style. "Here is an excellent point from the Vedas: if there is no sacrifice done on earth, the heavens cannot hold the devas there. The devotee and the god he worships together make the real, and not separately. The stress on one god is a prophetic attitude. It is unnecessary to make it an Indian belief."

I had been reading Hiriyanna's *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, in which he speaks apologetically of the non-authorship of sruti. Guru thought it was needless to be concerned. "If Hiriyanna had known that sruti only meant a priori, he would have had nothing to be ashamed of. Truth is not invented by anyone. 'Truth proves itself,' as Wittgenstein said.

"Professor Hiriyanna is very reluctant to admit that there is negativity in Indian philosophy. Why is it so painful for him? One of the major conclusions of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is clearly negative: *neti, neti* (not this, not this)."

Guru ending by musing, "Indian people's assessment of their own intelligence is dependent on their salary scale. They think intelligence is proportionate to monthly salary. Plus, they believe the great concepts of Indian philosophy are secrets known only to Indian rishis and that people of other countries cannot clearly grasp

them. These are false claims. Instead of saying that Indian literature is esoteric, they should say that the Vedas are written in protolinguistic forms.”

THE LIVING SPIRIT OF WISDOM

One day Paul and I were busy cooking lunch. As we were fully absorbed in cutting vegetables and making curries, we weren't in a mood to listen to anything, but Guru wanted to discuss some serious questions with us. Paul didn't even hear him. Guru got very annoyed at his indifference. “Paul, did you hear what I asked?”

Paul went on chopping, so Guru said, “Here is a grown-up man who has a doctorate from the Sorbonne, yet he's not willing to answer an earnest question from his own guru. He apparently had no training or discipline at home. In good homes, if an adult asks a question and a child doesn't answer, his mother will say, ‘Honey, answer the nice gentleman.’”

As Guru waited for Paul to respond he got really angry. “This is terrible. There can't be anyone in the civilized world who won't reply when asked a question. When I was with my guru, I gave my full attention to him. I never allowed a word to escape his lips unnoticed. Bipolarity has to be a passion. In the guru and disciple relationship, both should be filled with the same fervor from the crown to the toes. It can even excel the erotics between lovers, or it can be compared to a man hating an enemy with all his heart and will. When a disciple is properly attuned, every thought should be aimed at recalling and interpreting the words of his guru.”

Paul finally spoke. “But the infatuation of man for woman and woman for man is horizontal.”

Guru said, “From the time she becomes pregnant to the moment she gives birth, a woman is continuously haunted by the mystery growing within her. Giving birth to a child and holding it in her arms gives her a true sense of fulfillment. Thus there is a deep intuitive expectation in her that is both sublime and spiritual.

The horizontal pangs of erotics are only found in men and not in women.”

One day we visited the Kankhal Gurukula, center of a conservative Hindu sect called Arya Samaj. They have a regular university with many academic courses. Dharmadev Vachaspati was waiting for us. He had planned an elaborate tea party for us, but Guru didn't want to wait. As soon as he walked in, he started asking questions:

Guru: Do you have God in the Vedas?

Dharma: Yes.

Guru: What is that God's name?

Dharma: It's mainly the *pranava*, Aum.

Guru: Do you accept the Bhagavad Gita?

Dharma: Wherever and whenever the Gita is not against any Vedic injunction, we accept it. But we think there are interpolations in the Gita. It is part of Mahabharata, which originally had only 24,000 verses and now has more than 100,000. That means several radical changes must have come into the text of the Gita also. So we cannot put it on par with the Vedas methodologically. We don't believe that Sri Krishna is Paramatma, the Supreme, in fact we don't believe in avatars at all. At best Sri Krishna is only a good devotee of God. The mythological Krishna doesn't elicit any reverence. Some of the legends connected with him are even rather shameful.

Guru: Do you use the term yoga?

Dharma: We use it in the sense in which Patanjali speaks of yoga.

Guru: Which yoga do you accept?

Dharma: Ashtanga Yoga (the eight-limbed yoga).

Guru: Do you accept the Six Systems of Indian Philosophy?

Dharma: Generally we accept them, but we don't give any credence to the Brahma Sutras and Advaita Vedanta. In the Katha Upanishad and in the Svetasvatara Upanishad and

even in the Rig Veda, there is reference to two birds sitting on a tree. Of these the tree is the world, God is one bird, and man is another bird.

Guru: Is Iswara the bird that does not eat the fruits of the tree?

Dharma: Yes, Iswara is called the witness by the Svetasvatara Upanishad.

Guru: Are you dualists?

Dharma: No, we believe in triple reality: Brahman, jiva and prakriti—the Absolute, the individuated person and nature.

Guru: What is it you call *mukti* or liberation?

Dharma: The supreme bliss we get from the absolute.

Guru: In the Upanishads we read that the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman. Why is that?

Dharma: In our publication we have printed it differently. Instead of “the knower of the Absolute becomes the Absolute,” we say “the knower of the Absolute becomes *like* the Absolute.”

Guru: Are you revivalists, wanting to make modifications in scriptures?

Dharma: Yes.

Guru: Do you accept smritis?

Dharma: We accept the manusmriti and other smritis also.

Guru: Is Veda a sruti or smriti?

Dharma: Sruti.

Guru: Why do you accept smriti at all?

Dharma: The smritis are written to elucidate the subtle teaching of the Vedas.

Guru: In the Bhagavad Gita it is said, “The Vedas are based on nature modalities, so transcend them.” What is your reaction to this?

Dharma: We don't accept the Gita. Anything said against the Vedas is blasphemous.

Guru: From your words I understand that there is no difference between Muslim fundamentalists and the

followers of Arya Samaj. Both of you abhor critical reviews of your dogmas.

Dharma: But Koran is not like the Vedas. The Vedas are revealed by God himself.

Guru: The Koran is also revealed by Allah. So?

Dharma: Revelation is given at the beginning, because it has to be perennial truth.

Guru: What do you mean by “at the beginning?”

Dharma: A billion years ago.

Guru: Do you believe in thermodynamic estimation? Why don't you say beginningless?

Dharma: A cycle has no beginning, but this world does.

Guru: You don't reject anything in the Vedas?

Dharma: No.

Guru: Little's Oriental Balm claims Amritanjan Balm is bad. I have only one prayer to you. Whatever be the variations in scriptures, please don't kill human beings in the name of the differences found in books.

During our time in Hardwar Paul became more despondent day by day. While we were walking along the banks of the Ganges, Guru said, “Paul is in depression. This is because he was spoiled by all his sisters when he was a child.”

It was very painful for Paul to listen to Guru's remarks. Guru went on, “Nobody will admit anything that is deeply lodged in their ego. The vulnerable part of your ego is putting up a defense. If somebody touches that place, your soul will wriggle like a worm. To bring you back to the tranquility of the Self, you have to take your life seriously.

“Enthusiasm for the Absolute to prevail is the only medicine for states of depression. The human mind is so constituted that its

instructive dispositions need a strong numerator interest: a passion for Truth, Justice or Beauty. When one supplies this element all blues and troubles vanish.”

Knowing that Paul had run out of money, Guru said, “Don’t be exceedingly happy when money comes, and don’t get sorrowful and depressed when your pockets are empty. Such kind of erratic moods come when your mind is struck with poverty. Even when you have plenty of money, live as if you have none, and even when you are penniless, live as if you are well-to-do. When you aren’t married, behave as if your marriage took place a long time ago, and when you are already married, think that your marriage is yet to be. Of course, I don’t mean that you should be an irresponsible husband or a lecherous man running after women.”

We paused at a beautiful spot. Guru stood looking into the rippling reflection of the mountains and said, “You cannot say that Mother Ganga isn’t special. Hindus believe that a dip in the Ganges will absolve you of your sin. That doesn’t seem to me a superstition. The Ganges is neither a stagnant pool nor a narrow strip. It runs freely over a vast stretch of the subcontinent of India. In certain places it is as wide as a lake; in others it is a rapid moving with great force. It is not only flowing in space, it is flowing in time as well. When you relate with such a living river, your mind is affected by its reality, which has been in existence for millions of years. When through identification your mind derives such irresistible dynamics of an ever-cleansing presence, how can any sin stick to you? Sin is a state of conditioning, a state of narrowness.”

On hearing Guru’s explanation of sin, I wondered, “Why not define sin as a constriction in the mind or a smothering narrowness in time and space?” Then I remembered the words of the Isavasya Upanishad, “If you see your self in all and all in your self, how can anyone or anything be seen as despicable?” It is the totality of being which removes one’s sense of sin.

A neighbor of ours in Hardwar was the Australian yogi, Mr. George Fowler. One day when he was visiting he told Guru,

“Nehru is not a true disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. His policy isn't based on nonviolence, because he encourages the butchering of animals. Gandhi is the only true model for India.”

Guru responded, “If you apply the right norms, you can see that Gandhi's nature didn't conform to the concept of divine grace.”

“No, no, no, you cannot say so. Mahatma Gandhi was a man of great renunciation. He lived an ascetic life.”

“I agree with you. But his renunciation had the quality of rajas, and his asceticism was what is described in the Gita as demonic.”

Fowler was shocked. “How can you say that? The Gita teaches nonviolence, and Gandhi always exhorted us to nonviolence. Gandhi called the Gita his Mother. It was he who made India famous for her great spiritual ideals. Is there another person in the whole world who lived so much in accord with the Gita?”

“Enough, enough!” Guru said. “I have seen with my own eyes the non-violence of Indians. Not a single Muslim would dare visit Amritsar or Tarantaran. If the Prophet himself came to Punjab and asked, ‘Where are all the Muslims who live here?’ the Punjabis would say, ‘Oh, the Mohammedans, we massacred and ate them. Now we ourselves behave like them.’ Is this the non-violence that Gandhi taught?”

“That's because Muslims kill Hindus.”

“My job is not to find out the faults of the Muslims or the Hindus. Whatever the difference in people's opinions may be, man should not kill man. Jinnah and Patel and Nehru signed the Partition agreement without thinking for one moment what would happen to the millions of Hindus and Muslims who had lived as neighbors and friends for centuries. They cut a fraternal society in two. Even an arranged war would not have brought about that much bloodshed. And who was responsible for it? Seeing the results Gandhi and Nehru must have cried, but that is only cheap sentiment. The truth is they were absolutely thoughtless.”

“Then what should they have done?”

“They should have made a common neutral government for two or three years to advise the public of the possibility of two nations. That way people could have chosen where they wanted to live and transferred their wealth from one country to the other according to their choice. Yet not a single minute’s notice was given to those people. It was atrocious.”

Fowler concurred. “Now I see the harm that was done by unimaginative leaders.”

In the evening we once again went for a walk. Everywhere tall trees stood majestically with interlocking branches festooned by creepers of colorful flowers. The deep silence of the forest was only occasionally broken by the shrill voices of songbirds or the orchestra of crickets and frogs. We were in no mood to break the spell of silence with any conversation.

Guru leaned forward to caress a humble flower. “If any of you write about me, you should not forget to mention that I was a person who delighted in roaming with the shepherds of the Alps, singing their folk songs. And in the Himalayas I was always fond of calling every flower dear.” He equated the peace of the Himalayas with the peaceful fraternity of Hindus and Muslims in Madurai and Palani. “Religious beliefs may be puerile, but it doesn’t matter as long as they don’t incite anyone to kill but rather to respect each other.”

As we returned to our residence, the Ganges looked like a waking dream. Chiming bells filled the air with sweet vibrations. Guru said, “If experiencing the Himalayas is this beautiful, how much more will be the experiencing of God?”

The Saptarshi Mandala is four miles upriver from Hardwar, and we decided on a visit. It is an ashram complex especially built to accommodate up to forty sannyasins, with separate cottages and beautifully appointed caves in which to meditate. It has a large hall for satsang meetings and a common kitchen. In spite of all these arrangements, there were no sannyasins there to take advantage of it. Guru said, “This is like a cage without the golden parrot in it.

Sannyasis don't care for mere accommodation or food. They seek truth. There should be a teacher here.”

On the opposite side of the river was a small shack in the shade of a huge, spreading tree. A guru could be seen giving classes, and the place was crowded with several hundred people. Guru said, “Mere facilities will not attract seekers. There must be the living spirit of wisdom.”

* * *

EVEN A TEA VENDOR KNOWS VEDANTA

On our way back we came to a poorly maintained teashop and decided to have tea there. The proprietor was an ex-serviceman who knew English and was fond of relating with Europeans. As he prepared the tea he spoke to us. “This world is a wonder. There is nothing here that we can fully understand. From where did this world come? We cannot say for sure. Where does it go? We don't know. Therefore all studies and research that are made about this world don't deserve much attention. There is only one thing to know: ‘Who am I?’ If you know the answer to that, you have known everything. It is not a question without an answer. ‘I am the Absolute.’ So says the realized person. When you say, ‘I am Brahman [the Absolute],’ don't forget you are maya also, and you are declaring yourself Brahman while sitting in maya. He who says this should also know that Brahman alone is real, and the world is a phenomenon. Only such a man truly knows.”

After serving us the man turned to Guru and reverentially said, “Oh, Mahatma, I am an ignorant man who does not know anything. I said these words in front of you, so that you may correct me if I have gone wrong.”

Hearing this Guru was pleased. He said, “To admit one does not know is the greatest knowledge.” That made our host very happy.

When we left the shop, Guru said, “Paul, I love India, and I wish to live here for this simple reason. Look at that poor man who

runs the teashop. He has not gone to any university, he has no academic degrees, and he's not a priest. He's just an ordinary man. Even then he knows Vedanta, and that too correctly. He knows how to show reverence to sannyasis and also that the most relevant subject for discussion is the Upanishads. Where else on earth can you find this? That poor man's simple words are more truthful and inspiring than the oratory of religious heads in Europe.

"I'm not interested in the five year plans of the government of India, but here is a subcontinent stretching from Kanyakumari to Kailas, having a single unified mind pondering on the thoughts of perennial wisdom. It is that conceptual world which keeps all the people of India integrated, not any political thesis or national movement. India's common language is not a spoken one; it is a language of the soul. It is expressed through ashes, saffron robes, shaven heads or matted hair, and water pots. The chanting of Aum or *nama shivaya* is the most familiar vocabulary of this language."

Guru continued, "Although simple people have flawless knowledge, the pundits in Northern India are not very inspiring. From the first day of our visit we have been listening to the talks of religious people considered very erudite. They seem to be confused. A number of them have gathered bits and fragments of several theories, and they put the hearsay together and speak in assertive tones, but without any sense of coherence. The Vedas and Upanishads, the Six Systems of philosophy, and the Bhagavad Gita are clear expositions of envisioned truth. They should be revalued and restated with clarity in a modern tongue. If that is not done, India's spirituality will not remain for long.

"What separates different religions and philosophies and keeps them from relating to each other are their variegated geographical and cultural backgrounds. The manner in which the positive sciences are discussed with sound methodology must also be adopted in the philosophical disciplines. It is terrible if one falls short in reasoning ability and becomes afraid to openly state his beliefs. When such a state pushes hundreds of people to hide away from public recognition, there is no sense in saying that human

beings are liberated from slavery. Man should be able to open his heart and soul to his fellow beings and should be able to talk with certitude and clarity. Only then can we say that he has become a free being.

“Don’t think I’m alone in this matter. This very idea of integration came to me because of my good fortune to sit at the feet of a great guru who was well established in unitive understanding. He spent at least half a century soaking himself in the wisdom teachings of India’s spiritual certitude. For another half a century I have been learning and teaching the same subject. Now I am writing a textbook to lay out the basics of an integral philosophy of the best visions of the world. Thus between guru and disciple a hundred years of penance have been performed without a break.”

The eastern sky became radiant with the huge golden disk of the moon. The Ganges was flowing before us with crystal clear transparency. In the vibrating waters we were watching the reflection of the moon, which gave to each passing ripple an indescribable beauty. It was serenely symbolic of the Self, which Vedantins claim is indescribable because of the inadequacy of names and words. In an exalted voice Guru said, “Oh what a wonderful sight. One will not forget this till one’s death: the Himalayas, the Ganges and the moon sheen all together. Narayana Guru never allowed such moments of beauty to escape his appreciation. The Ganges and the Himalayas are the pride of the Indian people. Hindus will not approve of anyone who fails to show appreciation for their sacredness.”

As we strolled down the riverbank, we could see flickering oil lamps shining out from the many ashrams along the way. Guru said, “Hardwar is the land of temples. There is no word to describe this country except as a wonder.”

Not only in the temples but in all the homes as well, worship was going on. Ringing bells and burning camphor were everywhere. Guru said, “The sweetness of Hindus is their strength. Hindus do not need a pope or a priest. They know how to take care

of themselves. Give them anything, a flower or an icon, and they will sit before it and sing devotional songs for hours. They need only a small excuse to make God their counterpart.”

ORTHODOX HINDUS AND CASTE

One afternoon we went to the Sanatana Rishikula and were received by the president. As usual Guru put several questions to him about his organization. His answers can be summarized as follows:

“We uphold Sanatana Dharma, or what may be called Orthodox Hinduism. Our source books are the Vedas, Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and the Gita. The *mahavakya* we give for initiation is *tat tvam asi*. We install all devas as deities and worship them in the temple, but all the same our main teaching is Sankara’s doctrine. We don’t convert people or have any animosity to any other religion. We adjust our teaching somewhat to the requirements of changing times but so far we have admitted only Brahmin boys here. In course of time that convention may have to be changed. We are very particular about vegetarian food.”

On our way back Guru noted, “In the Rishikula there is caste discrimination, but they are gentle people and show no hatred to anyone. Their caste convictions are harmless. Even I may have some caste prejudice. But Nitya and John are very touchy when I speak of caste. They don’t see their own prejudices. It’s okay. I don’t mind. Narayana Guru was absolutely resentful of caste, but I can justify it to some extent without any violation of human values.”

By then we’d left the peaceful walk by the side of the Ganges and come to a busy thoroughfare. Guru’s mind was not the least affected by the change in the environment and he continued his observations with clarity. “Caste distinctions are valid. The Western equivalents of the Indian system don’t carry any stigma. Sannyasis are the same as renunciates: monks and nuns and hermits; Brahmins are priests, teachers and artists; Kshatriyas are warriors and their modern counterparts, the sports and media

heroes; Vaishyas are the farmers, merchants and businessmen; and Shudras are the workers. It is only when we say a farmer can't become a teacher or a worker can't be a priest that injustice enters the picture.

“The problem lies in the rigid social stratification that has been imposed by those who benefit from enforcing servility on a sector of the populace. Arbitrarily imposed strictures are opposed to the freedom of the self. It's not birth that decides one's caste, it's temperament and attitude. The idea is to help one understand one's innate nature, which leads to harmonious activity and happiness.

“The sannyasi is an absolutist regarding freedom of thought and behavior. Even if he doesn't get any food, he won't complain about it. He just sits quietly in one place, forgetting his needs. What he thinks is, ‘Let food come to me. If it doesn't come, that's okay too. I can't take time out from contemplation to seek it.’ Thus the sannyasi stands at one end of the scale of values symbolizing humanity's freedom.

“At the other end are those who are weighed down by the burden of necessity. They are busy attending to their needs all the time, and so are always full of sorrow and regret. Those are the Shudras. Between the freedom of the sannyasi and the bondage of the Shudra there are proportionate boundaries, but we cannot show for sure where the demarcations are. In any case, most people are comprised of an admixture of elements from the various grades, and the aim of teaching is to guide seekers to move to the highest grade by continually choosing freedom over creature comforts.

“After the sannyasi, the one who is most free is the Brahmin. He knows the Vedas and mantras. He has only one more step to walk to become a Vedantin. The Brahmin lives without causing any hurt to anyone. His lifestyle is simple. He's sure to be protected by human society wherever he goes. His wealth is not in his wallet but in his knowledge. Knowledge is highly prized, and it is easily recognized. Unlike the sannyasi, the Brahmin cannot

leave the bounds of his society, yet within its four walls he is honored and can enjoy a large measure of freedom.

“The Kshatriya is willing to die for his country. When a man is willing to stake everything for his country, it is only natural that his countrymen will respect him. His freedom comes in compensation for his sacrifice. However, he will not get the same reverence and acceptance a Brahmin does.

“The Vaishya buys his freedom. How much money he has with him is equal to how much freedom he can acquire. The poor Shudra does not have the renunciation of a sannyasi, the knowledge of the Brahmin, the chivalry of the Ksatriya or the physical wealth of the Vaishya. He has to depend on others, bartering his freedom to serve his protectors.”

When we got back it was already getting dark, so we busied ourselves cooking dinner. In the middle of it, Fowler came and started posing questions. “It is unkind to kill animals,” he asserted. “A sannyasi is expected to be of kindly disposition. So why does he prompt others to hunt tigers and strip their skin to be used for prayer mats? That way he is encouraging violence. It is very unfair.”

Guru responded, “Your ideal of non-hurting and love for animals is certainly commendable, but your allegation against the sannyasi is misplaced. You do not know India’s cultural foundation. India has a history of several millennia of going through periods of *himsa* and *ahimsa*, hurting and non-hurting. The ideal of nonviolence originated even before the advent of the Vedic age. Prior to the Jains there was the ancient culture of the Shaivites. We can find three symbols of Indian culture: the Shaivite sitting on a tiger skin, the Jain sitting on a strip of linen, and the Vedic sacrificer sitting on a prayer mat made of sacrificial grass. These only indicate the strata of India’s spiritual history.

“Shiva was primarily a hunter. There are descriptions of him stripping the skin of an elephant and wrapping his body in it. Thus the killing of animals began with Shiva. If someone wants to correct this, he should start by mounting the seat of Shiva himself.

Thus a guru who advocates nonviolence should first of all seat himself on a symbol of Shiva's animal hunting before telling us not to kill. Besides, no sannyasi would ever ask anyone to kill an animal and give him its skin. He only uses it when it comes his way unanticipated."

* * *

HEART PANGS

By some strange quirk of fate, the Singapore Gurukula was right across the street from the Sri Narayana Mission. Back in Kerala there was growing disenchantment among the devotees of Narayana Guru that the Gurukula and the Shivagiri Mutt were not working together. To the common man who never bothered to understand the details of the ideological clashes, the Gurukula was only a rival institution to Shivagiri. Only those who knew Nataraja Guru could understand the Gurukula's seemingly strange and hostile posture. Unfortunately, what was happening in Singapore looked like a reflection of the situation in Varkala.

When I arrived on my first visit, in 1965, the stand of the officers of both institutions was very obstinate and egoistic, and mutual envy and hatred were sky high. Still, there was hope on both sides that I would act as a peacemaker. I welcomed people on either side to come and present their grievances to me. To bring reconciliation where people have lost their way, understanding should be applied at the point where people have drifted away from altruistic values to become self-centered. I began giving classes at the Gurukula on this general theme. As days passed, more and more sympathizers of the Mission came to attend the classes, and there was a feeling that all differences could be minimized.

Just at that time Guru came. Our behavior patterns differ very much. My policy is to wait, giving a lot of opportunities for people to present themselves as they think they are, and only after establishing ties with them do I start correcting them. But Guru

never wanted to waste any time. He never minced words, and in less than a minute he would cause a confrontation. Whenever he saw even the slightest exaggeration, he would tell the person right to his face that he was mad. Those with latent abnormalities would come out of their hideouts immediately with all the frenzies of really mad people. And after such an outburst they would either calm down or leave in a fury, never to return. This is exactly what happened to the Singapore crowd. After two weeks Guru returned to India with all the peace talks in shambles. I felt deeply wounded in my conscience, and decided to leave as well.

I returned to Delhi, where events also took a wrong turn. Guru came to the Institute, and he saw immediately that the politicians and bureaucrats who were hovering around did not appreciate the pure and wholesale study of man and his spiritual nature. He made great efforts to expose their hypocrisy. I was working eighteen to twenty hours a day to make the Institute yield good results, and it was frustrating that the program had neither Guru's approval or the sincere appreciation of my co-workers.

Guru had driven a wedge between the Institute and me, and I was ready to walk away. So, I went back to Singapore with the intention of bringing a rapprochement between the Gurukula and the Mission. This time I succeeded, but the emotional strain of mediating between different groups with intractable vested interests caused me to lose my stamina, and I fainted while giving a talk. I was rushed to the hospital, where the doctor surmised I had had a heart attack. There was no foundation for the diagnosis; even so, I was initiated into the mystery of myocardial ischemia by being given all the worst drugs that are administered to heart patients.

After sixty-five days in the hospital, the doctors gave up on me. It was a remarkable night. Several nurses spent the entire night in my room, kneeling by my bed and praying to the Good Lord Jesus to save my life. I think God must have listened to their prayers. Next day, I was flown to Kuala Lumpur where a doctor consoled me, saying that there was a good chance I would live for

at least six more months. I just wanted to hold out ten more days so that I could get back to Varkala and pay my last respects to Guru.

My sister was a pathologist and her husband was a cardiologist. They met me at the Trivandrum airport with a stretcher, a wheel chair and bags full of medicine, and took me up to the Gurukula, where Nataraja Guru insisted that I be accommodated in his room. After the doctors had left, Guru came in and looked disdainfully at all the pills and capsules and tonics. He insisted that I throw them all away as part of my therapy. In the morning he expected me to get up at half-past four and take down notes as I had always done. He thought that lying in bed would only worsen an ailing heart. Later he took me by the hand and made me walk around the hill a bit.

Under Guru's care I slowly started improving. Little by little he gave me small assignments to do, and in the morning and evening he took me out for short walks. His theory was that we die when the plus side of our life is robbed of its vital interests. A good remedy for seemingly fatal diseases is to cultivate enormous interest in accomplishing something worthwhile.

While I was regaining my strength under his care, Nataraja Guru received a letter from John Spiers that was like a revelation to me. In response to one of Guru's periodic epistles, John wrote:

You say in the announcement: "It is in this context, in this nuclear age...that we are all called upon to revise and restate our attitude to human happiness" and later on, "it is the duty of all fellow beings to think of their common happiness or collective security," etc.

I am sorry to tell you I don't feel any "call," let alone any "duty." There it is. For unitive understanding, yes, for the Brahmavidya Mandiram, yes, for the efforts and demonstrations of Garry [Davis] against the world establishments, yes, for Gurukulas where a handful of worthy people may achieve enlightenment, yes. For these things I feel an absolutist drive, entirely of intuition. The same

intuitional insight tells me that western civilization, its science, culture, educational systems (propaganda machines), its double-faced loyalties (to peace and war—talking of peace and preparing for war, and actually waging war, bloody war in Viet Nam and one about to burst round Suez, and economic war), that this western civilization is very close to the point that no amount of peace talking can stop it. Indeed, that the dialectical cyclic principle involved here is the ominous fold-up. Only then can the numinous slowly, slowly rise up, like simple grass when all this monstrous forest has burnt itself out. In your dragon metaphor you had this perception.

I am as sensitive as anyone. I remember at the age of 11 or 12 feeling overwhelmed with the suffering in the world and shedding tears. All I can do is to stand for the numinous, which is the same as following the Absolute. You remember your writing about Narayana Guru saying he felt he did nothing, and was sad. That is true. If one or two see this, well and good. The written word is more lasting than the spoken, and in *Values* and your *Gita* a few now or in the future may see and carry on the torch of wisdom.

The future of wisdom rests with the young people, those of our post-war generation. They are anarchic and in the wilderness, detached from all establishments, at least different from their elders in this; they are immune to propaganda, cool about the interests of the elderly, suspicious of all given values. And yet they are the future and they might be reached through properly presented wisdom teaching. But NOT through science, which is just another establishment. I am like them in many ways: anarchic and unmoved by the State and its politicians, disdainful of the whole educational system that makes people a passive/receptive audience for all the lies of the mass media, and the whole scientific establishment, pretending to be

Gurus when they are just two-year-olds playing around with math in their labs.

John Spiers

* * *

A SECT IS THE MAUSOLEUM OF THE GURU

Narayana Guru's last wish was to found a school to teach the Science of the Absolute (*brahmavidya*) and provide an interdisciplinary study of religion, science and the humanities. He called the proposed school the Brahmavidya Mandir and had plans for a building drawn up by a construction engineer. He knew he wouldn't live to see his grand dream accomplished, and knowing human nature as he did, he feared that some enthusiastic devotees might build a memorial at his burial place instead. To ward off such a possibility, he gave the following instructions to those who were loyal to him:

1. Do not build a memorial. To remind living people of death is to pull their minds backward from their natural onward march. It is not pleasant to think of somebody's death. It is far better to plant a tree than to build a building.
2. If a building is to be constructed, it should serve a definite purpose. There is no better purpose than imparting wisdom.
3. If a building is constructed to house a wisdom school, its architecture should not have any dishonest structure on it for the purpose of ornamentation. All parts of the building should have easy access and definite views so that bats and such smelly creatures will not find asylum there. It should have a meditation hall or room where people of all religions can meet and meditate. It should have a library for comparative and interdisciplinary studies.

Over time the Guru's words were forgotten. In the 1960s a rich man proposed to build a memorial for Narayana Guru and

erect a marble statue of him. The idea caught on and plans were made for a huge temple at the Shivagiri Mutt. This made Nataraja Guru very upset. He personally went to try to prevent the masons from digging up Narayana Guru's grave and removing the Shiva lingam. But the dollar was stronger than the wishes of a wise man. Nataraja Guru gave his final admonition to not pollute the sanctity of the place and went away. The chief mason was a pious devotee of Narayana Guru. He stepped into the grave and struck the ground with his pickaxe. The very next moment he fell down dead. That caused a great panic in the minds of the building construction committee. However, Kerala's Chief Minister was also an enthusiast of the memorial and it was decided to go ahead with construction anyway.

I wanted to let people know what exactly Nataraja Guru had in mind when he objected to the installation of a marble statue where Narayana Guru had expected a wisdom school. So I tape recorded Nataraja Guru's comments, and based on what he said I wrote an article in Values (November, 1967) titled *Stone Faced Guru*:

On January first, 1968, a marble image of Narayana Guru will be installed at the Shivagiri Mutt, Varkala, Kerala, in a colossal granite tomb, built at a cost of several lakhs of rupees.

This significant and decent burial of a great Guru's great ideals in his own grave will be celebrated by an ex-chief minister of Kerala State and by several thousands of brainless and tongueless people of the West Coast who call themselves devotees of Sri Narayana.

If Jesus was buried there he would no doubt once again repeat, "Let the dead bury the dead."

Many ask me why the living voice of Nataraja Guru is not heard from Shivagiri Mutt. Of course, there is no need to answer their silly question. You can mask your guiles, lies and corrupt mind behind a serene face as pious-looking as

that of a dying duck and offer paper flower tributes before a marble Guru whose blind and stony eyes cannot see the inner person behind the painted front. For before the piercing gaze of a truthful living guru none but the guileless can stand naked in his spirit. Hence, a stone guru, a marble image of a guru, is most acceptable to the fiends of a corrupt generation. The flaming truth of a living guru's voice would consume and turn to ashes the pretensions and hypocrisies of all make-believers. Hence they carefully choose the ever-frozen speechless lips of a guru in solid marble.

Jesus said it was more difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. This may be so, but it is well known that a dollar mountain can more easily penetrate into the peanut brain cells of conceited priests and so-called sannyasins than an actual virus eating its way into a blood cell.

But don't be bothered, fellow comrades and fellow seekers. Once again let the dead bury the dead. We shall turn to the living Guru and listen to his immortal voice of Truth, Beauty and Goodness.

This naturally infuriated the memorial enthusiasts and they retaliated by hiring a thug to kill me. Before he could finish me off, a passerby stumbled on the attempted murder and gave me another lease on life. When Nataraja Guru heard about this, he wrote me that no absolutist who stood for truth was ever spared from some manner of attack. To escape the tense atmosphere I flew to Delhi, where I visited old friends and formally severed my seven-year connection with the Psychic and Spiritual Research Institute.

FIRST VISIT TO AUSTRALIA

Nataraja Guru spent 1969 on another world tour, the one on which he stayed in San Francisco with a number of his hippie friends and was even given LSD. His autobiography relates some interesting details of this period. On his return in late summer, we

met in Singapore and flew to Kuala Lumpur. Guru wanted to hold a Peace Conference there, and Gurukula friends Padma and Narayanan had been preparing for it for a year.

In May there had been a holocaust in Malaysia, with fighting between the Malays and the resident Chinese, who were in possession of all the coffee and tea estates. Many Chinese schools were set on fire and women and children were mutilated. The Premier of Malaysia was in a mood to bring reconciliation between the Chinese, Malays and Indians, and he readily agreed to preside over the Peace Conference. Another dignitary, the Chief Justice, gave the keynote speech.

After the meeting I traveled around Malaysia giving talks. One day Guru casually mentioned that it was perhaps time for me to visit Australia. I protested that I didn't know anybody there. I was holding my diary and just as I said that a small piece of paper slipped out and fell to the floor. I picked it up. To my astonishment it was an address that had been given to me by a woman a few months earlier along with a request to please go and see the man listed there, who at the time was living in Melbourne. Guru thought it was a very auspicious sign that a country in which I had no contact proved to have a contact person after all.

The name that had come to me seemingly by chance was a Mr. Chamanlal, who was now employed in Sydney as an advisor to the Australian government on city planning. He assured me he could arrange my visit and that I could stay with him. Then I got a call from Mr. Narayanan, who said that if I was able to go he could send me a round trip ticket. While I was still on the line I told Nataraja Guru of the offer. He said to thank him, but tell him he should only pay for one way. I felt very annoyed. When somebody was offering me a full ticket, why should I only have him pay half? But I knew Guru was a clever fellow, so I told Narayanan I accepted the offer, but that he was only to pay for one way. I hung up wondering how I would come up with the difference.

The next morning someone asked me to perform a fire ceremony at his residence. This I did, after which I was given an

envelope with the exact amount of money I needed for the rest of the ticket. The local Gurukula disciples also gave me some money, so that I wouldn't be entering a strange land with empty pockets.

* * *

From *In the Stream of Consciousness*:

It is easy to understand the disciple's nonduality with the guru intellectually, but in actual life there are many short circuits and much spitting of fire. It is only by God's grace that a total break or complete disadoption can be avoided.

When I first came to live with Nataraja Guru, I asked him to enlighten me on my relationship to him. He said, "In the social context you and I are two free individuals who live their lives as they want. In the wisdom context I am the guru, and you are the disciple, and any violation of our nondual stand is to be seen as a consequence of disadoption."

Being young and rebellious and being propelled by an ego which refused to be easily tamed, I wanted to test Guru's commitment to his own version of himself as a social being relating to another free individual of the society. After a few days of friendly behavior I sneaked out of the Gurukula and went my own way, only returning after several months.

When I walked back in, Guru was taking his evening meal. Upon seeing me entering the dining hall, he asked someone to serve me a plate of rice gruel and boiled gram. I was deeply struck by his casualness. Then, wasting no time, he picked up the thread of a philosophical argument right where we had left off three months before and continued bringing it to its logical conclusion.

The stable foundation of my discipleship is laid on my guru's consistent victory and my continuing failure in all the trials to which we put each other during a period of twenty-three years.

Beware of False Labels

Nataraja Guru always liked to talk to his fellow passengers everywhere. He would accost them in trains, buses, planes and ships. Once an Indian university student asked him, “Sir, what do you think of family planning?”

“What do you mean by family planning?” Guru shot back.

“The government of India has a project to control the population of India by adopting some contraceptive methods.”

Guru commented dryly, “To ward off ants from a jar of sugar, if you label it ‘salt’ will an ant take any notice of it?”

The student was surprised. “Why do you think this is a case of wrong labeling?” he asked.

Guru began to expostulate. “A family is a sacred unit exemplifying the finest relations man can have, such as those of parent and child, husband and wife, and brothers and sisters. To plan a family one has to visualize the inner coherence of the whole unit, and should understand the contribution of each member to its general value structure. Each person has a right to unfold in their own way and to realize what is dear to them. Both the end one conceives and the means adopted to bring it about should directly or indirectly contribute to a similar unfoldment and realization of the values cherished by the other members of one’s family.

“Creating environments and facilities, and avoiding hindrances and obstructions are aspects which need planning. This is to be done from inside the family and not to be imposed by a government from outside. If the government is not doing its utmost to insure safe births and adequate nourishment for the children, an atmosphere free of prejudice and dread in which children can grow up, educational facilities, medical care and the inculcation of value visions, as well as environmental protection and adequate parental support, how dare it interfere with a family to inhibit the desire to have children or prohibit the birth of a child?

“Does your government’s ‘family planning’ give attention to all this? It does not. They are only interested in producing a

statistical report showing how many men are castrated and how many women's ovaries are ripped open.”

The student was stunned. “How do we tackle overpopulation, then?”

Guru asked, “What do birds do when there is overpopulation?”

“They migrate.”

“Man can do the same thing.”

Guru then called the student's attention to the area outside the train window. We were passing through miles and miles of good land and vegetation with hardly anyone living on it. He said, “In the crowded city of Bombay we want no proof of overpopulation. The same is true of Calcutta. But outside the city we hardly see any habitation. Proper planning should be done to provide facilities to people so they can live in natural surroundings, rather than sucking everyone into an industrial city and then insisting on their castration.”

When You are Wrong

Once I was accompanying Nataraja Guru on the train from Delhi to Amritsar. Among our fellow passengers were two gentlemen who were workers of the Indian Communist Party in the Punjab area. Seeing our saffron robes and our beards they took us for religious people, and wanted to discuss some of the fundamentals affecting human life.

The older one asked the guru, “Sir, do you believe in God?”

Nataraja Guru replied, “I cannot answer that question unless you tell me what you understand by the term ‘God’. The existence or nonexistence of God is to be determined by its definition.”

The elderly gentleman pursued his point, “And what is Guruji's definition of God?”

Nataraja Guru gave him a slight smile and a look and answered, “That which is right when you are wrong is God.”

Bhoga and Yoga

We were setting out on a long journey from the Nilgiri Mountains in South India to Punjab in North India. As soon as we boarded the train, Guru said, “Man seeks certitude.”

People were still pushing each other aside to find their seats. Both inside and outside the train there was a lot of noise, and the situation was absolutely chaotic. But when I looked at Guru, he was sitting with his eyes half-closed, absolutely oblivious of the shouting and disorder in the compartment.

I pulled out my notebook and started writing. He continued, “Man is endowed with reason. Like a crest-jewel, there shines in human reason the jewel of discrimination that enables man to discern the true from the false, the essential from the nonessential, the self from the nonself, and the transient from the eternal. It is this discernment that brings certitude. Certitude brings peace. In peace the duality of the self and the nonself is transcended, at least momentarily. That moment of nondual silence is yoga.

“Life alternates between bhoga and yoga. Sexual consummation marks the peak of bhoga, and spiritual absorption arising out of true certitude marks the peak of yoga.”

Sex is Vertical

As we were passing by the side of the racecourse grounds in Ooty, a horse there became amorous and started mating with a mare. The cows that were grazing nearby stopped eating grass and looked at the couple.

Nataraja Guru called my attention to the behavior of the cows and said, “Here is an excellent proof to understand the verticality of sex. Sex, in its pure and spontaneous manifestation, has the stamp of the Absolute on it. The cows show great interest in the

horses mating. Don't you see here the registry of the interspecies interest in sex? Men, horses and cows are all united by their interest in copulation.

“To see obscenity in sex, to vulgarize it by reading immorality into it and to think of it as a sinful act shows that we have lost the innocence of our heart. Bhoga, the conditional enjoyment of happiness in the physical body, has for its nucleus the blissful nature which unites all embodied beings in the Absolute.”

Love that Glistens in a Teardrop

There was an interesting bunch of fellow passengers on the train we had boarded. One of them introduced himself as a Sanskrit professor. Guru asked him if he had any Sanskrit classics with him. He said that he had, and he produced out of his briefcase a copy of Valmiki's Ramayana.

Guru was very much delighted to see the one book that has most touched the soul of India in its depths and said, “Do you know what unites India? From Kanya Kumari to Kashmir and from Surat to Howrah, in every home you can hear the chant, ‘Rama, Rama.’”

“How does Rama go to the core of India's psyche? He embodies truth. Truth is not only to be known, it is also to be upheld. Truth that is known is satya. Truth that is upheld is rita. In Rama there is a coming together of the lux and the lex, the Light and the Law.”

The Guru asked the professor to read out a passage from the Ramayana. He chose the portion where Rama abdicates his throne and departs into the wilderness with his wife and brother to live a life of self-imposed exile, in order to uphold the truth of his father. When he entered the ferryboat, Guha the ferryman, who was the chief of an aborigine tribe, greeted Rama with great affection and lamented the misfortune of the valiant and virtuous prince.

In all earnestness Guha said, “Oh Great Prince, do not go away.

I have a small kingdom. It may be absolutely worthless in your eyes, but I entreat you to accept it as my humble gift to you. Be our king. I will serve you with my life.” Here it can be noted that Guha means cave, and that the kingdom under reference is the kingdom in the cave of the heart.

Hearing these words, Rama became tearful. He held Guha to his heart. The love of Rama overwhelmed Guha. Tears of joy and gratitude rolled down his cheeks.

At this point the professor’s voice cracked. He stopped reading to wipe away his tears. We who were listening to him also became tearful. Guru said, “The eternal glory of Valmiki’s victory as a Guru of all time lives on in this teardrop that comes alike from every eye, Rama’s and Guha’s of the past, and yours and mine of today.”

For a long time no one spoke. It was a silence in which we all felt we were going deep into the cave of our own heart.

Sharing

When our train steamed into a major junction, we purchased lunch packets. Guru opened his packet and was about to eat his first morsel of food, when a small boy of seven or eight who stood outside the train stretched out his hand. Guru passed the ball of rice on to him. The boy quickly swallowed it and stretched his hand again before Guru had eaten the second morsel.

This annoyed me, and I wanted to push the child away. But Guru stopped me from doing that. He ate the second rice ball he had made and then gave another ball of rice to the boy.

He turned to me and said, “I know people are annoyed by beggars. Poverty is bad, but it is not a crime. Every man is trying to live as best he can. What you see here in India can never happen in the West. This boy is a total stranger to us, but he is so confident

of the love and compassion of others. It is that trust of man in man that makes him stretch out his hand. You should become tearful at the sight. This mutual recognition and sharing is discredited in sophisticated societies.

“Do not mix up the issues of abolishing poverty and relating to someone in need. If you take the first issue, you will have to tackle the economy of the whole world. Do it if you can. But the second question has an immediate urgency. You don’t have to renounce your happiness, you are only expected to share. Your own happiness is to be bracketed with the happiness of others.”

Economical Distribution

When I was living at the Somanahalli Gurukula, I used to grow tomatoes. I would laboriously haul buckets up from the river to water my small plot, and as the months went by I enjoyed watching the green fruits appear and swell and redden towards ripeness.

None ever became fully developed, however. In the night the poor villagers would come and pluck the ripe fruits from the vines. I was very angry about it. I wanted to storm into town and find the culprits. Nataraja Guru, who was visiting at the time, told me, “No, no, it works very well this way. The tomatoes are finding a home where they are most needed. If we gave them away we wouldn’t know who really needed what. Now they go directly into needy pots. It’s the most economical distribution system.”

Knowledge is Virtue

When we arrived in Madras, a friend arranged for our stay in a brand new hotel. When Guru was shown to his room, he walked around and had a good look at the room, its furniture, and the conveniences of the bathroom, and asked us to call the manager of

the hotel.

When the manager arrived, Guru pointed out the odd way in which the room was furnished, the defect in the choice of colors for the carpet, bedspread and window curtain, the lack of imagination in the switchboard fixture for the lights and fans, and the absence of any clothes racks or clothes lines in the bathroom. He was not merely satisfied with offering criticism, he even started giving details for remodeling the whole thing. Taking the manager with him, he walked outside and had a look at the details of the building and told him of some of the latest innovations in hotel architecture.

I secretly thought in my mind that there was no need for Guru to waste his time on the oddities of the hotel.

I think Guru read my thoughts. He said, “What do you think is the state of a *mukta*, a released soul? From what do you think he is released? The only thing to be freed from is the absurdity of life. God gave us the wonderful light of reason to make our life on earth pleasant and beautiful. Absurdity can come to us from any direction. Wherever you see it, push it away.

“I am not employed by anyone, but I am fed and clothed. I owe a responsibility to the world which supports me. So I take pleasure in sharing the light of my understanding with my fellow men.

“You think I wasted my time. Even though the defects of the room remain, the darkness which perpetuated those defects is no longer in that man’s mind. He is happy about it. Only knowledge can bring us happiness. That is why Socrates said that knowledge is virtue.”

The Eye of the Beholder

Once the Maharani of Gwalior organized a Bhagavad Gita Conference in Bombay for seven days. Nataraja Guru was invited to preside on the last day. That morning Guru went for his

customary walk. He always combined teaching with his morning walk, and the best lessons I had from him were often when I followed along on such occasions.

Morning hours in Bombay are the peak time of traffic. Guru was totally engrossed in a subtle point of metaphysics when he came to a signal light. He did not notice the signal turning red, he just walked on. Fortunately there was a policeman in the traffic island. He gave a long whistle and held the traffic to a complete stop. Oblivious of what was happening, Guru kept on going. When he came to the traffic island, the policeman greeted him with a verbal salutation, and Guru realized that on all sides cars were impatiently waiting for him to pass.

On our way back we saw a beggar sitting on the pavement. Being a leper, he had no fingers, and the stumps that were left behind were really horrid to see. All that he had gotten that day was a banana. As we passed by, I felt guilty that we had nothing to offer him. Then to our amazement, he greeted Guru by politely mentioning the name of God, and with great reverence he picked up the banana with the stumps of his hands and offered it to him. Guru accepted it with great love and blessed him. As is customary in India, he returned half of the banana to the beggar. Guru immediately continued the teaching, in which he was fully engrossed.

We came to the site of the conference. The Maharani came and prostrated at Guru's feet. Guru turned to me and said, "What a beautiful woman. Don't you think so?" Nobody makes such a remark in India, so I was very much embarrassed, if not shocked. But Guru insisted that I should answer his question. "Isn't she beautiful?" he prodded.

In India sannyasis are not supposed to even look at the face of a woman. I did not know what to answer or how to save everyone from embarrassment.

Then Guru addressed everyone in the room. "Today is a great day," he said. "I saw three beautiful children of India. I am not a man of wealth, and I have no authority over anyone. I am only a

beggar, but a policeman on duty stopped traffic in my honor, and leaving everything behind, he even came forward to pay homage to a Guru. This can happen only in India. A beggar should know nothing but his need, but today a beggar offered me the only fruit he had. He wanted nothing in return. This Maharani was educated in England. She is a powerful woman of modern political India, but she leaves aside her pride of social position to take the dust of the feet of a wayfarer. It is in this attitude of the Maharani, the beggar, and the policeman that I see the true beauty that is taught by the Upanishads.”

I looked at him and marveled, “How beautiful is my Guru.”

What Else Do You Need?

On a full moon fall evening my guru took me for a walk along the banks of the Ganges in a place not very far from Rishikesh. We came to a place where the river, even though the current was rapid, appeared to be still. It shone like a sheet of glass. The high mountains of the Himalayas, silhouetted by the bright moon behind them, were seen reflected in the water. The moon, peering over the mountain peaks, made the trees appear like phantom figures of exquisite beauty. The gurgling of the river sounded like the endless chanting of “aum.” The hypnotic spell cast by the scene was irresistible. We both stood entranced, gazing at the moon and the Himalayan heights mirrored in the Ganges.

After a long silence Guru turned his compassionate glance toward me and said tenderly, almost inaudibly, “The Himalayas, the Ganges and the moon coming together in the blend of one reflection. What else does man need to be inspired? The rishis of the Upanishads, Vyasa, and Kalidasa were all inspired by this trio.”

Again he lapsed into silence. Lost in a sense of ecstasy, I stood there. To me it was even a little more wonderful than what

Guru had declared. I thought to myself, “The Himalayas, the Ganges, the moon and your own guru coming together to bless you in peace. What else do you want in life?”

Can't You Recognize My Voice?

Once I was sitting at the feet of Swami Akhananda Saraswati of Brindavan. The swami was speaking of the bipolar relation of a guru and a disciple. He became very eloquent on that subject, saying “The disciple should be like a chaste wife who cannot think of any other man than her husband to occupy the treasured sanctum of her loveful heart.”

At that point I got up from my seat and begged his pardon to leave the hall. He asked me where I was going. I said, “Swamiji, I am like a chaste wife. I treasure my bipolarity with my guru.”

“Who is your guru?” the Swami asked.

“Nataraja Guru is my guru.”

The Swami looked at me searchingly. “Can't you see me? Can't you recognize my voice? The same Nataraja Guru is speaking to you.”

I was more than a little put off. “Suppose a man goes to his neighbor's wife and says, ‘Can't you see me? Can't you recognize my voice? I am your husband.’ Should she accept him?”

“Certainly not,” the Swami replied. “The husband and wife belong to a transactional world of social membership, whereas the guru and disciple belong to a transcendental context in which the personal aspect of the individual is a superimposed error that is to be effaced by wisdom. The notion of duality and the understanding of a guru are mutually exclusive.”

I bowed low in profound gratitude, and resumed my seat.

While I was staying with Swami Akhananda, there was a marble statue of Lord Krishna on the altar in the prayer hall. All the devotees were offering flowers to the stone figure.

One time I approached the Swami and asked him, “Why should I worship a fixed image in a work of art when I am far more inspired by the presence of a living example of the Highest, such as yourself? I would much prefer to sit at your feet than to sit alone before an image.”

He said, “Yeah, that’s right. But one day you will come to look for me in my room, and I won’t be there. You may come after me and find me sitting on the toilet. The image of me sitting on the toilet most likely would conflict with your previous projections of holiness, divinity, and purity. I think it’s better to worship this lovely sculpture, which also represents the Highest. Whenever you approach it, it will always greet you with the same serene smile. It will never grow old or ugly or run off to sit on the toilet.”

I thought, “Yeah, that’s right.”

Idols Have No Teeth

An elderly couple came to Nataraja Guru with a request that he install a devi temple for them. Guru agreed to it. The couple belonged to a family of which it was well known that some of its scholarly members were pronounced atheists. In their eyes, installing such a deity would be seen as supporting the superstition of idolatry.

When one such scholar confronted Guru and asked him if he believed in idol worship, Guru said, “I was a physics teacher in Europe. Still, I do not want to snatch away from any Indian priest the privileges of his priestcraft.

“A couple from this family wanted me to install the idol of a female deity. If a man has a sore tooth and he goes to a dentist asking for a filling or extraction of the tooth, the dentist won’t give

him an admonition for having a bad tooth. Neither will he reject it as an irrelevant case. He will attend to it.

“My main interest is the happiness of each and every person. Everyone has a right to believe in whatever they are convinced of. This couple believes they can have peace by prayerfully relating to what they call a devi, symbolized by this idol. I am obliging them. Tomorrow they may find out that what is real in the image is only stone, and what they have projected on to it has arisen out of their own mind. Then they may discard the stone. Why should I stop anyone from following their own way of arriving at truth?”

“I am not afraid of an idol. I know that it is a stone, and it will not bite me. But it seems that you believe in it, because it is disturbing you.”

Custom Binds; Wisdom Frees

Once Narayana Guru was sick in bed. He was served some rice gruel, and he asked the man who brought it if it had been salted already. There is a custom observed in India that one should never taste food prepared for a guru, because it is believed to instantly become leftover food, unfit to serve. As the cook was not readily available, the man could not say yes or no. Seeing his confusion, the Guru said, “Give it to the dog. It has no false scruples.”

Judging a Gift by its Wrapping

When the great poet of India, Rabindranath Tagore, came to pay homage to Narayana Guru, the poet was overjoyed by the great changes brought about by Narayana Guru in the socioeconomic setup of the country. Commenting on that, the poet complimented the Guru on the “great work” he was doing for the people.

The Guru’s reply was not delayed, “Neither have we done

anything in the past, nor is it possible to do anything in the future. Powerlessness fills us with sorrow.”ⁱ

After a lengthy period of stillness, the poet bowed low and took leave of the Guru. The Guru sat quietly, looking on in silence. Afterwards some journalist reported that Narayana Guru did not respond to the reverential salute of the poet-saint. When this was brought to his attention, Narayana Guru said, “Our act of reverence, concealed by the wrap, is invisible.”

Sink or Swim

Two friends and I were sailing a boat on a lake in India. The particular part of the lake we were on was notorious for being tricky. When we took a certain turn, the boat capsized and all three of us were thrown overboard.

None of us knew anything about the hazards of that lake. When I came up, I saw my friends thrashing about and gulping mouthfuls of water. They were in a panic and seemed to be drowning. Cautiously I put my legs down, feeling for the bottom. It turned out that the boat had capsized in shallow water, and when I stood up it was only up to my shoulders. I rushed to my friends and showed them that they could stand on their own feet, and together we waded out of the lake.

Today when I see many of my friends struggling, I am very much reminded of this incident.

ⁱ Nataraja Guru. *The Word of the Guru*, (Cochin, India: PAICO Publishing House, 1968) p.34.