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THE RHYTHM OF GURUKULA LIFE

(Island Gurukula Aranya Bainbridge Island, WA July, 1984)

For the last sixty years, we have been trying to popularize the notion of guru in so many parts of the world. The Narayana Gurukula was founded in 1923, so this is the sixty-first year. In those days many had not heard about "guru," and it was not in English or American dictionaries. Now this word is in all dictionaries. Even public media uses the word guru occasionally. But the meaning is getting more and more changed as years go by, and it has become somewhat synonymous with the word charlatan, so many feel somewhat hesitant when they hear the word guru or gurukula. We were even advised by friends to give up this word, but then there is another word which is also used very much and also has many bad connotations. That word is God. Lovers of God, believers in God, did not give up the word God because some people were misusing that word. We also decided not to give up the word guru just because there are wrong gurus. In almost all countries, counterfeit bills are printed: dollar counterfeits, franc counterfeits, pound, etc. That does not make a government stop printing their own currency bills. A counterfeit is possible only because there is a genuine. If there is a genuine sovereign you can also have a counterfeit sovereign. When there is a genuine Guru, there can be 10,000 counterfeit gurus. So we are not going to be ashamed of that word. But it is necessary to understand that word precisely and the sense in which we use it.

I began with an invocation. For those who are familiar with Indian invocations, what I just recited here could also be a Hindu invocation. But I was not using it as a Hindu invocation. That is why I want to explain it. I began with the word AUM. This can also be translated as "all." All means both the known and the unknown. What is the known? Most of our experiences in the wakeful are noticed by us. We experience them. So we may say that which happens in the transactional world, the gross world, what can be objectivized – that is known to us. What is happening in the dream is known temporarily when the dream is going on and afterwards most of it is forgotten. Even when we recall a dream it becomes somewhat fantasized and we may even put lies into it, knowingly or unknowingly. So the dream doesn't have the same quality of the known and the wakeful. Whatever is happening in the deep sleep or unconscious is not known

to the wakeful mind, is not known to the surface mind. A fourth aspect is a state of transcendence. Even when the body is not in a sleeping state, there can be a transcending of the wakeful, dream and deep sleep. That aspect is not nameable. It is simply called "fourth." Instead of saying so much— the wakeful, the dream, the deep sleep and the transcendent, we simply say AUM. So AUM is to be taken in that sense. AUM means all: the conscious, the unconscious and the transcendent all put together.

We were addressing AUM. We were not just remembering this word as an act of reverence, though it was also that. But much more than that, we were addressing our own consciousness: AUM. We were also making a statement about AUM. What is that AUM? AUM guru. AUM is guru. What does that mean? Guru. Two sounds: gu and ru. Gu. means darkness. Ru means dispelling, shattering or removing. From this it is evident – guru means the experiencing of your darkness being removed. Light and knowledge. Darkness and ignorance. Removal of darkness only means removal of ignorance. Teachers remove certain kinds of darkness of a relativistic type, so conventionally a guru is spoken of as a teacher. That is not perfectly right, although that meaning is also possible. Guru means the total negation of negativity. If light is the bringer of happiness, darkness brings misery. As far as we are concerned, as people living in this world, we value our happiness, and nobody wants unhappiness. If we turn to light, to a source of wisdom, it is to dispel our misery, to dispel our darkness. So when we say AUM guru, we mean that which is permeating all forms of consciousness, the unconscious and the transcendent. We think of that consciousness as a dispeller of our misery, a dispeller of our darkness, our ignorance, our nescience. So this is the meaning of the two words, AUM guru.

Then we said, AUM guru brahma. When we wake up in the morning, we create a world around us. Many materials of the world are taken through our sense data, and we put them together and decide what we want to make out of that from moment to moment, hour to hour, day after day. It is a process of creation. We can create only with the light that is within us. Therefore, that light which is entering into our wakeful consciousness is here called guru brahma. We are saying, "Oh Light, oh Brightness, You are the One who is enabling me to create my daily world. " Is not God creating the world? Yes, God is creating this great, great world, but you are creating your world which goes well with God's creation. If I keep my eyes closed, if my consciousness is not waking up, then I don't have a world around me, even if God's world is existent. Not that God and I have separate status – it is with God's light I will proceed. We now understand that when we say AUM guru brahma that means, "This wakeful consciousness is a creator of my world. I adore you. "

Then we say guru visnu. When once you project something from your mind, an interest is evoked in you and that interest is sustained only to the extent that you can remember everything connected with that projection. That means there is a sustaining light of memory that can be recalled in the wakeful consciousness and even in dreams through various associations. So we address that light and say, "O' Light, O' my Pure Spirit. You are not only the creator of my world, You are also the sustainer of that world by continuously supplying me with memories. "

Then we say guru devo mahesvara. Devo means light. Guru devo: "O" this dispeller of darkness. You are the Light of all lights--maha deva. " Maha means great, deva means light--light of all lights. Why do we say maha deva for that? The wakeful consciousness and the dream consciousness both emerge from the unconscious of our depth. And both, immediately after use, return to that source. That source is such that it is capable, of supplying us with concepts, and it can retain that concept for future use. Thus it is called maha deva, the source of all light, the source of all happiness. Isvara means the innate controller of anything. We have an innate controller in the unconscious or the causal consciousness, which we call mahesvara. AUM guru brahma, guru visnu, guru devo mahesvara. You see there is nothing religious about it; nothing Hindu about it; nothing Indian about it. It only means that we are trying to understand the function, the dynamics of our own consciousness.

Then we said, guru saksat param brahma. Saksat. Aksi means the eye. That which can be objectively seen here as the wakeful, the dream and also the interpretation of it, the emotional dimension of it, are coming from the depth of our unconscious. It also has a transcendent quality. When all these are taken together, then we say, "You are the absolute Brahman. " What is Brahman? If you go on drawing a spiral, you can go on enlarging and enlarging on into infinity, and still it can be continued. Like that, there is no end to man's knowledge. The scope of an ever-growing knowledge is called Brahman – that which cannot be limited but goes on and on and on and on. Thereby you say: I am not trying to describe the Absolute, but it is in terms of, in relation with, the Absolute that I understand the relative. This is what we mean by guru – that dispeller of darkness in us in all states and whereby our knowledge is increased endlessly. It has nothing to do with a religion, nothing to do with any particular culture of any regional limitations.

Then we say, this is a Gurukula. This is the home of the Guru. Which Guru? Not this guru of that guru, the unnameable Guru. Why do we call it Narayana Gurukula? Because there was a person called Narayana who understood Guru in this sense and he made himself an example of living that life. So out of respect we recognize his name as an exemplar. But more than that, the word narayana means one who dwells in the heart of all human beings, the immortal indweller in every heart. He is our own pure light, pure consciousness. So it is not really the name of a person. Then it also has the meaning naram ayanam. Naram means water. Life is only where there is moisture. That animating principle of all sentient beings is called narayana.

Now as we go further, when we make this gurukula a kind of model, we have two kinds of personal behavior. One is outgoing, the other is ingoing. When we turn inward, that is with the intention of studying ourselves. When we go outward, that is with the intention of doing something. In Christian theology they speak of these two kinds of behavior as piety and works. One is a matter of your devotion and the other is a matter of your service. We turn inward and understand ourselves. We turn outward with the intention of sharing our good thoughts and action with others – so that is called works. Most of us here are family people – fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, grandparents. That means, we are people who have responsibilities to this world. We are expected to attend to the needs of others, to care for others, and where there is caring, action is imperative. Action in Sanskrit is called karma. Knowledge is called jnana. So we are placed between the world of understanding and the world of action. People who are not affiliated to a Gurukula also engage in thoughtfulness, reflection, and action. That means, the Gurukula life is not the only way. This is one of the ways. We do not make an exclusive claim that finally we, the wise people of the world, have come and we'll give you the right knowledge. We say this is one way--there are so many ways. So you can seek and find other ways if you like. I am here to explain this way, how we do it.

This is somewhat difficult to explain. We use certain words which have become somewhat cliches in the Gurukula circle. We speak of a horizontalization of life and the verticalization of values or the verticalization of life. Our scheme illustrates that something is prompted in us by our own innate nature. That impels us to act. Some questions rise from us which prompt the urge for us to seek and find. There is this urge in us, and there is also an urge to do. But when you seek you can be caught in a kind of vicious circle, a kind of repetitive behavior of the mind as if your mind has fallen into a rut, into a whirlpool. You start thinking about something and slowly that becomes a reverie, a daydream, and you forget everything – necessities of life, the responsibilities. You forget and you sit there pondering over one thing. Then we say, your thoughts have become horizontalized. But if you give it sufficient attention and again bring your mind back to the onmoving stream of your consciousness, then you have re-verticalized your thought. This can also become pathological, that a person can never verticalize and goes on round and round in his or her own thoughts, emotions, imagination or dreams. There is a need to discover that the mind is going in a vicious circle, to save it, and bring it back. This is a very important thing. Whenever mind is the eddy of a vicious circle of thought and we bring it back to the main flow of consciousness, then we say we have reverticalized our thought.

When you take an action, an action can go on and on and on, and you will never know. You may even miss your breakfast and forget to eat your lunch, to go on with work because your work can be very interesting. It is a stimulus-response -stimulus-response-stimulus-response--a vicious circle. You do and your doing is prompting and the prompting is making you do and you do and that is a prompt. If you give a hatchet or an ax to a child and allow the child to cut down some branches of a tree, then see what he will do. He will go on cutting everything, and never stop. It is very interesting to him. He will cut one branch, then the second, third, fourth, fifth, and so on. To pull your mind from action and say, "Enough for this day " – many cannot. They become workaholics. I am the best example. I go on doing, doing and doing. And then always my heart says, "Enough man. Go to bed." I look at my watch and say, "Five minutes more," and then "Ten minutes more." At eleven o'clock I say, "OK. Oh! I am so horizontalized. I will go now and go to sleep." So these are the first two lessons which we teach: do not allow too much horizontalization in your thinking, and do not allow too much horizontalization in your work. Regulate both.

These lessons may look very simple. They are not simple. Why do you work? Because you are concerned. Concerned about what? Either your success or the satisfaction of people for whom you are working or your sentiments. You want to satisfy your sentiment of doing the right thing for the people whom you love, etc. Thus there are many emotional aspects in work which can blindfold you and take you further and further into it.

The heart has a rhythm, a systole and a diastole, and if that rhythm is lost you become a patient. Like

that, between our outgoing mind and incoming mind, our piety and work, our devotion and service there has to be a rhythm. Maintaining that rhythm is one of the secrets of Gurukula life.

Nataraja Guru said that Gurukula life is like cricket, where again and again you touch the wicket. Similarly, you must again and again return to your source, return to your center. Otherwise you will become out and lose the game. Never lose the game. Running away from the wicket is like running toward the world, the outer extremity, and you forget your center. If you get caught there, you may forget you have a center.

There is a story that once one of the Indian saints called Narada wanted to put a question to his master, the Supreme God. So he asked, "God, what is this maya against which you caution?" (Or in the Christian sense, "What is this Satan you are speaking of which is deluding me?") God said, "Come along, come with me." So they were going, Narada and God, and God said, "Oh, Narada, I will die now. I will die! I'm so thirsty. Please, go and bring me some water. Take your water pot. Rush! Go to the river and bring me some water." He was making this appeal with such a piteous voice that Narada believed it. Narada did not think at that time that God cannot die. How can God die? And is there any need for God to eat and drink? He did not think of these things he just ran. He went to a river, and he saw that the river was in flood. The water was rather muddy, so he waited there to see if this water was good for consumption. Just when he was wondering if the water was pure, he saw on the other side of the river a beautiful young girl who came to fetch water. She got her pot, tipped it into the water, and when she was lifting it, she slipped and fell into the river. Narada could not stand there and see a young girl drowning, so he put his water pot behind him and jumped into the river, swam to the other side, got ahold of the girl, somehow lifted her out of the water, and saw that she was unconscious. He looked around, saw a house in the woods, and presumed he should take the girl to the house and give her first aid. He somehow saved the girl and life came back to her. She was so thankful to him, so very thankful. She said, "You are my Lord. You saved my life." He was also a little attracted to the girl and her great good feelings. He said, "But, I go now." She said, "Please don't go. Don't go away like that. You saved my life. My parents should see you. Otherwise they will be very unhappy that they could not give anything to you. So please remain until my parents come." Late that night the parents came and it was too late to leave anyway, so they prevailed upon him to stay there. He had a good time with the girl and he never wanted to leave her, so he lived there. He told her, "I love you so much." She said, "Don't say that. If you love me, you may have to marry me. If you want to marry me, you should ask my parents' permission." The parents readily agreed to it: "You are the savior of this girl, so you should marry. That is the right thing." So he married her, then one child was born and after the next year another child was born, then the third was born, then another child – like that, eight children were born. In the meanwhile he was living with these wild jungle people, hunting and collecting honey and things like that. He learned their language, and was roasting meats on the fire, and living an ordinary hunter's life. He lost all his virtue. Then there was a wild fire. The entire forest caught fire, and all died in the fire except him.

With great anguish he was crying at the thought of his wife and children and father-in-law and mother-in-law who were all burned to death. Then God shook him and said, "Narada, where is the water? You went to bring me water. What happened?" And Narada was so ashamed that he had married and begotten eight children and all those things had happened. Then God touched his eye. He realized he had not gone anywhere. There was no river. There was no woman. There were no children and there was no wild fire. Nothing had happened. It was all his imagination.

This is a classical example of the horizontalization in which a person gets caught through various kinds of personal interests and emotions. When we relate with our friends in the Gurukula, there are also many cross-currents like that which came from the girl to Narada. One has to be a little critical of all experiences and all relationships. In the Bible it says that those who place their love for their father and mother more than their love for God are not worthy of God's love. This does not mean that you should not love your father and mother, but that we have our first love going to God and our second going to this world. There should be a power to discriminate between these two. But what stops us from making that discrimination? There is worldly wisdom and there is divine wisdom. Of those who live in the Gurukula or are related to the Gurukula, what we expect is they should minimize their worldly wisdom and maximize their divine wisdom. I shall give an example: We had an idea to start a press, so we looked for a press, and we found not one but two presses. Then we were advised if we buy both the presses, it is more economical. It's a matter of worldly wisdom that we should do what is economical. Whatever is expedient, you do. Along with that there can come other shrewd intelligence, too. Why don't we buy both the presses and clean them up and sell them in the market for double the price and then buy another, smaller press for us. We don't think about why

the original man did not do the same thing. We think we are more clever than him. If we buy them both and clean them and they look streamlined, we can then sell them for double or triple the price, and we can even make some money for some other projects. These kinds of considerations drag us away from what is genuine. If we go on listening to all the worldly wisdom, we should not think of the Gurukula, we should think of Madison Avenue. That is where the right people are who can tell us how to advertise, how to sell.

Once in California a big television producer or director came to me. He got my name from someone. He said, "Swami, can you chant one of the Upanishads for us?" He and his wife came and brought a tape recorder. I chanted Isavasya Upanishad and Taittiriya Upanishad. He recorded both of them, then used some synthesizer or something to make my voice vibrate, and said, "Do you hear this? This is your voice. How effective it is. We will bring it to the television. We promise you, in one month, we will make you the number one Guru of the world. Then, in three months we can turn over the first million to you." So I asked him, "Friend, do you think that after receiving the first million I will be the same person or will I change?" He said, "I never thought of that." I said, "You cannot even come to me and ask me to make a second chanting for you if you make me that big. Now at least there is so much peace around, you can easily come and see me and talk. My schedule won't allow you in next time. So let us not go into such things. I don't like myself to be shown on television." He said, "I think there is a real reason for that. Then how about putting you on a radio network? Then nobody will see your face, they'll only hear your voice."

You see, these are the kind of traps into which you can be caught when you look for success in the world. But if you care for your inner peace and your peaceful relationship with all other friends with whom you are now in a good relationship, if you prize that above everything else – your children, your home, the welfare of the community in which you live. the rightful place that you have in the community – then you do not want to rush into things. So I want to advise my friends – you can make the press and publicity department very big, very huge. But Doubleday Books, Random Books – they are publishing thousands of books in millions and millions of copies. Has that in any way changed America, changed the world? I am not saying that books do not serve any purpose. They do serve some purpose. But we should not exaggerate like this and run after possibilities. Sitting here in our seats, in our best relationship which is now maintained here, we should see to what next step we can go without endangering any of our present good relationships: your relationship with you and God, your relationship with you and you, your relationship with you and the world. When you know that, you can say that you know how to oscillate between the vertical and the horizontal. Go and expand, come back, expand, come back. That's what nature is also teaching us. The highest point of horizontalization is the point of death. A plant can grow, horizontalizing, putting its branches on both sides, putting more leaves, flowers, roots – and then it comes, that final point to which it can go. Then again, seed is bursting into a plant, the plant into leaves, leaves into flowers, flowers into seeds. It has a rhythm. We can also bring each of our actions to a culmination point and then return. When you forget to return, you are putting so much stress in your body and mind that you create sickness in yourself. But if the rhythm is kept, you avoid sickness.

A good lady came this morning and asked me, "Tell me how I can preserve my health, it is waning off." I told her, "I gave up doctors and their advice and their medicine and from then onward I was finding things were going better. Why? Because now I have taken responsibility for my life. Hitherto I thought falling sick meant leaving it to the doctors. I became irresponsible. I do not say never discuss anything with a doctor, never take an aid. They are our good friends. But do not leave the responsibility to them. They are experts; take their advice. Not that you should follow all advice – take the advice and feed it back into you. Similarly, in matters of work and finance, you need economists, you need accountants, you need bankers – take their counseling advice. But you be the decision-making person, and let that decision you take be in concordance with God's will. How do we know that we live God's will is the next question. There is again a dictum of the Bible, "Thy will be done." Jesus Christ was the son of God, He could naturally expect all protection from God. He was humiliated, but God did not come and say, "Stop this humiliation of my son." He was crucified. God did not say, "Don't put him on the cross. Don't put these nails in him, don't make him bleed." It was as if God was deserting him. At that moment, Jesus had to say, "Father, father, hast thou forsaken me?" If God's own child could be driven to that, we should not expect a better deal. But when you come to that, remember what Jesus said: "Let thy will be done."

So there is a disparity sometimes between our will and God's will. Our will is called that which pleases us. God's will is called that which is good for us. In the Katha Upanishad it says priyam and hidam. There are two ways, the way of the pleasant and the way of the good. They are not the same way. We are always aspiring to be pleasant. The child says, "Give me another candy, and another candy." But the mother says,

"No, no, no. I cannot give you that much candy." The child may say this mother is not a loving mother, but the mother is the most loving mother – that is why the candy is not given. Similarly, you ask for candy, and God says, "No, no, no. It is not good for you." When you ask and it is given, when you ask and you are asked to put your effort and the effort succeeds, then you say, "God, now I understand your will, because when I walk that way, you are giving me more and more favors. When I walk away from you, I see more and more impediments and I never succeed." So this is a kind of an acid test, whether your will and God's will are the same. In the Gurukula, like any persons, we also desire for many good things to happen, but we won't run after it. If somebody says, "Now you have put up the building and if you do not pay so much money tomorrow I will not give you the press," we may say, "Oh, now what can we do? The whole world has seen that we were putting up this building and now we cannot get the press." We feel like we are pressurized. A Gurukula person should never feel pressurized. They say, "It is not coming? Thank God. We will do this now for another purpose. We don't care whether the press comes or not." We are not in that terrible pressure at all. This is one thing against which I want to caution for the future of the Gurukula.

Once Nancy sent me a terrible, terrible letter detailing all the kinds of payments she has to make here and adding up all her commitments. It was a big, big amount. So should I say, "Oh, my Nancy, if things are happening like that we shall ask for some loan from all of our friends and ..." I said, "Nancy, you are there because of your friendship with some good people, and you have improved their land. They will be very happy to get the land improved and given back to them. So there is no trouble. You had the satisfaction of making all these improvements which has enabled you to grow. For these three years, you should be grateful to God that God gave you good friends and a place to improve, and through that improvement get some good experience. Say thanks to God, thanks to our friends, give back their land, and come away." That takes a load from her mind. Never think that you are so bound that you cannot leave anything. Suppose there is a little clot in the heart, causing some veins to be blocked. The brain, death's headquarters, says, "Stop. Enough." What happens to all your commitments? Nothing happens. When once you have accepted that death can come any moment, then you can leave it to God. That gives you great freedom in this life, freedom from everything and everyone.

One of my friends wanted to kill herself, so she jumped into the well. There was not enough water to kill her, so she only got dislocation of her knees. She was pulled out. Then she somehow managed to get some poison. She took the poison – adulterated poison – so it did not work. She had bad diarrhoea for seven days. Next she put a stool on a table, got on the table, found a place where she could use a blade to cut the electrical wire insulation, hoping she would then get a shock and die. I don't know why she did all this, there were so many places where she could get to the wire, but she somehow did it and came tumbling down, and again for three days she was in bed. I told her. You are unsuccessful in committing suicide. You should go to a training school to get proper training in how to commit suicide."

You cannot die as you like, but you cannot live as long as you want either. Always knowing that the good God is ready to take you away, then your mission is over. Your mission according to Him is not the same as your mission according to you. Once I was living in an ashram with a very humorous man. One morning he was very fussy and angry and going this way and that way. I asked, "What happened?" He said, "What happened! Unreliable fellows in this world! Unreliable fellows! Deceitful fellows! Cheats. Outright cheats! That engineer fellow, he was to come this morning so that we could start the construction. He did not turn up." I asked, "Did you telephone?" "They telephoned me." "That he was not coming?" "Yes. He is not coming." "What happened?" "He died. That deceitful fellow. He promised to come this morning and start the construction but in the night he died." So bear this in mind. This can happen to any one of us. So go slow.

One of the last things I want to say about the Gurukula is, you see now Bob is here, Jane is here. Nancy is here, the other Bob is here, all these friends are here. We do not pay each other to serve each other. There is no monetary payment. If we were paid, we would not have been working this hard and with this kind of cooperation. How precious that relationship is which we have now, that one can live for another person for no return. Nothing. It is possible for me to go like some old slave master and say, "Bob, what did you do with that? How did you manage this? You are wasting money, you are wasting our time." "It's possible. Is that the right thing to do? Or to see how wonderful this person is who is giving his time, his mind, his patience, and all his efforts, his soul, everything put into this to make my day bright and your day bright. Then we become cheerful. So my one advice is, do not see the other person's defects. But you can always see what is erroneous and mistaken and call that friend to it in absolute love, not to make a negative judgment but for mutual help. In most of the society what I see is bickerings come in through the back door.

Once you find fault with one person and others do not agree to it, you think, "Those people are a clique and I am an outsider. " Self-alienation comes to people. Once self-alienation comes, then spiritually you die. Never commit spiritual death by alienating others and thereby becoming self-alienated.

One thing I have learned from my teachers and teachers of the world is that only through dedication and through renunciation can you earn anything. As soon as you say, "I give up," so much trouble is gone. Trouble is gone? But we were all to go to Alaska, and we were wondering if we would get a cabin at all, and if the little child would get exposed to bad weather. Would it catch cold? Where would we find enough money for that, and how do we compensate there? We simply decided, "We don't want to go. " Just in one decision – we don't want. As soon as we say, "I do not want," a big relief comes. You should be brave enough, courageous enough, to say, "I don't want." Such good food is made here, and when friends bring it I find it too difficult to say I don't want it, but I know by eating this I am becoming bigger and bigger and bigger. For my own good, I should say I don't want it. Each time I say I do not want, I feel I am benefited. This does not mean that I am advising you never to want anything. Need is a horizon-tality, satisfaction is a verticality. Go into the horizontalization of your needs and come back soon and get into the vertical. Coming back home to God, going to the needs of the day, coming back to God. This is the rhythm of life. The Gurukula is dedicated to that.