

A Moldy Yogi Retires!
by Scott Teitsworth, 2018

The post of editor is a famously invisible one, and for this reason the role has suited me perfectly as a person who shuns the limelight. For over 40 years I have tinkered almost daily with an array of important Gurukula books, and this spring, after finishing up my part of a restoration of Nataraja Guru's *Integrated Science of the Absolute*, I find myself without a project for my old alma mater. It's an odd sensation to wake up without a compelling call to engage my brain to its optimum capacity (no comments please!).

In place of hosting my own sendoff party, I thought it would be nice to share my editing history, just for the record. The Gurukula writings are rare and special, as Guru Nitya noted in his autobiography:

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.

It's a nice coincidence that this year, 2018, marks the 40th anniversary of Deb Buchanan and me beginning our weekly Portland Gurukula gatherings, which were initiated by us listening to recordings of Nitya's Gita classes and discussing them with a few of his other friends. Now they continue to be a rare opportunity for a small group of seekers to meet regularly and dive deeply into the mystical implications of the teachings that are at the core of the Narayana Gurukula.

I began my editing career even before the classes, in 1975. Through most of my more than forty years of editing I had a “day job” as a firefighter as well as a family to care for, so it was always a part-time project, but I have probably averaged 2-3 hours per day for all that time. After five years of being the grateful beneficiary of Guru Nitya’s teachings and admonishments, I realized it was only fair to give back some energy in return. I asked him what I could do for him, painfully aware it would be like trading tarnished pennies for the bags of gold he had been freely lading on everyone he came in contact with, but that’s all I had to offer. He soon asked me to put his Bhagavad Gita commentary into proper shape for publication.

Nitya taught the Gita in Portland a number of times beginning in 1970, as it was wildly popular in America in those days. Anne Morin had typed up a first draft in 1971, which I incorporated into the project. Nitya used my typing task as a kind of disciple training a la Milarepa and Marpa. I had to do everything, including all the Sanskrit diacritics, on an electric typewriter we had on hand, carefully adjusting the platen to enter the lines and dots above or below the letters. It was tricky to get them in the right place, and it didn’t always work. If I made a mistake, I was not permitted to do any erasing, but had to throw out the entire sheet and start over. More than once I got to the bottom of a page, which might have taken more than an hour, and slipped up. I can still recall ripping the paper off the platen and crumpling it up for the wastebasket, resolving to try even harder next time. It was frustration incarnate! I suppose not being disheartened by the whole business was a valuable trait to reinforce, but only my loving dedication to my teacher lent me the will to keep going.

Overlaying that extreme caution about mistakes was the widespread conviction that the guru, any guru, was infallible, so I should NEVER alter anything, just reproduce it exactly as it appeared. It took decades for me to loosen up on this idea, realizing that there was room for improvement if one was very,

very careful to retain the intent. After many years of fear and trembling I have come to be quite satisfied with the results as my fear of divine retribution diminished.

Speaking of belief in the infallibility of gurus, while it has a certain value in reining in a disciple's ego and fostering trust, it is for the most part a misplaced notion that has led millions to sacrifice their good sense in favor of their teacher's egos, leading them to disaster. America alone has a million such stories of well-meaning people deceived by charlatans pretending to embody the will of God. I consider myself extremely fortunate that the person I submitted to was not only a brilliant philosopher, but an honest soul fully dedicated to wisdom transmission.

Certainly in the matter of written material, any wide-awake editor should be encouraged to question apparent mistakes. I was fortunate to be working in the same house as Nitya so I was able to bring my concerns to his attention and resolve them with his blessing. Sometimes he would upbraid me just for good measure, yet he never insisted on his own infallibility. That was just another popular myth. The aim was always accuracy of thought and word, not personal glory.

I used to wonder how other gurus wrote such immaculate and compelling English, until it dawned on me that they had their own editors who weren't restrained by the same compunctions as I. Readability was just about the most important consideration in terms of their books' popularity, and while the Gurukula was never much interested in becoming popular, clarity of communication still struck me as a most valuable feature.

I have always been fortunate to have a lot of time to devote to the editing work, treating it as my form of sadhana, and so whenever something wasn't clear to me I would meditate on it, sometimes for several days or even up to a week, in order to be sure of the sense. I never had to be in a hurry to move along, but felt supported by the Guru to take my time and get it done right. Only when the precise meaning clicked into place would I see how it could be expressed with a minimum of tinkering. My most

gratifying moments were when I did something as simple as switching the position of two words or phrases, and finding the result making spectacular sense. That's one way editors get their kicks, I guess.

I should add that my saturation in the Gita throughout the 1970s served me in good stead later on. Nitya became caught up in so many other important projects that he didn't do his English language Gita full justice. After his death I began to teach it myself, and eventually did my own commentary that was based on many of his best ideas that hadn't found their way into his book, at least the English-language edition. The result spawned my two most important published books, *The Path to the Guru*, on chapters 1 and 2, and *Krishna in the Sky with Diamonds* on chapter 11. The complete, exhaustive commentary is freely available online:

<https://nitya-teachings.weebly.com/bhagavad-gita.html> .

Not long after finishing our first project and sending the Gita manuscript off to the publisher, around 1979, Nitya handed me a bound volume of typescript, the original almost obscured in numerous places by extensive scribbles from several previous editorial attempts. It was his *Psychology of Darsanamala*, and it was nearly unreadable in parts from all the cross-outs and rewrites. I quickly ascertained that many of the corrections actually were anything but improvements, and that a thorough overhaul would be necessary.

I spent around seven years recovering the original from the maze, retyping, and then fine-tuning it. I was still under the caveat of not changing anything, but there were obvious fixes to be made here and there, and definitely the need to reorganize. The end was capped with my first large writing project, the Introduction, which felt a lot like giving birth. There had been a very long gestation period of my seventeen years of study with Nitya and then a difficult—though not physically painful—build-up of the complex ideas required. It was almost like it was growing physically inside me. Once it burst its barriers and was able to be expressed it came blasting out in a big rush, and the result was a beautiful “baby” that

did reasonable justice to the book. One of the biggest compliments I have received in this life came two years after the book was published: while I was attending the 1989 music and arts festival at the Ooty Gurukula, someone rudely accused me of signing my name to an essay that Nitya had obviously written for me, meaning the Introduction. I was initially shocked, but soon realized that having my essay sound as if Nitya had written it was actually high praise, and evidence of its adequacy. Over the years of saturation in Nitya's work I have come to write a little like an Americanized version of his phraseology, and I don't mind it a bit.

Not long after finishing *The Psychology of Darsanamala*, I was approached by Nancy Yeilding with a stack of transcriptions of Nitya's fabulous Atmopadesa Satakam class given in Portland, and I agreed to turn it into a book. I spent on average about a month on each of the hundred verses, seven years in all, first typing them on a computer—a new and very helpful word processing technology—and then adjusting them into a more readable form. I discovered that prophetic lecturing was a quite different format from written text, and I needed to make the conversion. A speaker will naturally add ideas later on in a talk to compliment earlier ones, and an alert listener won't have any problem with it, but in writing they all need to be properly joined in one place. I first brought related ideas together in a streamlined form and then fine-tuned the result. I dared on rare occasions to substitute a word I was sure was meant from the one in the transcript. The whole process was like adjusting the focus of a telescope or microscope, where the blurred image finally comes into crystal clarity, and the image leaps out at you. The result, in my opinion, is one of the finest books of spiritual insight ever produced, and a worthy testimony to the sagacity of its author, Nitya, as well as the original insights of Narayana Guru that he so expertly elucidated.

Several more years were required to come up with a fitting title, *That Alone: The Core of Wisdom*, write a proper introduction, and shepherd the manuscript through the publisher 5 full times, as

they kept adding new errors as they removed old ones, making it a about a twelve year project. It was the first one where I used a painting by fellow disciple Andy Larkin for the cover, the beginning of a proud history of his collaboration for the Gurukula.

Toward the end of the *That Alone* undertaking, in May of 1999, Nitya entered *mahasamadhi*, which among other things precipitated my own teaching and writing career. I realized that if his disciples didn't carry on the dissemination of his wisdom, so important to maintaining the lineage of Narayana Guru and Nataraja Guru, it would peter out. I determined to apply my editing skills to his other books in hopes they would continue to speak to people for a long time after those of us who knew him personally were gone.

Nitya's autobiography, *Love and Blessings*, painstakingly compiled by Peter Oppenheimer, came out in India in December of 2000. I could see room for my polishing skills, as the printing of the book was uneven and there were a number of typographical errors. Peter, who himself rated the work a C+, graciously gave me permission (and the manuscript) to work with. I felt Nitya deserved at least an A, if not an A+ effort. I brought in some more material from Nitya's other writings, and best of all, Deborah Buchanan allowed me access to her diary from her long trip with Nitya in 1971, an important time not covered in the Indian edition at all. (As an aside, that was when she took the two now-famous and widely circulated pictures of Nitya and Nataraja Guru sitting together at the Varkala Gurukula.) She not only vividly chronicled that period, but had included direct quotes in brackets that could be used verbatim. I was by now brave enough to produce those several new chapters in the first person, reasonably in Nitya's voice. My own writing definitely has a lot of Nitya in it, which may be a fault for me, but after decades of working with his writings and teachings it is impossible for me to have a truly uninfluenced tone.

Early in the editing process the 9-11 disaster happened, and it was obvious to me that the official story was absurd and a cover

for a much more nefarious homegrown conspiracy. I was literally sickened, broken-hearted at what it meant for the planet, which lies on us like a gigantic leech now, in 2020. Further despair was occasioned by how greedily my fellow humans bought into the bogus cover story. I have always admired Nitya's attitude embodied in a line from his Yoga Sutras book: "The yogi makes every effort not to be a howler telling untruth or a simpleton believing in something because somebody said it or it is written somewhere." Yogis, it turns out, are rare.

My work on *Love and Blessings* was deeply healing. I would wake up each day filled with conspiratorial misgivings and rush to my computer to begin poring over the manuscript. I'd work for a couple of hours, and as I went along I would feel my spirits lifting, until by the end of each session I would be back to "normal," that is, to a state of mental balance with my former strong dose of guarded optimism about the meaning and trajectory of life. The radiance of living was restored. I felt the book was acting as a guru to me.

After the editing process was complete I worked with a local artist, Linda Sawaya, to produce the beautiful volume that a friend and I had privately printed for the US edition of 2003. The press run was a thousand copies. It remains my second favorite of our books, after *That Alone*, a book that can be opened on any page to enjoy an uplifting revelation.

Next came a spate of restoration projects for new editions of several of Nitya's works, and Larkin covers adorn most of them. *Meditations on the Self* was once again privately printed by a good friend and me, and is to my mind the most physically attractive of all our lovely books.

Having achieved what I felt was a high degree of competence in working with the material, I was gratified to be invited to redo two of Nataraja Guru's books, *Unitive Philosophy*, combining three previous works of a series, and *Saundarya Lahari*. This brought me to another level of super cautiousness about making changes. His works had been well edited by John Spiers to begin

with, so mostly I would be proofing the digitization. Happily there were plenty of mistakes in the proof sheets to keep me busy. Any changes I made were accompanied by a visualization of the Guru looking intently over my shoulder, along with an incisive story related to me by Johnny Stallings.

Johnny had been with Nataraja Guru for the whole year prior to his death in 1973. Johnny was in his early twenties, and rather naively offered to help the Guru polish up and modernize his English. The Guru, more than fifty years older than this hippie kid, replied with a twinkle in his eye that he was very fond of his Victorian style of writing just as it was, but thanks anyway. Whenever Johnny and I talked of editing issues that story would come up, so I was properly chastened in advance. The Guru's writing surely had an antique charm, and was very precise. Still, I could see how some minor rearrangements would make a big difference in getting his ideas across to a somewhat wider readership. Of course, being confused by the writing is part of the challenge of reading him, a kind of entrance exam to separate out any disciple who wasn't serious enough, but there are few these days who persist once they are stumped. Unless they already revere Nataraja Guru they will just turn to another author. And the ideas are plenty challenging without any additional linguistic barriers. So with fear and dread I made the most minimal changes necessary to make the writing clear to me. I have spent my entire life studying this philosophy, so after all it is a rather high bar. If I don't understand it, it may indicate a real problem. I continue to be pleased whenever I review the results, and am confident that if Nataraja Guru is looking down from philosopher heaven he will be appreciative of my contribution in getting across his revolutionary—really, unmatched—vision.

A resolve to include me in all future book projects was rescinded for Nataraja Guru's masterpiece, *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*, reissued in 2005. The result was the worst book publication I have ever seen, with numerous glaring errors on every page. I immediately began preparing a corrected manuscript,

which took well over a year. There were times when I had to refer to the decently edited first edition in order to determine what the original intent had been, because for the life of me I couldn't make it out. I sent an edited hard copy to the publisher, along with a request to reissue the book and destroy the second edition. Unfortunately all copies were sold over ten years before a new edition was proposed, but they had saved my revised copy and entered the changes somewhat before sending me a new manuscript to review toward the end of 2015. I knew this would be the last chance ever for proper editing, so I threw myself into the project full bore. With the help of the internet and our excellent Portland library and bookstores I was able to track down most of the obscure references for double-checking. With a practiced and careful eye, I caught many subtle errors from the first edition in addition to many new ones and the plethora from the second edition. It was very satisfying to peruse the result, as the new version was the most readable by far. Apparently there is now a movement to reinstate some of the old-fashioned wording, but as the human race seems to be entering a post-philosophic era, it may not matter very much. Nataraja Guru was after all speaking to a mid-twentieth century audience of holistic scientists that no longer exists. Yet the value of the work in helping a sincere seeker to stabilize their consciousness and unify their philosophy is undeniable. Plus, the gorgeous Larkin cover he came up with does it the full justice it so well deserves. [As of 2020, the project has been scrapped by the Gurukula management, so anyone interested can write to me for a digital copy.]

A long gap in my editing career between 2006 and 2015 was filled with my own composition of a 1500 page commentary on the Gita, based on Nitya and Nataraja Guru's unique revelations, along with weekly class notes concerning our studies of the gurus' masterpieces at the Portland Gurukula that is freely shared over the internet. Another late project was proofing the digitization of *The Psychology of Darsanamala* by Beverley Hammon, just in time for our last detailed class on it in Portland. (The class notes, book

introductions and other writings are available on my website, split between: <http://scottteitsworth.tripod.com> – old, and <https://nitya-teachings.weebly.com/> - new.)

After over 40 years of dedicated work, I awoke one day in April and realized there was nothing more for me to do for the Gurukula. I was “retired” by default. It has taken some getting used to, as it’s been my lifetime meditation technique. Thankfully a few of my own projects remain to keep me from turning to compost immediately. Starting in 2018 I’ve offered a two-year course in the Bhagavad Gita based on my commentary, beginning every winter. It has been met with enthusiasm from a small group of dedicated seekers happy to learn about the work in a modern, science-based perspective.

I’m sharing this account because there are a few worthwhile anecdotes I wanted to pass along to my Gurukula fellows, to get them on the record, such as it is. Most of all, I wanted to proclaim once more that a vast, astounding body of knowledge is contained in the books I’ve labored over, and one of the most satisfying parts of my life has been helping to preserve it for anyone who might like to know more about the wonderfully liberating ideas that make our rather obscure organization special.

My work for the Gurukula in summary:

By Nitya:

Bhagavad Gita 1975-1978

Psychology of Darsanamala 1979-1987

*That Alone 1989-2003

Polishings:

Love and Blessings 2000-2003

In the Stream of Consciousness 2004

*Meditations on the Self 2004-5

*Neither This Nor That... But Aum 2005-6

Darsanamala (digitized by Beverley Hammon) 2015-17

By Nataraja Guru:

*Unitive Philosophy 2003-5

*Saundarya Lahari 2003-5

*Bhagavad Gita 2006-8

*An Integrated Science of the Absolute 2005-6, 2016-17 (reissue canceled per Gurukula management, pdf available from me on request)

My major works:

Weekly class notes 2004-present

Bhagavad Gita 2005-2015

*Krishna in the Sky with Diamonds 2012

The Path to the Guru 2014

Exegesis of the Labors of Hercules 2005-11

* indicates Andy Larkin cover art

Responses:

Dear Scott,

Thanks for sharing your wonderful experience and thoughts. I find myself lucky to associate with you in a small way. Wish I was here in Portland 40 years back or I could have found Nitya in India.

Reading your letter gave me a feeling as if you are in an active dive to get pearls from deep ocean and I am standing at the shore watching with a numb mind.

When one starts the journey of life one does not have a clue how it will unfold. In retrospect meeting Nitya must be a high light of your life. I am delighted to see your enthusiasm and sincerity to keep the guru lineage alive. We all dabble in horizontal plan but few get lucky to take vertical leaps.

The image in the mirror merged with the object! (This is to express the similarity in quality of your writings with that of Nitya).

Regards, Jay Thakar

WOW Scott- don't really know what to say, but thanks for sending me this.

Dianne Young

Thank you for sharing . inspired to do more

Pranaams

Shyla Rao

Thanks for sending this out and for all the hard work you have done over these many years to make Nitya's teachings available to us. I appreciate it greatly and know it changed my life. I hope you feel appreciated by many! Jan Atwill

Congratulations and gratitude!!

Love,

Nancy Yeilding

Wow Scott! Deep, deep bows to you for your sincere and selfless devotion and dedication to our Gurus and their teachings. Your account is really touching for many reasons - 1) you did all these works without an ounce of self-interest, just a genuine wanting to know and let know 2) I'm sure you got dinged for your choices (editing or otherwise) many times by various people and when your ego was wounded you found a way to put it aside for the higher purpose 3) each of these projects took years to complete and you stuck with it, with kids, a wife, job and all. Amazing!

I'm one of the many lucky enjoyers of the fruits of your labor.

Thank you! Thank you!

And.. your retirement may be temporary.. because... remember the Bhagavad Gita video transcription project I started and plan to continue? Nancy has offered to edit it, but you never know.. We may call and say, " Scott! Please heeeelp!" And that will be the

end of your retirement [Smiley face]. Just sayin'... I will resume this project in the Fall.

Much love and gratitude,

xoxo

Ammu

Dear Scott ji,

When I saw the word “Retires” even before opening the message, I was disappointed - I didn't know what it meant though. Then I saw that the Gita class continues - relieved.

I could read the “editing history” only tonight. I was moved, I couldn't realize why. I felt I travelled a millennium backward, because those days it was common, as we read, to have enduring Guru-Sishya relations of pure love and devotion. Through the account you sent across, I could see that happening in our times, though the physical presence of Guru Nitya is no more with us.

Interacting with such blessed souls is also a blessing in itself.

Pranam. Aum.

Baiju

Dear Scott,
Bless you and thank you, brother, for your wonderful work, generations to come will be grateful for all that you have done. And I'm sure the Gurus will be very happy with, for, you. I can almost see Nataraja Guru, in some ice-cream parlour in Sausalito,

eyes all a twinkle, saying to his girlfriend ‘not bad for these hippies, eh?’.

(Vinaya)