

Flip Flop

I met then-Swami Nitya Chaitanya Yati through the type of “accident” with which spiritual biographies are rife. At least, some magnetic force must have been operating to bring us together out of the chaos of a planet with four billion inhabitants. I had just severed ties with my family and society, fleeing with my future wife to a remote part of America. It was my intention to live simply and practice yoga as much as possible, mechanically and surely treading the path to the Divine.

We arrived in the city of Portland from the east just as Swami Nitya was arriving from the west and setting up a class in a local church. We heard of the class by the purest coincidence, yet my wife to be was very insistent on attending. She immediately connected with the Swami, who later shocked both the orthodox and myself by traveling with her for many months as Guru and disciple. Hers was the spiritual magnetism that drew us into the Narayana Gurukula, and while my involvement is much more peripheral, both of us felt an instant affinity for Nitya’s teaching which has only deepened over the years.

After several evenings in that first American class, on the Bhagavad Gita in the fall of 1970, I began to intuitively remember sitting at the feet of other—perhaps even the same—Gurus in the past, and began to touch that timeless situation within of a seer surrounded by disciples. I realized that I was in the presence of a true Guru, not just another of the many charlatans coaxing money from the fatuous and gullible. How my heart soared in that presence, certain of a safe and simple passage to the realized state! What a relief to pass all my troubles on to this owlish, bearded foreigner and let him lead me to the Goal of goals!

American ideas of Indian Gurus mostly come from books, and these all speak of the student requesting discipleship from the master, whereupon he performs a few mystical and incomprehensible actions, demands an additional number of unusual services of the student, taps him on the forehead three

times, and sends him into instant and total realization. So with this scheme and several other preconceptions in mind I entered Nitya's room one day and asked him to be my Guru. He wasn't interested.

He wasn't interested!?

Not interested! *That* didn't fit the scheme. And with me only two or three steps short of enlightenment and everything so far going by the book! This Swami fellow, the key to all the imagined wonders, just kicked my whole mental orientation far out to sea where a huge, ugly fish ate it up. To add to the shock he added a few less than complimentary comments about my inner nature, and within a few days I went from being the great and wise disciple to being the biggest fool on the face of the Earth. My ego was crushed. My heart felt like a fierce fire, which would be stirred occasionally to allow for more complete combustion. While I imagined Nitya to be the source of this misery, I began to see how in my ignorance I had brought it all upon myself with my projections, and that he had remained detached and uninterested beyond all my psychic twisting and turning. I, an unprepared neophyte, had merely met the Guru, and from our brief encounter reaped many years of confusion and sadness. So much for the mechanical sureness of the path. So much for the certitude of knowing a Guru. So much for the ease and pleasure of the Way. So many illusions gone. So much humility yet to be cultivated!

One day, almost in passing, Nitya said to me, "You know, Scott meditation does not necessarily mean sitting in lotus pose with the eyes rolled up. Anything can be a meditation. Playing music properly is a very good way to do it." Somehow that simple statement took a deep hold on me. A neglected interest in music came back with a rush, and a serious study was begun. Guru Nitya has casually reunited me with a part of my dharma without my even being aware of it at the time, and it has been a major part of my life ever since. In addition to the enjoyment of doing something that is natural to my psychic system, music and yoga interact and feed back on one another in mutually beneficial ways. The discipline of studying and concentrating on music has helped me to

focus and discard distractions, which has made it easier to pay close attention to the Word of the Guru. And the Guru's teachings help consciousness grow so that it may more easily grasp the complexities of the music being performed. Believe me, every extraneous thought appears instantly as an error during a musical performance!

"Anything can be a meditation." It looks simple in print, but it has repeatedly struck me as an important truth. Especially now, when the traditional yogic approach is becoming a vestige of an ancient world, and therefore increasingly inaccessible to everyday people. Like so many of the teachings of Narayana Guru and his disciples, it breaks through our assumption that yoga somehow has a certain structure, can only be done at a certain time (usually "later"), and is confined to those who meet certain criteria or qualifications. We really need to fuse the wisdom and intelligence of yoga with our everyday lives, which have become splintered and unrelated to nature and its ways. "Anything" does not really mean anything—it means whatever is appropriate to your particular life and circumstances. *Your* dharma, not the one decreed by some society or other extraneous factor, is what is right for you. It does not have to be in music or art or politics. The fundamental realignment that these teachings bring about releases the ability of the individual to be directed to the next project with ever greater balance and dexterity. Even the simplest thing can be done more artistically, and thus be more satisfying.

Putting people in touch with their true latent abilities seems to be almost the first step that a guru must make us take. It is interesting to watch how Guru Nitya advises people regarding their dharma. Often it starts with a student's question, which may lack focus and direction, and perhaps be quite innocuous or abstract. Nitya may virtually ignore the original query and instead address directly the real unspoken needs of the student. Everyone but the questioner will understand the relevance, it seems, though the comments will undoubtedly go deeply into the person. I have seldom seen it done as bluntly as in my own example earlier (I'm

considerably more dense than most) but typically with a subtlety which allows for the individual's tendencies to have a hand in shaping the outcome. Yet there is no doubt that the Guru is seeing right to the crux of the situation. The refreshing nature of being in the Guru's presence comes to some extent from this ability to cut through our individual and collective confusion and expose the core reality, which we in our cumbersome mental dilemmas tend to obscure.

Thinking back on some 13 years of knowing Guru Nitya provides an interesting perspective. Most of my original ideas about spirituality now seem so radically unspiritual as to verge on the absurd. Like me, many of us read or hear about a guru and nod our heads in sanctimonious agreement with verbal interpretations of their teaching. But this attitude actually closes us off from the real and potent effect of their Word. In our smug self-satisfaction we desire to be knowledgeable *about* the Absolute as a way of preventing a deeper participation *in* it. We must cast this off in a meaningful way or we are condemned to forever be the same, rooted in our habitual ignorance.

Our worldly life is caught up in pursuing phantom ideas into imaginary situations. When we sit at the feet of the Guru we can feel this churning mentation calming down, easing off, relaxing, becoming silent. Only then can we hear and absorb what is emanating from him or her. And just as meditation does not always consist of sitting in lotus pose with the eyes rolled up, the Guru is not always hiding within the body of a man or woman. This same process of opening out can take place at a music concert, at a dance performance, or even just sitting by a bubbling stream or a silent mountainside. The principle is always the same: still your mind, let go of your conditioning, be a little humble, and you become free to hear. What you hear is for you alone to know and learn from.

We of the twentieth century have all but lost touch with the wisdom upheld by Gurus and seers. Everything in our modern environment counsels us to reject it as outmoded, to throw it all away and start anew. Sure, what passes for religion or morality is

merely a manmade attempt to perpetuate our state of slavery. What we often forget is that revolution is also keeping us in slavery, slavery to the belief that external, political forms can change our world. All that does is substitute one straitjacket for another. Why we love Guru Nitya, and Nataraja Guru and Narayana Guru, is that all these artificial barriers are to be thrown away. What they offer us instead is the chance to change ourselves, to be rid of the straitjacket once and for all. When that is done almost any political system will work. Until it is done, no system will work.

The Narayana Gurukula Gurus have intentionally managed to remain apart from the glamour and bustle of commercial religion. This has kept the teaching pure and uncompromised. Americans are all too familiar with the selling and spoiling of religion by greedy quacks. India is still blessed beyond imagination to have humble and honest Gurus such as Narayana, Nataraja and Nitya available to help its people understand the unifying truths that have been distilled through the ages.

Through a great grace a Guru has once again come to us, to try and shake us out of our self-satisfied egoism. We who know him, in whatever degree, must turn squarely to ourselves and face the challenge there, and decline to fight with those who see things differently. We must all learn as much as possible from our own wise teachers, so that we can all live in peace and harmony, sharing the great wealth that is ours.