

# Love and Blessings

## Introduction to the Second Edition

There is little to add to the estimable introduction to the first edition by Professor Oppenheimer, but a couple of minor points should be noted.

As Nitya's life was unconventional, so is his autobiography. Little attempt has been made to include an overall picture of specific events, especially during his Guruhood, which began unofficially in the mid-1960s and officially in 1973 and extended up to his death in 1999. Nitya always considered exact details as secondary to the broad points of wisdom teaching, and what is included here deals more with the learning curve he underwent than being a linear historical narrative. *Love and Blessings* is mostly a tale of psychological unfoldment, and the actual details of Nitya's life form only the background. This is very much in keeping with his general orientation, where actual events were always secondary to his interactions with people.

A guru is a teacher, a remover of darkness. Technically, it is the principle of enlightenment inherent in creation that is perennially expressed through certain people and learning situations. So it is appropriate that the Guru's life be expressed through his teachings even more than the outward trappings of his life.

Because of this, the latter half of the book especially contains few references to actual events, being instead a chronicle of inner growth. It epitomizes the kind of thought and instruction that guided Nitya's relationships with everyone, and which were the primary focus of his and his disciples' energies. As he himself said, this is an inner journey rather than a series of external events. The purpose of this book is to further instruct a world hungry for wisdom more than to memorialize a particular individual who, while widely known in South India and a few other places, remains largely unknown to the outside world.

Guru Nitya's anonymity was intentional and jealously guarded, and his intimate friends appreciated that the distortions of fame seldom intruded into the peaceful atmosphere around him. There are several stories of the Guru intentionally avoiding the limelight, but one of the most amusing took place in the late 1970s. Nitya and a small entourage were passing through Las Vegas, and the anchorman of a local TV affiliate arranged an interview. Cameras ready and notebook in hand, he asked a few innocuous questions, building to a stereotyped climax. Prepared for soundbite revelation, he pitched a slow one over the plate: "And what kind of belief is it that binds your group together?" Nitya looked thoughtfully into the middle distance and slowly answered, "We are all united by our...deep love...of the avocado." He looked questioningly at his students to see if they were willing to go that far in agreement with him. The interviewer closed his notebook and tucked it away with the flicker of a pitying smile, the cameras were turned off, and Nitya was able to continue on his way as an ordinary human rather than a cult hero. The subtle point that no self-respecting guru would demand any kind of belief from anyone was completely missed.

Another oddity of this account is that since the last nearly thirty years is represented only by letters, those living with and near the Guru are little noted. No Indian language letters were gathered, as the task of translation would have been too great, and of course very few letters were sent to those actually living with him at any time. Therefore many of the Guru's closest friends and associates are not included in this autobiography at all. At the same time some relatively peripheral characters stand out solely due to having submitted their letters for the book, since only a very few of his literally thousands of correspondents were willing to share their intimate treasures of his letters with the public. Nonetheless those people are perfectly representative of how the Guru interacted with everyone. As always, it is the teaching that matters, not necessarily the person who received it. Readers will very quickly realize that

the letters are directed as much to them as to the person whose name appears in the heading.

Guru Nitya (1924-1999) is the third great teacher in the lineage of Narayana Guru (1854-1928). Narayana Guru was a revolutionary seer and contemplative who also fought against the caste and gender prejudices paralyzing 19<sup>th</sup> century India. His disciple Nataraja Guru (1895-1973) was a brilliant philosopher who gave a scientific interpretation to his guru's mystical teachings and began the Narayana Gurukula, the school for the dissemination of Narayana Guru's philosophy. Guru Nitya succeeded him as head of the Narayana Gurukula after a long and stormy apprenticeship.

Nataraja Guru, was an extremely interesting character in his own right, and plays not a small part in this narrative. While clearly an intellectual genius, he exactly resembled the character Mr. Natural rendered by the American cartoonist R. Crumb. Both were short and fat with twinkling eyes and snowy beards, and delighted in correcting their disciples with a (physical or psychological) kick in the backside. Because of this resemblance, Nataraja Guru was taken to visit Crumb unannounced during a visit to California in 1968. When the cartoonist answered the door, likely under the influence of some psychedelic, he was astounded to see what he must have regarded as a projection of his own consciousness standing on his doorstep. He immediately slammed the door, thereby precluding what would have been one of the great moments in the history of cross-cultural pollination.

Nataraja Guru's time spent with the hippies of San Francisco, including a psychedelic trip he was secretly administered, is narrated in his inimitable style in his own *Autobiography of an Absolutist*. Students of that legendary era will find its trans-cultural perspective fascinating.

Before his death, Narayana Guru specified the requirements for a guru in his ashram. He or she must be a scholar, a hermit, broadminded, possessed of equanimity, a profound thinker, an

ascetic, a speaker of truths, efficient and energetic, having good morals, and not idle or lazy. Although only three years old when Narayana Guru passed away, Nitya Chaitanya Yati, who came to embody all these qualities, was clearly the perfect man for the job.

Near the end of his life Nitya described the unitive state of a guru to those gathered in his evening class. “Every time I sit in prayer, there is an overwhelming experience where there is no sun or any lamp lit, and where there are no objects to be illuminated. There is an indescribable effulgence which does not permit any inside or outside, where there are no temporal dualities of before or hereafter. If it does not bear any fragmented ego to say ‘I am,’ this experiential imperience and imperiential experience can be poetically described only as a word of supplication.”

Such realization brings with it a sense of lightness. Nitya epitomized a substantial portion of his delightful philosophy in a letter to Sraddha in 1981. It is well worth previewing here:

“Who am I? That is the great question. Go within. Find out.” So clamor all the masters. Take a break from being so serious. What is the point of knowing who you are? You are just you, a plain and simple you, like the plain and simple “I am” among a multitude of I’s and you’s and he’s and she’s. What’s more important is to watch the traffic and note the light signals at the crossroad and to understand the moods of the people and the markets you deal with. You will be a lot better off if you cultivate good taste for forms, shapes, designs and colors, a good ear for music, sound logic to think correctly, good ethical norms to conduct yourself amicably and cheerfully with others, and a sensibility to appreciate all the finer nuances of life’s music, which has a wide variety ranging from the Sama Veda to disco.

Everyone is as important and unique as I am. So let me re-frame the question “Who am I?” as “Who are all these wonderful people including me?” Why go within? Why not be friends with this tangible world, this unending feast of

colors and music in which the grand drama of life is always in full swing. Why should anyone dampen one's spirit with a cynical philosophy of rumination on death and disease? That will be taken care of anyway.

Your self does not belong to any caste. You cannot be perceived by the senses. Unattached, formless and witness of all are you. Be happy. This suggests a drastic reduction of the solid person of flesh and bones into a rarefied abstraction. I do not have to write off the legitimate use of my senses and mind to be happy. I know caste is a barbarian prejudice, just as race is a regional scruple that can be dismissed as a pettiness of mind. We are mini systems intrinsically fabricated into the microcosmic system of the macrocosmic system. I can be genuinely happy by functioning as best I can within the frame of reference to which I legitimately belong without either exaggerating or obliterating my role and identity.

Nitya used terms for the Absolute in keeping with the level of understanding of the person he was communicating with. While his own conception was of an impersonal, benevolent, all-encompassing, transcendental state of the Divine, he never hesitated to employ terms like God if such was the device that a person used to designate the undesignatable.

Along with remembering that terms like 'God' and 'prayer' have a neutral, philosophic meaning to Guru Nitya, it should always be kept in mind that the Guru is a principle, not a principal; a force, not a person. It is the teaching urge of the universe, and can be encountered in whatever one finds affinity with, be it a human, a river, mountains, flowers, or even written words. The present book is a perfect example of the guru principle residing in an inanimate object. Few people will take the time to read it cover to cover, but it is possible to just open the book at random while pondering over a problem or a situation, to find—within a couple of tries—a passage going directly to the crux of their predicament.

This is not so strange when it is remembered that “random chance” is how the Tao operates, and such happy “accidents” underlie the oracle of the I Ching as well.

Of course, many readers will find this book to have relevant and insightful wisdom on nearly every page. The Guru principle teaches through the general as well as the specific, the macrocosm as well as the microcosm, the obvious as well as the subtle. It has prepared a feast of uncommon delight in the coming pages.

The attentive reader will note that in March of 1996 Nitya mentions a problem with his hand. Though it wasn't diagnosed at the time, this was undoubtedly due to a small stroke, which he began to have more and more frequently. Although his spirit remained buoyant for the remainder of his life, his health began to decline after that time. A massive stroke on November 29, 1998 left him physically unable to care for himself. On May 14, 1999, faced with the prospect of being moved from his beloved Fernhill Gurukula, the Guru left his body.

Why in the world would anyone read an autobiography about someone unknown? Only to throw light on their own path. This book offers a lifetime of wisdom gleaned by a brilliant and dedicated soul who lived in a most interesting time and place. It is to our eternal benefit that so many insights, so poetically and compassionately expressed, come together in the following remarkable account.

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October, 2002