

Volcanic Inspiration

All around the globe, spiritual volcanoes rise out of the wilderness in many places. They mark the sites where dedicated seekers have broken through the earth's crust to release the virtually infinite energy lingering not too far beneath the surface. Some are very old and weathered and others are of a more recent origin. Some are active, many are dormant. Most are in fact extinct. The major religions and philosophical systems of history are the really huge volcanoes, full of the ridges and valleys of different denominations, while local sects and study groups comprise the smaller mountains. There are also many individual vents that are almost invisible, where lone seers discovered a unique way to open the floodgates but never shared their discovery. From the smallest and most obscure to the most imposing, all are inspirational and enjoyable to admire. By reminding us of what others have accomplished, they invite us to become happier, more creative, and more compassionate in our daily lives.

All spiritual volcanoes are remarkably similar in their essential features, though their unique patterns of eruption and subsequent weathering have given each one special aspects of distinctive beauty. Only a fanatic would lay claim that their favorite was the only “real” volcanic formation. From a distance, almost all volcanoes look alike.

Narayana Guru opened a vent to the center of the earth in the late nineteenth century, by digging down largely on his own as a solitary seeker of truth. When he burst through the last barrier, energy poured out and engulfed him, transforming both him and his regional environment. Because he became famous, you may already know some of the dramatic story of his life.

Narayana Guru's profound compassion for suffering humanity impelled him to share his vision with all interested seekers of truth. He foresaw the value of combining scientific ideas with spiritual wisdom, and so sent his disciple Nataraja Guru to

study for an advanced degree at the Sorbonne in Paris. Nataraja Guru was awed by the power of the Guru's wisdom, and developed a way to integrate it with Western science. Over a lifetime of deep contemplation he was able not only to interpret Narayana Guru's energy, but to bring up mountains of magma himself and fashion it into the towering, conical volcano he named the Narayana Gurukula. He built what welled up in him into a soaring structure of sublime symmetry, though somewhat forbidding in its rocky crags and beetling cliffs of intellectual intensity.

It was a third-generation disciple, Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, who released the horizontal potential of the energy brimming inside the Gurukula dome. He teased the magma out so it flowed in all directions, allowing it to spread far and wide and inundate a substantial area. In this way Narayana Guru's vision could be applied to the real-life problems of seekers in the east and west, north and south.

All three gurus worked diligently to express their insights in a modern idiom, free of localized religious references. Religious symbols were interpreted in terms of psychology and the natural laws of science. They always insisted that there are not two truths, the spiritual and the scientific, but they are complementary ways to interpret the one reality in which all of us are privileged to exist. Bridging the gap between physics and metaphysics has been a crucial and highly rewarding enterprise for them—and subsequently for us.

Because of this, the Narayana Gurukula is at the forefront of efforts to interpret the spiritual traditions of the ancient world in a comprehensible form for modern thinkers. The happy result is to discover the practical value of the ancient teachings, by focusing more on their inner meaning than their exotic outer forms.

Only a relatively few truth seekers are actively involved with this exceptionally excellent South Indian volcano. There is a lot of hustle and bustle around the name and historic legacy of Narayana Guru, but only a small portion of it includes active maintenance of the wisdom heritage for personal transformation. Narayana Guru is

all-too-often taken for granted, worshipped as a figurehead. What will keep his legacy alive in the truest sense of the word is for concerned individuals to delve into the meaning of his teachings and discover how they lead to levels of satisfaction and happiness that are endangered species in the modern world.

The Narayana Gurukula today consists of just a scattering of encampments near the periphery of Narayana Guru's magnificent volcano of wisdom teachings, mostly hidden from sight by the jungle undergrowth. From these solitary huts, sorties are made from time to time onto the lower slopes. A few of the disciples lead expeditions onto the sides of the volcano, or advise about some of the better routes for those interested in exploring on their own. It can and does provide excellent mountaineering practice for those intent on climbing other peaks.

Most visitors are content to view Mt. Gurukula, which remains one of the youngest, gentlest and most beautiful of all the thousands of igneous outcroppings across the globe, from a distance. Occasionally, one of the inmates of the huts scales its peak, struggling up into the rarified air to catch a breathtaking vision of the surrounding terrain. But mostly the view is from the ground: the mountain is admired but climbed infrequently. Still, for those charmed by beauty far from the beaten path, who are turned off by the madding crowds and pestiferous hawkers that surround the more well-known volcanoes, the recondite Gurukula is a welcome discovery.