

Saint Guru Shord (1900-1988)

Personal notes on his life and teaching

[a working paper]

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Saint Guru Shord

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Foreword

Guru Shord's rediscovered yogic technology ushers in the dawn of post-industrial asceticism. Comprehending these critical findings is tantamount to grasping Guru Shord's sainthood. One is not however to view this study as a hagiographical singing of the glories, as the aim of these notes is to establish an accurate historical depiction of the man and his teaching. None frankly but the present writer is capable of attempting this.

The current project thereby adheres to four very well defined and clear-cut aims throughout. First is to venerate Guru Shord as modern Thailand's seminal yoga master. Second is to document a five-year period of private training that I personally underwent with the Saint himself. Third is to document the radical restoration of Guru Shord's rediscovered ascetic principles as uniquely marked by tremendous refinement, beauty and grace. Fourth is to survey, examine and articulate what the present writer has come to understand as the rediscovered yoga of our present era disburdened of its useless cultural accretions and extraneous ethnographic and mythic elements.

The present study may also be seen as an accompanying module The Sritantra Project (2002-2008) and other forthcoming notes and articles of which I have reprinted some passages herein.

Preface

The Wide-Open Universe

One fine morning, just before his passing, I visited Guru Shord's garden ashram, as I did so often in those coolest hours, sitting at his feet and practicing the various articulate yogas. Now it just so happened that on this day the master told a story from his distant childhood. The anecdote related to a pivotal event towards the child's conversion to the philosophical life.

This event took place in the very early years of the twentieth century when the child was living on the island of Phuket off the southwest coast of the kingdom of Siam. Here is the story that Guru Shord told:

One afternoon when I was still a little boy attending the local temple school, the teacher started telling the class about a mysterious thing called the "Universe." But it wasn't easy for us eight-year olds to understand. The teacher then pointed to the big world map that was hanging on the wall with the Kingdom of Siam right in the centre.

Next, the teacher tried to make us see how small we were compared to the "Universe." He said, "Listen. If the Sun were the size of a watermelon, then the Earth would only be the size of a pea." Then he paused. "So tell me then" he said, "If the Sun was the size of a watermelon and Earth was only the size of a pea..., then how big would you be?"

Answers from the class were not forthcoming. There was even a long unsettling silence.

"Never mind" he told us, "I'll just let you think about it." Then he laughed to himself and let us go home early.

Later that night, though, while lying in my bed, I began to ponder what our teacher had said. I tried with all my mental might to comprehend the "Universe." I reasoned like this: "If the Sun were the size of a watermelon and the Earth were

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only the size of a pea, then I must be smaller than a tiny speck of dust. A tiny speck of dust," I tried to imagine that, "compared to the whole wide Universe! 'That means I'm not important at all,' I thought. 'That means *I'm nothing!*'"

The old man smiled, even beamed with delight having finished recounting his precious little tale. Then he rose to his feet and casually said, "You can write that in your book."

'*My book?*' I thought with a quizzical look. A prudent pause of silence followed. Then he smiled at me again, and with a raised brow of knowing said, "You can put it in the preface."

Introduction

Guru Shord was modern Thailand's pioneer yoga master. At the ripe old age of 88 years, he was still teaching daily at his small conservatoire. Though students and patrons came from all walks of life, Guru Shord was nothing less than The Royal Guru, having taught Their Royal Highnesses the Queen and Princess of Thailand within the walls of the Chitralada Palace. The Yogi-Raj also trained important actors from among the highest ranks of the Buddha clergy, but this too always remained confidential. Indeed, most who sought the guru's help were of Thailand's highest social rung, and they typically arrived at the celebrated ashram in their chauffeur-driven Mercedes-Benzes. Still, the guru looked to all with equal vision...

As luck would have it, Guru Shord was born at the turn of the Twentieth Century in the Royal Siamese capital of Krungthep, or modern-day Bangkok. His father, however, was a kind of liege official obedient to King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), the Fifth Rama King, and was thus given highly favoured posting on the Andaman Sea coastal isle of Phuket, an important Siamese trading port of the time. It was thus amid the tropical splendour of Phuket that Shord gained his earliest childhood memories.

Shord received an early British education, first at the British Free School in Penang and then to Bombay. He eventually studied at Trinity College, Cambridge. After graduation, he worked many years as a reporter both in Europe and in India. With the late 1930's came the imminent outbreak of war in Europe and this, combined with severe health problems, forced the bachelor journalist to the Himalayan foothills. There he lived throughout the war-years with Swami Sivananda on the banks of the Ganges. It was also there that Shord was ordained into the ancient ascetic order of svamins and undertook to master the science of yoga.

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After the war, Shord returned to Thailand and quickly established himself as a prominent national news editor, sometimes running two papers at once. He also took a sixteen-year-old girl for his wife and turned his house into a yoga institute. His teaching was never a commercial venture, but done in the spirit of social service. Nor was there ever need to advertise either. "When a flower blossoms," his guru had told him, "it does not send out invitation cards. The bees come by themselves." He normally conducted morning yoga sessions and went to the newsroom after lunch.

Only at the age of seventy-five, did the Master retire altogether from journalism and establish his yoga conservatoire. The demand was enormous and he faced the challenge squarely. He displayed such unswerving stamina and force that the people around him were often astounded. "It's a good occupation for an old man," he said one day, "I like to be useful."

In fact, even well into his eighty-eighth year the again bachelor guru was surrounded with beautiful women: sparkling young college girls, ravishing airhostesses, fashion models, call girls and other sophisticated professional types. Yet road-tattered Western yoginis came as well, aglow from extended journeys east, having heard along the way of a certain living legend. This is probably what kept him teaching so long.

"But everybody has to die," he affirmed. And he certainly gave us all fair warning. True to prediction, on his 88th birthday he stretched out on the floor and merged his glorious being with the clouds.

Chapter One – Youth

British Education

Guru Shord's father held high esteem for western education and accordingly sent the child away to boarding school on the nearby island of Penang, "The Pearl of the Orient." At that time Penang was a part of British-ruled Straits Settlements. It was there in Penang that he obtained his middle-school education at the British founded Free School in Georgetown. Later for demanding prep-school studies, the academic teen travelled overseas to Bombay, India where he entered the British public school. That was around the year 1916.

"The journey by steamer took nearly a month," the Master told me one quiet morning. "It was odd," he explained. "Indian students weren't allowed to study in the British schools back then; but for some reason Siamese students *were*. But there were only about five of us studying in India then. Occasionally we would meet but we had to travel far because some were studying in Darjeeling, some in Madras, and other places. Travelling by train wasn't easy in those days. It's the same today. *You know what I mean.*"

After completing his studies in Bombay, Shord set sail for the British Isles where he had won admission to Trinity College, Cambridge.

Chapter Two – The Reporter

1. Mahārāja or Street Beggar

He studied World History, which he found compelling, but gave little thought to his future line of work. However, love of travel and skill in writing naturally led him to a career in journalism. After graduation he worked some years as a reporter in England. Then he returned to India, the country he loved and knew best. In India, he wrote for the British owned paper called The Statesman. Though Indian owned today, The Statesman is still a leading national broadsheet. He also wrote for his native Siamese press and continued to do so throughout his long career as a foreign correspondent.

His work in journalism taught him to view all levels of society with equal vision. "In the morning I would interview the Maharaja of Hyderabad," he said. "That same afternoon I would start a story on local street beggars and scavengers. To write a good story on scavengers and beggars you have to mix with them for a couple of weeks."

By observing first hand the appalling inequities that continue to plague modern India, Shord arrived to his ethical outlook on life. "Everybody is looking for the same thing," he told me. "Everybody is looking for happiness. But don't mistake ethics for morality," he cautioned. "Ethics is concerned with one question only: What is happiness."

2. World Congress of Faiths

By 1936 Shord was back in England to attend the highly publicized World Congress of Faiths, which convened at University College, London from July 3-18 that same year, and where the illustrious Indian scholar Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) was a principal speaker.

In the later part of the following year the journalist also met Theos Bernard, the daring young American traveller-cum-writer who gave a public talk in London. Bernard was on his return voyage to America after completing an extensive tour of India and Tibet. The Master recounted this meeting for me. He described how Bernard had come to the talk "oddly dressed in traditional Tibetan clothes." He related with humor how Bernard had reproved a panel of journalists when they "incorrectly" referred to him as an American. "I am not an American," Bernard insisted. "I am a Tibetan!"

While touring Tibet, Bernard apparently received confirmation from 'certain high lamas' that he was the tulku or "saintly-reincarnation" of the extremely revered eighth-century teacher named Padmasambhāva. Padmasambhāva is adored as nothing less than the Father of Tantra in the Land of Tibet where tradition asserts that he was solely responsible for introducing the sacred tantric texts from India. One can only infer with warranted caution that this was the reason why Bernard so insistently maintained that 'he was not an American, but rather *a Tibetan*.' Notwithstanding, a comical irony emerges from the quasi-historical fact that Padmasambhava was actually not a Tibetan, *but an Indian!*

3. Hitler's Rise

Already, however, by 1933 an ambitious young German named Adolf Hitler had cunningly hijacked the German State, and for the next six years had managed to keep his neighbours and the world in a relentless state of shock and awe. On March 10, 1939, German troops quietly annexed Czechoslovakia. For documentation purposes, they brought along their film crews; and just like that, they cast their monochrome spell of surreality across the whole of the European continent. Regional leaders were loath to take action and responded like somnambulists shackled to the nightmare. It eventually required the September 1, 1939 invasion of Poland to arouse them from their collective stupor. They could

simply no longer take the German leader lightly; placate either, persuade or humour. Alarms were sounding...

Fuelled by deranged utopian visions of a German National Socialist World Order, the whole of Europe was poised to be sucked into a grisly Theatre of the charred and dispensed with. Xenophobic sentiment was steadily on the rise whilst those with money and a prudent sense of self-preservation conveyed themselves accordingly.

The Master himself had already beheld the phenomenon of Hitler while addressing a massive Nazi Party rally in Berlin. "I went there on assignment," he told me one day. "I was standing so far back in the crowd that Hitler was just a tiny speck. But I could hear him very well because they had excellent loudspeakers."

One should also be reminded that Guru Shord was *not* a descendent of Nordic folk. To make things worse, the foreign scribe's health was teetering at the at the time on brink of utter ruin. Nearly forty years of age, the roaring years of the bachelor's youth were apparently catching up with him fast. Afflicted already with acute diabetes, a doctor in London then diagnosed a fistula as well as rheumatism. In fact, there were also signs that he might become the victim of coronary thrombosis if he was not extremely careful. Nonetheless, when the doctor advised Shord to enter a hospital and undergo surgery for the fistula, he grew apprehensive and refused the operation. Besides, with Hitler intent on keeping his promise to unleash German bombers on the British capitol, it was hardly the time to confine himself to a London hospital. There was one more complication as well. Though a resident of Britain, Shord was not a British subject, a fact brought to bear while enduring two days of interrogation as a suspected enemy spy. Assessing the evolving state of affair, one thing was clear the Asian reporter: it was time to leave Europe. But where was he to go? Timing would be crucial.

Chapter Three – The Cinematic Flight

1. London to Paris

Early in the morning of May 14th, 1940, Shord packed his belongings and headed by taxi for London's Victoria Station. He was fortunate to get a ticket all the way to Genoa.

Departing from London was the point of no return. Everything from there would depend on luck. From Genoa his plan was to book his passage on the Nederland Royal Mail Line all the way to Bombay. But he fretted over whether or not he could get there in time to book his passage. The only thing he knew was that the ship sailed twice a month.

London to Paris was an all day journey. As may still be done today, one first went to Dover by rail and then crossed the English Channel by steamer to the port of Calais, France. From there one reboarded a train bound for Paris.

There was going to be a 20-hour halt in Paris for the next available train to Genova. He was actually pleased; he had an old school friend living in Paris, and with a little luck, he would be at home.

The train arrived to Gare du Nord. It was just about midnight. He phoned his friend immediately.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming?" said the friend, "I could have met you at the station!"

"There wasn't any time," Shord replied.

"Never mind" said the friend, "But I have to tell you this. I'm leaving for Italy tomorrow afternoon."

"*Italy!*" Shord exclaimed with surprise. "So am I!"

"Come by taxi. We'll talk when you get here."

2. Ex-pats in Paris

The taxi took Shord to the slender Rue Visconti from where he lugged his heavy book-laden trunk up the narrow stairs to his friend's apartment.

The two friends greeted with beaming smiles that come from years of separation. They specially enjoyed speaking in their native tongue. When pulling out their tickets they responded with amazement to see that they had booked the same exact train. But his friend had booked all the way to Rome.

They had both been a part of an elite group of Siamese students, most of who by Royal Assistance studied in England or France. They were roughly 400 in number. After their studies, nearly all returned to the Kingdom of Siam to take up comfortable government appointments.¹

It was among the gifted, much smaller group of students that studied in Paris who had recently begun to exert influence on the course of Siamese political history. So enamoured by the philosophy of democratic freedom, they were able to convince certain discontented military leaders in Bangkok of the need for radical political reforms. This movement led eventually to a 1932 bloodless coup d'état that relieved the king of absolute power in favour of a constitutional monarchy. Unfortunately, however, these changes swiftly led to a degeneration of Siamese politics, transforming the structure into a thinly veiled system of dictatorship by military coup.

¹ "...Siamese students abroad [were] intensely involved in political discussions and dreams during the 1920s. These comprised a minuscule group (there were nearly four hundred on government scholarships in 1924 and an indeterminate smaller number on private funds) [Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam* 1984: 50]. [B]ut their influence far outweighed their numbers, as most came from influential families and returned to high positions with the prestige of first hand knowledge of the West. They had enjoyed a period of years abroad, out of reach of indigenous social controls and with the luxury to achieve the perspective that only distance can provide. The overwhelming majority studied in England and returned with an urbane skepticism that was ultimately class-consciously authoritarian and unideological. The small numbers schooled in France, however, were much more ideological and radical. These included both law students and young military officers, who at meetings in Paris in the mid-1920s talked of socialism and popular democracy" (David K Wyatt, *Thailand: a short history* (2nd) 2003 [1982]: 225-6).

In lieu of returning to what some then regarded as an intellectually stifling political climate, a few rare Siamese chose to live abroad. Such was the case of Guru Shord, as well as his Paris-based compatriot who since his early years of study at the esteemed Sorbonne had come to feel at home among the cultural circles of his adopted foreign city; and for reasons quite similar to his British-schooled colleague, took up writing as a means of earning a living.

"So what's going on in Rome?" Shord asked.

"I'm joining a group of international journalists with the prospects of meeting Benito Mussolini" said the friend. "It is an obvious propaganda event. I simply got a call from the Siamese Consular who extended the invitation on Italy's behalf. There's another invitation available, he said. Are you interested to go?"

Shord was bemused.

"What do you say we ring the Consular in the morning?" continued the friend. "Maybe we can go together! — But wait... I haven't even asked you why you're going to Genova."

"To catch a Dutch ship," sighed Shord in frustration. "But I don't even know what day it sails."

"Then we phone the Dutch Embassy as well, what's the problem? You're looking terribly ill. You must be tired. We can finish our discussion in the morning."

3. Morning Rue de Seine

In thoughtful silence they ambled their way up Rue de Seine and found a sunny table in view of the market. Two quick calls had just been placed and the stage was set for the ailing journalist to meet the Italian leader face to face.

"But the Consular warned me," said the Paris-based friend as they had taken their seats in the glistening sun.

"Warned you of what?" said Shord.

"Of the Ducca's tenuous sanity," he said. "And of all the reports of his furtive behaviour, both official and private." He paused as the waiter brought coffee with croissant. "So no guarantee how it's going to turn out. But no matter what happens on the journalistic front, the consul assures us we'll be treated like diplomats and heaped with all manner of Roman indulgence. You know. *La dolce vita*. I can hardly wait!"

Shord responded with sombre impassivity, "Where will you be heading after Rome then?" he asked.

"Good question" said the friend. "The consul also warned me of that; these gathering clouds of war over Europe."

"Exactly," said Shord, and then paused before adding, "It's strange how things can appear so clear, yet those with voices refuse to spell it out. It's as if they imagine it will just go away."

"Do you believe the rumours of Nazi persecution then?"

"Gypsies, homos and leftist intellectuals," Shord remarked with pain.

They paused and took their first sips of coffee. An inscrutable silence prevailed. Cheerful girls in skirts passed by; the shouts of fish vendors were not far away.

"But hey – by the way," the host chimed in – "you haven't even told me where you're sailing to yet."

"Bombay," Shord replied.

"*Bombay?*" said the friend.

"You thought I was returning to Bangkok?"

"Well..."

"Listen," said Shord. "A week ago the Japanese Imperial Forces aligned themselves with the North-South Axis. Now I will tell you something more. The Japs are even more ambitious than the Krauts. And mark my words: They will terrorize all of whole of Southeast Asia before this war is finished."

"Siam too?"

"No. The Tais will continue to spare themselves. They will bow their heads to Emperor Hirohito and do what his military emissaries tell them," Shord replied.

"My!" said the colleague sufficiently jolted. "If not optimistic, yours is certainly a compelling forecast. But perhaps you're right. I mean it's really quite strange this recent mentality gripping the souls of Siam's leadership, and whose sympathies and tastes are unmincingly Fascist. But if I understand you right, you seem to be sure that the Germans or the Japanese will never take India?"

"That's simply not possible," Shord declared. India will always be the world's freest place. The Moguls ruled it for five hundred years and a heightened hybridity of culture was the outcome. It was later British rule that committed the atrocities, ravaging the place for material riches while failing to detect the most precious treasure – the jewel of spiritual freedom. But in any case, even should the Axis Forces make incursions, the Himalayan ranges will always offer sanctuary. No foreign force will ever take India."

"Fine, my friend, and I hope you are right. But in your present state of health, can *you* take India?"

"That's the question," Shord conceded.

4. Rome to Genova (Mussolini of the mind)

[Fast forward]...Bidding their adieus at Rome Central Station, the two friends parted company. The ailing reporter now proceeded back northward to Italy's chief port city of Genova. He was counting on boarding the Nederland Royal Mail Line, scheduled to arrive the following evening from Algiers.

The previous day's barrage of meetings and engagements had engorged him with a flood of awesome experience and his mind now found itself drowning in the resonance of majestic imagery, thought and quandary. It was no means merely the pompous backdrop of architectural grandeur that rendered the pressman's sentiments reeling – marble palaces of Titan dimension sumptuously decked with treasures of art. Nor the detail paid to the ritual splendour in which

the Leader ever sought to enshroud himself. Nor the debonair ranks of uniformed sycophants, each one responding to a higher up's finger snap, descending from the pinnacle seat of power – and indeed, it was the callous embodiment of tyranny itself whose strangely magnetic and riveting spell had awed the foreign scribe so utterly.

"I met Mussolini face to face," Guru Shord recalled to the present writer.

It was from this intense and up-close encounter with the virtual designer of the modern fascist state that Shord developed his ideas of the nature and properties of charisma.

5. Embarking from Genova

He halted one night and two full days at Italy's chief port city of Genoa. He rested in his room at the Hotel Miramara and whimsically explored the often-steep streets and quaint narrow alleyways. He reached outlying places of interest by convenient city tram. He took the cable railway to the top of the Righi for an excellent view of the harbour. He furthermore reminded that the city of Genova was the birthplace of Christopher Columbus.

Early in the evening of May 17th he passed through Italian Immigration. As he walked along the quay to board the ship, he stopped at a kiosk to check the latest headlines: German Troops Invade France.

Once on board he took to his journal, making liberal use of the complimentary companion guide.²

After all the passengers had finally boarded ship and the cargoes were stowed into the depths of the hull, a couple of tugboats slowly towed the great Dutch liner away from its berth into the deeper waters of the outer harbour. The waters teemed with those lovely little rowing boats, rowed by a single man while standing.

² We assume the existence of "Nederland Royal Mail Line," a complimentary on-board guidebook mentioned in Guru Shord's unpublished notes, n.p., n.d.

He was leaving the continent of Europe behind.

Setting a southeasterly course for the Strait of Messina the ship sailed unhampered along the mountainous west coast of peninsular Italy. Among the passengers talk was rife on the sudden outbreak of war in Europe. Anxious thoughts refused to let him sleep. He opened his journal and began to write:

The truculent Hitler has proved himself again invincible when preying on the fears of bourgeois democracies. But failure to react will only embolden him. The Soviets alone have shown the will to respond to this woefully destructive opponent. How much longer can the other nations wait; averting war at whose expense?

Thus not wishing to provoke his ire, some would appease his rabid belligerence by offering up selections from their ethnic minorities; sacrificial lambs to the slaughterhouse slave camps.³ Meanwhile, other less threatened states would assume the customary diplomatic posture of expressing ones legislative outrage.

Later that night the sleepless voyager found himself on deck, alone with the moonlit sky above. He enjoyed the feel of warm spring air as it blew across the sea and ruffled his hair.

6. The Ship's First Officer

The following evening in the dining salon, the journalist gained the distinctive privilege of sharing a table with the ship's first officer, an urbane, travel wise English-Dutch dual national who, like his guest, was a product of the British public school. That was in Christchurch on England's mild southern coast. After some studies in marine biology, the officer decided on a maritime career. It was after all an obvious course to follow. His father, born in Amsterdam, had also

³ Holland, Belgium, and France would combine to officiate the deportation of 123,000 Jews from their national borders. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, 1972.

sailed the high seas. Diligently passing from ship boy to bursar, he worked his way up the mariner's ranks. But he eventually re-settled back on land with the pretty young bride he had met on tour of the Isle of Wight, the maiden's native home. His great turn of fortune came however when he secured the mortgage enabling him to purchase the controlling interest of the Royal Line shipping franchise, making him England's sole authorized agent for the mail ship's voyages out of South-Hampton. His lovely offices, Messr Harden & Co., 21/22 Queen's Terrace, were favourably located in view of Queens Park just a five minute stroll from the railway station.

Yet who could have foreseen that by September of that very year, German air raids would devastate the town? With his next visit home, he would find his father's premises utterly reduced to piles of rubble.

Being by nature a loquacious spirit, the courteous officer would in weeks to come prove a virtual compendium of valuable of information.

Between savoury bites of spinach terrine, the officer shared some childhood memories of idyllic days in Hampshire County. He also knew something of local history. "Well protected by the Isle of Wight," he began, "the town of Southampton, one of England's oldest, has been a port of great importance since the beginning of the Middle Ages. In the early part of the 12th century, it was the place of embarkation for zealous crusaders under patronage of King Richard the Lion-Hearted. The port also thrived commercially in those days. Its trade in English wool for Bordeaux wine was in itself enough to keep the town in good financial stead. But its importance declined in the 17th and 18th centuries," the officer continued, "but that was reversed in 1840 with the completion of the London-Southampton Railway and the parallel development of steam powered ocean liners."

Proceeding to the diminutive yet artfully prepared dessert dish, "Ah!" gasped the officer, "And what have we here?" He peered into the sparkling crystal bowl. "It looks like bananas with chopped figs, doesn't it." Bringing silver spoon

to expectant mouth, he paused to pondered, remarking then, "Brilliant! We must have picked these up in Algiers."

"Tasty indeed," the journalist affirmed.

"Indeed!" replied the officer. "But a little bit dainty on the serving, wouldn't you say?"

"Actually my appetite isn't too good."

The officer took the passenger's words to heart. Reaching into the pocket of his formal white dinner jacket, the clean-shaven gentleman withdrew a silver cigarette case and, in favour of his guest, inquired, "Fancy a postprandial puff?"

"Thank you," he replied, and helped himself to a cigarette.

"So you're on your way to India then," the officer vented, blowing out the match that had just lit their cigarettes. "I suppose you're on assignment?" he spoke in a coaxing, questioning tone.

"I'm a free-lance journalist," the writer replied. "I write wherever I go."

"Writing," remarked the officer sorely. "That must be very lonely work. I've never been much of a writer myself. In fact, handling a pen is probably the most stressful part of my duties. But I can manage in at least four languages if necessary. But I'm an avid reader," the officer continued. "Plenty of time for that with a job like mine! I'm especially fond of literature," he explained, "and I like to take my own sweet time with a book to allow the tone of my own inner voice and imaginative landscape to participate in the writer's creative effort. It's not satisfying to let myself slide into a state of suspend my disbelief. The point isn't merely to be taken for a ride. Which is why I like an author that subtly implies that "this is really just a fiction," while the actual point is something else.⁴ With

⁴ Ten years earlier Martin Secker Ltd. had brought out the English translation of Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, a book that the officer was currently reading. There was a passage he found to be particularly enthralling and which he avidly read and reread many times:

The delusion rests simply upon a false analogy. As a body everyone is single, as a soul never... In literature too, even in its most sophisticated achievement we find this customary concern with apparently whole and single personalities. Of all literature up to our

all the time that people spend reading these days, for the sake of dry information and diversion, creative demand on the reader is nil. It's as if the reader has been brushed aside! But oh..." and the officer briefly pause. "Please don't take it personally. Forgive me. I'm afraid my thoughts may appear abstruse. I mean; I'm sure you're a thoroughly engaging writer – a journalist, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's right," the reporter replied.

"But what I really want to say is that a proper writer – and by "writer" I want to imply an "artist" – should never attempt to persuade his audience, but to purify, enlighten and transpose."

Carried adrift on his own stream of thought, the officer flicked a lengthy grey ash into the ashtray the two men shared.

"But that new machine!" he resumed his track, as if picking up the flow of thought down stream – "That's really going to change our perceptions of the world! You know what I'm talking about, don't you?" The officer inclined his head toward the journalist. "I mean the wireless radio. *That* is a truly revolutionary contraption. By the way" he added, grinning like a boy, "have you had a chance to hear any of Klatenborn's Crisis Reports?" The journalist's brow was made to rise. "They say that his transmissions can be heard across the Atlantic in America. Imagine that!" he shook his head. "The ship has a splendid radio you know. Let me invite you for a listen after dinner. Just wander across to the officer's mess in an hour or so. Just ask for me. We'll get a cup of coffee. The broadcast begins at nine o'clock sharp. See you there?"

"By all means."

days the drama has been the most highly prized by writers and critics, and rightly, since it offers (or might offer) the greatest possibilities of representing the ego as a manifold entity, but for the optical illusion which makes us believe that the characters of the play are one-fold entities by lodging each one in an undeniable body, singly, separately and once and for all.

7. Along the Calabrian Coast

The second night aboard the Royal Mail Ship found the voyager again all alone on the deck in the light of a midnight moon. The ship sailed closely to the small, nub-like volcanic isle of Stromboli. He watched in utter fascination as the fiery magma flowed in abundance down the steep incandescent slopes.

An owl suddenly appeared out the lonely night sky and came to a perch on the near by railing. It folded its wings and calmly set its gaze towards the coast of Calabria. Next, in a slow and impassive manner, the owl then turned its head in favour of the passenger. They looked to each other with palpable empathy. Then the wise owl blinked and turned its gaze in the direction of the Calabrian coast again, to the beam of the lighthouse of Capo Vaticano. The curious encounter made the passenger recall the ancient belief in bird omens. He furthermore reflected that the ship was now approaching the waters that were known since ancient times for their treacherous currents and visible whirlpools: the Scylla and Charybdis of Homer's grand epic that he read of as a boy in his *Illustrated Odyssey*. As the beacon of the lighthouse came closer to view, he reflected again on the portent of the owl. Could the émigré guru-to-be possibly have gained a prescient glimpse as he silently peered from the deck of the ship toward the shores of Calabria? Could he then have foreseen that fifty years later his principal disciples would be living on those same bucolic seacoasts subsisting on crudities of wild fruits and herbs like feral rishis free as the breeze? The owl spread its wings and disappeared into the night.

The ship soon entered the narrow Messina Strait that separates the toe of peninsular Italy from the myth-bound isle of Sicily. Then the first faint tints of dawn appeared to infuse the emergent landscape with rouge. Due to the numbers of ships that converged there, considerable caution was demanded in passing. Eventually the engine room was told to slacken speed to avert collision.

After re-establishing the Mail Ship's bearing, the navigator set a new course true south. Flickering lights from the old town of Reggio caught the

passenger's attention. With the aid of a telescope, he could see the fishing port's brisk dawn activity. On starboard he gained the breathtaking view of volcanic Mt. Etna, its lofty summit still capped with snow and a stream of smoke billowing up from its crater.

At daybreak, the lighthouse of Capo del Armi appeared at the tip of the toe of Italy's boot. The rustic scenery was marvellous there with rugged houses standing out clearly against steep hillsides rich in spring growth. From there a new easterly course was set towards the island of Crete and the coast of the Levant.

On the following day, as the guidebook informed him, the snow-topped mountains of Crete appeared, then the small barren offshore island of Gavado. From there it was nothing but sea and sky for another whole day until the Island of Cyprus emerged on the horizon, then the Lebanese Mountains and the next port of call at Beirut.

8. The Grotto of the Virgin

Due to a minor mechanical dysfunction, the captain announced that the normally scheduled five-hour halt was regrettably extended to one whole day; the necessary time to complete the repairs and fully insure unhindered sailing for the balance of the voyage.

Checking in with his officer-informant, the journalist learned that the ship's repairs were in fact going to take at least three days. The officer explained, though "strictly off the record," that the captain's version was "a matter of policy, a discrete form of protocol – a way to strengthen passenger morale and keep them from straying too far from port."

Yet speaking one seasoned traveller to another, the officer suggested that the writer take a jaunt and see a bit of the Holy Land and offered to provide him with guidebooks and maps. The journalist was joyous, and immediately set his mind on visiting Bethlehem. He began his pilgrimage by hired car, driving south

along the warm coastal road through Palestine. He halted in Jerusalem and found a quaint room. The following morning he drove a little further to the grotto where the Virgin gave birth to the Christ.

9. Port Said

The following afternoon Shord was back aboard the Mail Ship sailing due south for Port Said, Egypt, the actual beginning of the Suez Canal. Port Said is where the ship would begin its slow 160-kilometre journey south through the Suez Canal to the Red Sea port town of Tawfiq.

After numerous tours through what was certainly then the world's most vital transit point, the writer still found Port Said full of character. In many ways, the town marks the beginning and the end: the vestibule separating Orient from Occident.

The ship moored right in front of the Customs Office. The passengers slowly filed down the gangway to the rusty pontoon and then finally set foot on dry land again. But as soon as the foreigners pass through customs, there suddenly appear on the quayage before them a gesticulating committee of turbaned merchants avidly soliciting their new found friends with a polyglot barrage of proverbs and various other suggestions.

Viewing the scene from the height of the deck, the journalist smiled at the pending cultural exchange below. His special informant was standing there beside him, and they both looked on as

The timid Europeans inched their way through an apparent gauntlet of local entrepreneurs dressed in their commodious ankle-length kaftans, and among which always is sure to be found an assortment of conjurers and cigarette factory representatives.

As the traders closed in on the unsuspecting tourists, the officer's patronizing humour grew dry, indeed, as dry as the air of Port Said itself. "It's actually amusing," the officer remarked, "to see them get so flustered when confronted with these Oriental ways of commerce. It's as if they feel offended, personally, when the sellers propose their extortionate prices. It's the haggling, I suppose, that grates so much against the European sense of dignity. What do you think?"

"In my view," Shord replied, "the art really lies in defusing such encounters in a way that dignity reigns for all concerned. I got a lot of practice living in India. But then remember, I'm not a European."

"Ah," said the officer, having overlooked the fact. "I suppose it's a different perspective then."

"You better believe it."

10. Dashing to Giza

Again, the first officer confirmed himself as a matchless source of pertinent information as he told the pressman of a newly laid rail line that made it now possible for passengers to go and see the Great Pyramids and the Sphinx at Giza in just enough time to rejoin the ship at the canal's southern terminus town of Port Tawfiq.

The suggestion struck the writer like a beam of healing light.

"Now we would hardly encourage our normal clients to embark on this all and all risky jaunt." The officer comically cringed. "So please do keep it to yourself old boy. You know; it is difficult enough just to let them loose in the relative tameness of little Port Said. *Oh yes!* You would be surprised at all the stories we get from them being befriended by local acquaintances and then led through the narrow dark lanes of the Arab Quarter. They let curiosity get the upper hand on prudence. Although it has to be admitted that those large standing water pipes certainly hold an exotic allure."

"I agree" said the scribe, "and you can't underestimate Egyptian hospitality, as un-refusable as it is impeccable."

"A man of experience, I'm sure," said the officer.

"All in the line of reporting," said Shord.

"Then you can very well imagine the scenario yourself where, having once accepted a few cool draws... "

"Which really all it takes..."

"Depending on the substance smoked, one would think..."

"Granted..."

"It is easy to imagine how an innocent smoker would drift away dreamily in a well stuffed chair in the shade of a ghoraz coffee house, perfectly oblivious to the three loud blasts that are sounded by the ship to announce its launch, and how the captain is left no other option than to leave the intoxicated straggler behind – *a forsaken lotus eater fallen to the languidness of his dainty viand*," the officer waxed Homerically.⁵ "But regarding Giza," and glanced at his timepiece, "there is just enough time to do it justice. You can examination the surroundings and get some strong impressions. But you've got to go quickly. I'll see you tomorrow down south in Port Tawfiq."

The journalist quickly returned to his cabin and then made his way down the gangway to the quay. He passed through customs and headed for the train—a five-minute walk away.

11. Worship of the Sun

Leaving Port Said, the sidetrack railway travelled right along the canal heading south. It occasionally passed a ship on the way, which gave a strange impression of a ship that was sailing across a flat sea of sand. Seventy-eight kilometres into the journey, they stopped very briefly at the town of Ismaila. From there the train proceeded due west to the town of Zagazig before finally

⁵ *Odyssey*, bk. 9 (my trans.).

arriving at Cairo Station. The entire 233-kilometre trip took about four hours. He reached his final destination by the city tramline.

Arriving at Egypt's most famous pharaonic site, the traveller was awe by its phenomenal size alone. Those four-and-a-half-millennia-old archaeological remains of "veritable wonders in public works" compelled him wonder. "What faith-inspiring conceptions of life could have possibly compelled an ancient people to carry so many stones and bricks to its monuments?'

He began to interpret the massive physical scale and arrangement in in view of the primordial conception of a north-south axis, logistically aligned between the other chief Egyptian theological centres of Onu and Memphis. Onu was situated north of Giza. To the Greeks it was known as Heliopolis, "city of the Sun." It was the Ancient World's leading healing centre. Onu was also the seat of the Royal Cult of Ra (or Re) the Universal Sun God. However, in the New Kingdom Period alternate conceptions in concert with an emerging priest craft at Thebes began to supplant the conception of Ra. We then see Ra receive a re-elaboration along the lines of Amun-Ra. In the later Amarna Period (ca. 1500 BC), King Akenaten achieved a consummate revolution and the cult of Ra/Re became overshadowed by the worship of the single god Aten, arguably the world's first monotheistic deity. It is on these grounds that Diffusionist scholars accredit all religions and monotheism in particular, to have their origins in the worship of the Sun.⁶

12. Health at the fragile edge

Travelling back to rejoin the ship (now well on its way through the canal) the train again passed the town of Ismaila on the shores of Lake Timsah; but

⁶ There is a something in Guru Shord's rediscovered teaching strongly redolent of royal Egypt, "cobras conferring kingship" and that sort of thing. See Appendix: Commentary to Bhucha Phra-Athit (Classical Thai Sun Salutation), note 31, below.

from there it veered south to the town of Suez and beyond to Port Tawfiq, where the canal actually opens to the Gulf of Suez.

With ample stores of water and provisions for the two-week voyage that lied ahead, the Dutch flag vessel recommenced its course sailing South through the turquoise waters of the Gulf. While talking together on the bridge of the ship, the voyager asked his officer-informant why the Red Sea after all rarely looked red?

"Ah!" said the uniformed officer smiling broadly, "You won't find that in your complimentary guidebook, will you! Now poets have suggested that the name of these waters was inspired by the beautiful cast of the sun when silkily reflectant at dusk or dawn. However, as a former student of marine biology I assure you that scientists hold a different view. And they would have us believe that the redness of the sea is actually caused by the microscopic blooms of a phycoerythrin-rich species of cyanobacteria."

* * *

Images of Europe began to fade and the journalist felt as if a great dark weight had been lifted from his shoulders. After two days at sea, they made a brief call at Jeddah, the gateway port to nearby Mecca, that most cherished pilgrimage in all of Islam, the global hub to where the faithful direct their five times daily prayers. From there the ship continued its southerly course and entered the narrow Strait of Bab el-Mandeb as the opposite desert coasts of Djibouti and Yemen came clearly into view. Only fifteen miles from the passing vessel, the extreme strategic value of the strait becomes evident.

The ship then entered the Gulf of Aden and the warm blue waters of the Arabian Sea. From there a new easterly course was set that virtually retraced an old East African trade route.

There were seven more days of open sea. An agonizing dullness beleaguered his mind. He passed many hours lounging in a deckchair, staring out blankly to the pale blue expanse. The temperatures soared. He also took rest in

his private cabin where he jotted down notes in his current logbook. The flight from Europe with ensuing weeks of transit had pushed his health to a frayed and fragile edge. What lied ahead? The greatest test in his still-young life.

A few days later, he lands at Bombay. He steps from the ship to Imperial India. Swarms of coolies and street kids greet him, and beseech him for coins and other foreign blessings. He rides through a crowded lane in a rickshaw, it slows near a newsstand, and he calls for a Statesman. The quiet pulling motion resumes. He is stoical in route.

HITLER TAKES PARIS. GERMAN TROOPS MARCH DOWN CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES.

Chapter Four – Swami Sivananda

1. To Rishikesh

Returned to the elemental rawness of India the writer could see that things were very different now. He could also sense that his personal life was poised for a redefining change of course. For the first time ever in his professional career, he was forced to stop looking to the world around him as an endless source of extraneous news events. What was now required, at the age of forty, was to hone the keenness of his vision inward. He had come back to India a critically ill man, no longer in search of an imaginative feature story, but rather for a place of personal sanctuary; no longer in search of professional achievement, he now sought a cure to his gravely ill body.

By now the condition of his ailing pancreas had become so severe that injections of insulin were not even able to keep his diabetes in check. "I would have died!" he touchingly confided one day. "That is, if not for yoga."

* * *

He had long heard stories of a certain yogin-saint who went by the name of Swami Sivananda. Sivananda (1887-1963) was living on the banks of the Ganges River near the town of Rishikesh in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains. As a child from the southern Tamil lands, he received a orthodox Brahmin upbringing and later studied tropical medicine and surgery. After graduation, Dr. Kuppuswamy, as he was known then, broke caste-convention and left the shores of sacred India for a lucrative job in far-off Malaya. Intensive work in the medical profession provided all the evidence required to understand that the world was filled with suffering. Personal doubt bewildered his mind.

Is there not a higher mission in life than the daily round of official duties, eating and drinking? Is there not any higher form of happiness than these transitory and illusory pleasures? How uncertain life is here! How insecure

existence is on this earth-plane, with various diseases, anxieties, worries, fears and disappointments! The world of names and forms is constantly changing. Time is fleeting. All hopes of happiness in this world terminate in pain, despair and sorrow.⁷

To free himself from his ego-addiction, the doctor submitted to intensive selfless service to humanity. One day he experienced a marvellous vision that foretold of a path to freedom in the world. Then he suddenly recalled an ancient scripture that resounded in his mind with poignant force: "On the very day that you gain dispassion, renounce the world."

It was sometime in the very early 1920's that the doctor put an end to his 'life of ease and money-making' and returned to India by steamer. He immediately travelled to the city of Benares and took to the life of a mendicant ascetic. For a year he wandered the length and breadth of India, visiting many saints and places of pilgrimage.

In June of 1922, the doctor came to his journey's end. This was at Rishikesh, the holy town on the banks of the Ganges with the stunning Himalayan Mountains as a backdrop. He found the scenery of Rishikesh charming, the atmosphere spiritually pure and enabling. There were almshouses offering free food to ascetics and medical facilities to attend the sick. He therefore found the area around Rishikesh to be an ideal place for intensive practice. Two years later, he received initiation into the sacred order of sannyasin as Swami Sivananda Sarasvati.

For the next twelve years, from 1924 to 1936, Swami Sivananda lived as an incognito ascetic with no disciples. "He had neither associates, nor friends," reports Swami Krishnananda. "What we hear from people who had seen him in those days amounts to this,

⁷ *Autobiography of Swami Sivananda*, 1983: 14.

He wore little clothing and ate no delicious diet, which, of course, was not available at all even if he wanted... During the nearly 26 years of life that we led physically with him, I did not get even an inkling as to what sort of meditation he practiced...and what was the purpose for which he meditated. He would never say anything about these things, nor were we in a position to get any information about these. This is all we knew, that he was staying on the sand bank [of the Ganges] during the larger part of the day and night on the other side of the Laxmanjhula [rope] bridge and would come to the Svargashram for his bhiksha [alms food] during the appointed time.⁸

2. Meeting Sivananda

The ailing journalist was very much inspired when he learned that Swami Sivananda had founded his own religious society in Rishikesh. Of special interest was the therapeutic yoga that Swami Sivananda had begun to pioneer. It was a natural approach to the treatment of disease that did not resort to chemical means. It was a simple method of vegetarian diet, exercise, breathing and positive thinking. "All of this greatly impressed me," said the Master "and I decided to go there and see for myself."

The pilgrim was in awe as the six-hour bus from Delhi entered the majestic highlands. He stepped off the bus in the rustic town and walked the final mile up-stream along the river. He asked where Swami Sivananda was staying and went there directly. Concerning his first meeting with Swami Sivananda, Guru Shord related to the present writer as follows,

The first thing Swami Sivananda said to me was, "What religion do you profess?" "I'm a Buddhist," I said. Then Sivananda clapped his hands very loudly; he pointed to the sky and said, "We're the same!"

⁸ Swami Krishnananda, "Sivananda: The Fire of Sannyasa," 1992.

3. Kailash

Nine years before the eventful meeting Swami Sivananda completed that most difficult of pilgrimages to sacred Mount Kailas in western Tibet. It was the summer of 1931 when with royal entourage he began the arduous 72-day trek from the Almora region of the Indian Himalayas, walking the entire distance of 460 miles. Wrote Sivananda,

There is no place on all this fair earth which can compare with Kailas for the marvellous beauty and everlasting snows. We all had a dip in Lake Manasarovar and went around Mount Kailas...It is also called Mount Meru, meaning "the axis of mountains."⁹

Since very early times every Indian yoga tradition has regarded Mount Kailas, Meru or Sumeru as "the navel of the universe" or the "cosmic axis."

What is more, in the mystical or esoteric teachings of yoga the human body has always been viewed as a micro-cosmos and the spinal column identified with Mount Kailas, the centre of the universe. In a corresponding manner, the symbolism appearing in certain Buddhist traditions has metaphorically identified the historical Buddha with the totality of the cosmic universe. In this way Gautama's spinal column is also called the merudanda (danda, Sanskrit, 'pole, shaft'), a singular bone symbolic of the withdrawn, non-differential zone of autonomous reality beyond time and space called sunya in the Sanskrit language. The teachings furthermore depict this backbone as a secret cavern within the mountain where supreme mystical truth is revealed to yogis during intense meditative absorption. This also explains why, according to an ancient legend, the Buddha was unable to turn his head, but had to turn the whole of his body around because his spinal column was fixed and motionless like the axis of the universe.

⁹ *Autobiography of Swami Sivananda*, 1983: 24-3.

4. Ascetic Life, Knowledge, and Healing

Shord had found a sanctuary, indeed, he found a master who far exceeded his highest expectations. He soon gained diksha or "initiation" to the order of sannyasin and donned the saffron robe, or kavi, as is typically worn by ascetics throughout the Orient. He received the title Svamin and name as well, Satyananta. He took to a life of ascetic endeavours amidst the surrounding Himalayan forests. He had already made India a veritable home since his prep-school days at the British school in Bombay, and naturally gained extensive knowledge of India's cultural and religious traditions. But it was not until he actually became an ascetic that he learned first hand of the esoteric knowledge that yogis had protected for thousands of years. Yogis after all do not invent their knowledge. They receive it through the grace of their living guru who is linked in a long succession of spiritual masters. As tradition has it, the ultimate source of this understanding is the Sun, Hiranyagarbha "the golden womb."¹⁰ In this way, the esoteric science of yoga is connected to a long unbroken line of sages. It is due to these veritable doctors of the church that the knowledge of yoga is faithfully maintained. This all became evident to the neophyte yogi as he studied in the Himalayan forests around Rishikesh, especially as he advanced in the pranayama.¹¹

¹⁰ Hiranya means "gold," garba means "womb." According to tradition, Hiranyagarbha first communicated the philosophy of yoga in his equine (vājin) form to the semi-legendary sage Yājñavalkya (ca. 700-300 BCE). In turn, Yājñavalkya is said to have imparted the teachings to King Janaka of Videha (present-day Janakpur, Nepal). King Janaka, by the way, is the legendary father of Sītā (or Janaki) who was wed to the Hindu god Rāma of Ayodhyā as described in the epic poem Rāmāyana. Yājñavalkya is also believed to be the author of the "White" Yajur Vedā. There are actually two different Yajur Vedā collections (samhitā). Both contain the same material but their arrangement is different. The Taittirīya Samhitā is the older of the two. It is also called the "Black" Yajur Vedā because of its dour inscrutability. The second Yajur Vedā, called Vājasaneyī Samhitā, is in an ordered arrangement that brings method and light to the teaching and is therefore called the "White."

¹¹ See "[Anuloma Viloma Pranayama \(Alternate Breathing\)](#)" in Sritanatra [Five Verbatim Teachings](#), 2006.

5. The Theos Bernard Affair

The Master was in India throughout most of the 1940's. He was there when the writer Theos Bernard was presumably killed during communal rioting in September 1947. The death, however, was not officially reported until more than a month after the purported incident; what is more, the body was never recovered.

After attending the World Congress of Faiths in London where Shord first met him in 1936, Bernard returned to his native America and successfully published his first book, *Land of a Thousand Buddhas* (1940).¹² He then began a lecture tour and screened semi-edited film footage that he had shot in India and Tibet. When the war finally ended, he was eager to return to Tibet for further research and to obtain certain rare Tantric texts. But many Tibetans took great offence to his book's overly candid portrayal of their country and the government refused to grant him a second visa. Bernard was undaunted. He set off again for India determined to find a way to slip back into Tibet. It was for this reason that Barnard sought advice from the German born author Lama Govinda at his Himalayan retreat in Almora. The resident lama was unconvinced. Stressing the need for official protection, he bluntly warned Bernard not to try it.¹³

According to the preface by Theos' father that appeared in his son's posthumously printed books,

...Bernard was traveling with a native boy guide en route to Kye Monastery, near the Tibetan border of Northern India, when he was ironically killed in a riot that broke out between Hindus and Muslims.

There are, however, differing accounts. Lama Govinda's biographer, for example, claims that Bernard perished in Kashmir. Another private researcher has placed the incident in the area of Rhotang Pass above Kulu-Manali in

¹² Theos Bernard, *Land of a Thousand Buddhas*, 1940.

¹³ Ken Winkler, *A Thousand Journeys: A Biography of Lama Anāgārika Govinda*, 1990.

Himachal state. Most recently, a promising Columbia researcher, Paul G. Hackett, has tried to establish more admittedly "conflicting" details pertaining to the Theos Bernard affair. Hackett writes that Bernard entered the Punjab en route to the hills of Spiti near Ladakh, Bernard's supposed destination. It then became 'rumoured that his party of Muslim porters was attacked by Lahouli tribesman.'¹⁴

Now, Guru Shord held a different view altogether. But why should Guru Shord's view be considered? Shord was a member of the foreign-yogi community living in India at the time of Bernard's reported death. What is more, as a seasoned reporter, Shord would very than likely have made himself privy to the circulating rumours concerning the American's tragic disappearance. Here are the words from the Guru Shord's mouth: "Theos Bernard was caught in a riot between Hindus and Muslims in the city of Delhi. He was on the Muslim side when the Hindus attacked them and killed everybody."

Bernard's *Hatha Yoga* (1944)¹⁵ was among the many books in the Master's private library. It was only my second visit to the house when Guru Shord pulled the volume down off the bookshelf. He did this presumably to show me a photograph of Bernard performing the difficult mayurasana, a pose that the Master wanted me to learn. It was then that Guru Shord took the opportunity to casually relate the above-mentioned details.

By way of conclusion, I shall only add further that Guru Shord did not need to show me the photograph of Theos Bernard performing mayurasana. For I often witnessed the Master himself perform this strenuous peacock-pose, even three weeks before his 88th birthday.

¹⁴ Paul G. Hackett, "The Life and Works of Theos Bernard." Columbia 250, 2004. See also Hackett's "Theos Casimir Bernard," Columbia 250.

¹⁵ Theos Bernard, *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience*, 1944.

Chapter Five – Private Practice

1. The Path of Facing Life's Difficulties

Yoga hit Bangkok around 1950 when the master, then himself about fifty years of age, decided to return to the land of his birth. Formerly Siam, it had now become "Thailand", a rapidly modernizing mainland Southeast Asian country built on the three inviolable pillars of nation, religion and royalty.¹⁶

The master resettled in the city of his birth, that "Venice of the East" — Bangkok, Thailand. He set aside all ostentatious dress and firmly resolved to earn his living. He had already lived that marginal life of 'a hermit buried in meditation, keeping his body and soul together with scraggly morsels. He had actually found it quite an easy thing to retire from the world to the safe, though comfortless seclusion of a cave. He also understood that for some this, indeed, was the necessary path for which they ought to be respected and revered; that is, so long as they are willing and able to abandon every form of social responsibility. But such a form of yoga is really quite different from the yoga of those who choose the path of facing life's difficulties and troubles without evading them.¹⁷

Guru Shord was fond of Sir Paul Dukes's *The Yoga of Health, Youth and Joy* (1960), which, echoing the sentiment of Rudyard Kipling, expressed his very own heart-felt conviction.

Yoga in its highest sense teaches us how to face up to life, surmount its trials and tribulations, unenslaved by its transient treasures and meretricious

¹⁶ In 1902 the Siamese monarch passed the Sangha Act, which imposed an "official" standardized Buddhism over the whole of Siam's extended realm. One by one, the various kingdoms came increasingly under the centralized control of Bangkok's religious authorities. Political changes followed as well. With the bloodless revolution of 1932, Thailand ceased to be an absolute monarchy and established its present day constitutional monarchy along lines similar to the British model. Consequently, royalty staunchly remains a sacrosanct pillar of the Thai Triumvirate, as institutionally ritualised in the cult of the Devaraja as adopted in a modified form by Siamese kings from their royal Khmer predecessors as early as the 14th century.

¹⁷ Sir Paul Dukes, *The Yoga of Health, Youth and Joy*, 1960.

delights. It trains us not to shirk emergency, but 'to meet triumph and disaster and treat those two impostors just the same.' On this high level, Yoga shows us how to be in the world and yet not of it. This is the true sense in which one should retire from the world. The goal of all yoga, wherever and in whatever form one practices it, is self-conquest, the mastery of thought and emotion.¹⁸

2. Editor-in-Chief

With his decades of experience in international journalism, the talented newsman found that he was able literally to write his own ticket. Thus, Shord quickly took on demanding posts as editor-in-chief of prominent Thai and English language newspapers, sometimes running two papers at once. He would make the Thai capital his vocational base for the next four decades to come.

It was during the period soon after his return that the master took a sixteen-year-old girl for his wife. He then found a house on Soi Wattanayothin and turned it into his first Yoga Institute. It was open it up to the public in the spirit of social service. Mornings he directed open asana sessions and attended to those in need of special therapy. He accepted people without obligation, and allowed them to come whenever they liked.

He faithfully maintained his double occupation as yoga conservator and editor-in-chief for twenty-five years. However, pressing deadlines and assignments abroad often forced his yoga to take a back seat. For example, every fourth year he dispatched himself to Washington DC to cover the United States presidential elections. "It was nice," he said. "I was able to travel wherever I liked. I just took a camera and wrote a story." One very notable foreign assignment came in 1959 as thousands of Tibetans fled across the high Himalayan passes in advance of the invading Chinese troops. And there was the master in Dehra Dun, India, waiting to receive the young Dalai Lama.

¹⁸ Dukes, 3-4.

Normally after lunch Shord drove to the office. He had to take care not to let his love for yoga impede with his duties as a leading national editor. For professional negligence decreed dire consequence. "The hardest thing about being an editor" he said, "was making sure that my reporters didn't write anything disrespectful about the Royal Family or the Government, because if they did they would go to jail and I would have to go to jail with them—Ha!" And he laughed a great big belly laugh. "But none of my reporters ever went to jail," he affirmed with resumed composure.

Shord maintained his status as a foreign correspondent throughout his decades of family life. He filed reports with Reuters Press and other distinguished international agencies. Such tall credentials gained him passage through many a well-sealed door. He extensively explored the Southeast Asian region and learned to read it like the back of his hand. He wove and shuttled from country to country making such romantically evocative cities as Mandalay, Luang Prabang, Phnom Penh and Angkor Vat his frequent haunts of fascination. His unimpeded access to the Indo-Chinese states through the brutal years of American warfare yielded him perspectives unattainable to most. This accounts for his amassing an exceptional archive concerning the twenty-year post-war conflict that finally ended with the 1975 flight of the defeated Americans from Saigon.

His professional travels had a lighter side as well. He was especially enamoured by the northern Burmese City of Mandalay. "I went to Mandalay about twenty times," he said. He told me this the day before my own departure for Burmese capital city of Rangoon.

"Twenty times?" I echoed his words.

"Yes," he replied, and smiled very broadly. "I had a very good friend there with a beautiful house."

Then the master turned wistful, and with a tinge of resignation, said, "I'm too old to travel now, though; but if I were younger I'd go with you." My eyes grew tearful. I could not answer. The master was in his eighty-seventh year.

Chapter Six – Interviews

1. Therapeutics

Not until the spry age of seventy-five years did the Master retire altogether from journalism. It was therefore around the year of 1975 when the saint began full-time private practice. Though demand was enormous, he met the challenge squarely. He displayed such unwavering stamina and force that the people around him were often astounded. "It's a good occupation for an old man," he told me. "I like to be useful."

In the early 80s, Thai Television came to interviewed Shord at his private ashram. The old man spoke with unrivalled authority concerning the therapeutic science of yoga. For once thing, he explained how yogis knew about the circulation of the blood in the human body long before the so-called discovery was made in the West by William Harvey, the brilliant 17th century English physician. Harvey studied medicine at Padua in Italy and wrote his famous findings in Latin, *An Anatomical Experiment Concerning the Movement of the Heart* (Frankfurt, 1628). "But yogis already knew this," Shord explained. "They also knew that the pulse beats are generated by the heart, and had discovered that these pulse beats could be made stronger or weaker by controlling the breathing. They also knew that the nerves can be excited or calmed through the conscious control of the mind.

"The discovery of the thyroid gland," Shord explained to his interviewer, "and recent findings concerning its function are also nothing new to yogis. They were fully aware of its existence and function, and the others glands too, long before western science found these things out. Only the ancient sages gave different names to these glands. For example the pituitary gland was called 'the nectar-rayed moon' and the pineal gland was called 'the eye of Śiva,' and so on."

Saint Guru Shord

Still, no matter how comparable yoga may be with so-called modern medical science, it should not view as a form of medicine. 'Why?' Because yoga is something far better than medicine. If any comparison at all is drawn between the science of yoga and allopathic medicine, yoga should be viewed as a preventative form of medicine. Yoga possesses great curative properties. In the healing arts, its validity is unrivalled. Many chronic maladies can be cured through the yoga. Through regular practice, one derives a lightness of body, renewed vitality, and splendid health. You will notice a brilliance of complexion and eyes. One gains a positive outlook on life. One is filled with a sense of inner well-being. One is cheerful. Such spiritual buoyancy even contagious. Extolling the glories of self-reliance, yoga teaches people how to cure themselves.

Sitting right in front of the television camera the Master explained how all these things were slowly made known as he advanced to the higher forms of yoga.

"Yogis also had an intimate knowledge of the nervous system and the spinal cord," Shord explained. "They gave their own names to the various parts of the nervous system and knew more about their function than western science has yet discovered." Simply stated, "yogis understood that by developing the health of the physical body, its organs and fluids, and by bringing it under the intelligent control of the mind, they could at will slow these processes down and regulate or stop the flow of certain fluids to cure any disease in the body."

"I spent five years in Rishikesh," he said. "It took me two years to cure my body. I stayed three more for special training."

Cured indeed. "I have not suffered any disease in forty years," the saint affirmed in his eighty-fourth year.

Awed by the statement the interviewer asked, "Not even a headache?"

"What is there to cause a headache?" Shord replied, and then cryptically added, "It's because of pranayama."

2. Confronting Life's Problems through Yoga

It was a year before the Master left this world that the gifted Thai journalist Promporn Pramularatana conducted her famous interview with Guru Shord. Her article, "Confronting Life's Problems through Yoga,"¹⁹ focused on what she called "the octogenarian's aim of life."

"He wants to show people how to alleviate problems and difficulties through yoga," she thoughtfully observed. "When he talks, he brims with health and happiness. But in an interview the Guru will evade all questions concerning self, that is, anything concerning his personal history."

"That's old hat now," he frankly told her. "People already know me. Editors of books and magazines have interviewed me. Television stations have sent their film crews to capture me. I've been doing it so long! I'd rather give your readers tips on how to stay healthy and young." His simple and open manner charmed her.

He talks to you — to me, to friends, to strangers and wandering travellers, all with equal respect. The gates of his home are always open. As he talks, he either sits casually or walks back and forth to the other room where two or three women are practicing yoga. One woman is standing on her head in the śirsha pose, and he gives her moral support by counting the seconds.

"Life can be compared to a boxing arena," the Master told her, "but in the boxing arena, you have only one opponent. In life there are many more. Even if you lose, you will still have to fight."

"What does yoga do to help?" she asked.

"Yoga eliminates fear," he told her, "and lays the groundwork for samadhi, or concentration, which leads to peace of mind."

"But literally, how can you eliminate fear by simply lifting up your hands or standing on your head?" she asked.

¹⁹ Promporn Pramualratana, "Confronting Life's Problems Through Yoga," 1987.

"You are not just lifting up your hands or merely standing on your head," he explained. "You are practicing the asana (physical posture) as your mind concentrates on pranayama or the regulation of breath. At a more advanced stage, the practitioner will actually meditate while performing the asanas."

"But when you are suffering from stress, wouldn't it be better to take a vacation?"

"That's the Western concept of alleviating problems," he replied. "Taking a vacation or going to the cinema is merely a diversion. In the long run, the person has to come back to face up to the circumstances anyway, that is, if he is a responsible person. In the Buddhist faith, you learn to avoid the consequences brought about by complications; but in yoga, you learn to confront them. In yoga you learn to analyse the suffering."

3. Religion of the Heart

Throughout Guru Shord's more than forty-year teaching career, he initiated thousands in the timeless yoga. He furthermore imbued his precious teaching with a cogent appraisal of the ancient Buddha-Dharma, the religious culture into which he was born. For the Guru was by no means a divisive rebel. It is in fact incumbent on any individual who has managed that leap beyond the quagmire of nescience, to stand as a radiant illustration of the fact that all of humankind belongs to one great religion, the religion of the heart.

"In actual fact," the Master explained, "a yogi, or yogini, is just one type of religious ascetic who is searching for an end to suffering. Speaking metaphorically, the goal of all religions is to reach the summit of a glorious mountain. Yoga is just one path among many. Though yoga is not a religion in itself, it has always been adopted, adapted, and applied by all religions."²⁰

Broadly speaking, the Vedic term yoga pertains to any form of asceticism or meditative technique, including prayer. Though methods and philosophies

²⁰ Ibid.

differ greatly, the various paths approach the same imagined goal. To embrace all religions is to fully comprehend that you are not alone in your wish to overcome human suffering; such nostalgia being in effect universal.

4. Enter the Rishi

In *Yoga*, one of Shord's three published Thai Language books, the Guru explains why people generally and Thais especially hold many vague and incorrect ideas about yoga. He makes it clear why people in Thailand think that a yogi is the same as a hermit. It's because in the Thai language a hermit is called a ruesi, (Khmer, rosei) from Sanskrit rishi, or "a forest dwelling visionary." Writes the saint,

Due to customary Thai folklore, people commonly picture yogis as bearded, unkempt and unclean ascetics living naked and alone in the forest depths while subsisting on gathered herbs and vegetables. Through piercing concentration and arcane sorcery, they imagine that yogis can lie on beds of nails, be buried alive and withstand extreme temperatures while standing on their heads. They believe that yogis can perform marvellous feats, such as flying about on magic carpets, or creating goddesses out of thin air and making them their spiritual consorts!

"But don't be misled," the Master warns:

A practitioner of yoga is by no means required to retire from the secular world, sever all relations with human society and dwell in the seclusion of a comfortless cave. He can go on leading a fully active mundane existence, and when he walks down the road, he can be quite sure that nobody would take a second look at him, or find in him anything peculiar.

In fact, in the oldest surviving Bauddha texts, the Buddha is himself referred to as the rishi, only in the Pali rendering, īsi.²¹

5. The Royal Eight-Fold Path of Yoga

Throughout Saint Guru Shord's long and illustrious career, he strove to reveal the great similarities between the two remotely ancient systems of Bauddha and Yoga, especially to the Thais. Yet among his peers, only Buddhadasa Bhikkhu possessed both the knowledge and the moral fibre to speak out and to write on Raja-yoga. Raja-yoga represents the oldest known school of Classical Yoga. It dates back more than two thousand years. In the Sanskrit language, raja means, "king." This Kingly Yoga was first given shape by the time-honoured Indian sage Maharishi Patanjali in his classic work *Yoga Sutras* (yoga aphorisms). It is also known as Ashtanga-yoga. In Sanskrit, ashta means "eight," anga means "part." This is why Patanjali's Raja-yoga is also referred to as The Royal Eight-Fold Path of Yoga.

6. Careful: you're liable to get shot

While undergoing training at Wat Suan Mokh, the famous forest hermitage of Maharishi Buddhadasa,²² the present writer was exceptionally honoured to have gained private meetings with the age stricken patriarch of modern Southern Siamese Bauddha. Our talks were wide-ranging but consistently centred on the four main topics of Jaina, Bauddha, Vedanta and Yoga. Buddhadasa said, "It is proper for monks to practice yoga; but in private."

One cool morning as I sat on the pebbles, among the rich foliage and towering trees, the venerable sir confided in me, remarking, "Anyone that

²¹ "...having seen that the Isi had entered...." See I.B. Horner, trans., *Mahāvagga* (I, 15, 6), 1951: 34.

²² Suan Mokh, literally suan, "garden" of mokh (Skt. moksha) 'release,' 'liberation.' The monastery (wat) is in Chaiya district, Surat Thani province, southern Thailand.

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understands the essence of his own religion understands the essence of all religions."

The Maharishi's progressive view greatly moved me. Later up in Bangkok, I related this to Guru Shord. He paused in deference and lowered his tone. He said, "Of course there should only be one world religion. I know that and you know that; but be careful. If you go around trying to tell others of that, you're liable to get shot."

Chapter Seven – The Conservatoire

1. You only have to come a few times

The present writer had lived in Asia already seven years when he arrived shaven-headed at the Guru's open door one glorious morning in January 1984. It was the beginning of the old man's eighty-fourth year. I had just come from India after several luckless years of searching all over for a suitable yoga teacher. Having now met Shord, I was quite ecstatic over finally discovering a tantric master who far exceeded my highest expectations. Thus, I felt the urge to learn all I could in the absolute shortest possible time. My partiality for India had a lot to do with this. When I told Guru Shord what I wanted to study, he smiled at me as if I were a kid. "So," he said. "You're interested in tantra. Well, I'm reading a book about tantra right now. I'll bring it downstairs when I'm finished."

The more I learned from Guru Shord, the more I longed to return to India and practice his yoga on the banks of the Holy Ganges or up in the snow capped Himalayan Mountains or down on the tropical Malabar coast. But my incessant adulation of Mother India must have also terribly annoyed and bored him, and anyone else that was forced to listen. I projected the image of a restless young man who simply couldn't wait to make tracks out of Bangkok and leave its poisonous air behind.

"Relax," he advised me. "You only have to come here a few times. Your body's already healthy and fit. But if you want to go back to India" he sardonically added, "you have to learn pranayama first."

2. Learn pranayama or get lost

Pranayama or "breath control" was not at all easy for the neophyte yogi. It demanded great patience and concentration, both of which I sorely lacked at the time. Nevertheless, it has to be said that the Master's conservatoire was an

exceptional environment for undergoing serious yoga training. It was situated down a cool quiet lane in an up-market area on the eastern side Bangkok. It was also very popular, especially with women. And together with the ladies who swarmed to the conservatoire as if it were the city's posh Yoga Boutique, came the nerve-racking din of their endless chitchat. From my point of view this spoiled the ascetic atmosphere and made it even harder to sustain concentration. To make matters worse, I started taking notice of the captivating figure of the Master's spiritual daughter who pretty much kept herself out of view in the adjoining room for women only. But she was far from the only one that caught my attention. Without exaggeration, it can truly be said that Guru Shord's school received a permanent pageantry of stunningly beautiful female specimens, most of whom loved to chit and chat.

Even after learning nearly all the yoga exercises, I continued attending day after day. But with each passing day I grew more unnerved. One tense morning I told the Master flatly, "These women are making too much noise."

"Never mind, he retorted, "You can't change the world. If I make them stop talking, they won't come and learn. Relax. This isn't India you know."

I continued to attend.

Then one morning in a cool tone of voice, the Master gave notice. "A yogi doesn't practice too many asana," he said. "Pranayama is more important."

From the very first days of my arrival in Thailand, I had regularly dwelled with local monks. There were Westerners staying at the temple, too, who had entered the conventional Thai Bauddha sangha. Living together with my fellow ascetics, I began taking interest in their regional styles of yoga. Of course I quickly caught on that Indian term "yoga" was a virtual taboo among the Thai Bauddha clergy, who curiously preferred the Latin word "meditation." But terms aside, I found myself taking up certain native yoga practices that go by the names of anapanasati, vipassana, Samantha, et al. Under the sway of my

Bauddha brethren, I questioned the necessity of learning pranayama. 'Why should I learn pranayama,' I thought. 'I'm already practicing *meditation*.'

Now the Master was aware of the situation. At first he just smiled and asked about my progress. "Are you still learning meditation?" he inquired. "Are you able to stop your mind yet?" he asked. But he soon cut the crap.

Stop *meditating*" he ordered one day. And then he bluntly commanded, "*Learn pranayama*."

He had effectively told me not to waste my time, nor to waist his either. It was '*learn pranayama or get lost*.'

3. A Thousand Deaths

My regular appearances at Guru Shord's institute certainly created a general stir. Morning attendance noticeably grew and soon exceeded capacity. When the room for "women only" filled to the brim, the adjoining room for men necessarily took the overflow. In this way, together with the surging clientele came the amplification of disturbing noise until the actual source of the nerve-raking din was lying on the floor right next to me.

As alluded to above, many of the yoginis that visited the house were flawless testaments to why Thai women are renowned worldwide for their elegance, charm, and dazzling beauty, and many of these ladies had their eyes set on me. This was plain enough for even for a naïve ascetic to see. But having tried my best to maintain a distant manner, the glint-eyed women only found me more endearing.

As the months rolled by, it became the Guru's habit to treat me in a cool and rather off-handed manner. In fact, the Master took every available occasion to embarrass and shame me right in front of all those beautiful but noisy women. It was furthermore apparent that the Master was gaining considerable fun from his ruthless campaign of psychological attrition. The driving force of his repeated assaults was the cause of my suffering a thousand deaths.

Soon thereafter, the Prankster Guru saw the need to infuse a little warmth into his hyper-detached young protégé, especially when seeing how the sensitive rookie had become so unnerved toward the institute women. It was true. I had clammed so tight that the world's sweetest smiles were unable to pierce my hard outer shell. In the face of their advances, I exerted extra zeal; but again this only made me more alluring.

Due to the deadlocked situation, the Guru tried to make me drop my guard. It was early and not yet crowded that day as I lay on the floor taking rest between exercises. The Master came in from the back of the house. He donned a friendly smile and sat in the chair. And then he calmly sought to win my trust by starting up some breezy, buddy-buddy conversation.

"Yeah..." he began with a plaintive sigh, "when you're young you're free. You can go out to nightclubs where the girl comes and sits right there," and he slapped himself firmly on top of his thigh. "But when you're old," he added, "you can't do it anymore."

A few days later, the Guru perceived that I had fallen to a mood of morbid dread and evinced dark arcs beneath my eyes. He tried to lighten me up a bit by mooted the topic of death itself.

"Don't forget!" he said with a devious grin (and he aimed his magical finger right at me): "Everybody's got to die."

My mind was vague and by way of blurred response, I asked him if any old students ever came to visit him.

"No," he said. "They've all kicked the bucket – Ha! Ha! Ha!" he laughed out loud. "You know what 'kick the bucket' means?" he asked me outright.

I slowly blinked in dull response.

"In Thai" he explained, "if you can still 'kick the bucket,' it means you've still got power left." Then he doubled up his fists and roared with hilarity.

"It's like this," he continued. "When old friends meet after many long years, they like to say to each other – 'Hey, can you still kick the bucket!' – *Get what I mean?*"

I glanced about the room with uncertainty. The women next door were silent.

4. Mischief Making

Just as the old man planned it out, I started showing signs of slackened vigilance. The time was now ripe for the Master to plunge his obstinate student into an unrelenting pit of despair. The Guru truly relished these long-coming days when he was finally offered the prime occasion to dish out the highest yoga teachings. Though inwardly brimming with a sense of joy, he outwardly composed himself and went about the house as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

He then started setting me up with dates. "You should be friendlier," Shord advised one day. "Have compassion!" he said. I was skittish as hell of these treacherous ploys. *'Why?'* Because as soon as the least little thing occurred they all began tattling and spreading false rumours and cracking jokes at my expense.

"—That's all right!" The old man consoled. "It's just their sense of humour. Never mind."

Going to the house became an excruciating ordeal. Pitched psychic battles were being played out daily. As the aggravations and tensions mounted, I found that my patience completely exhausted. The Master, however, remained up beat. He kept close tabs on the daily round of intrigues like an avid sports fan. He seemed to take pride in counting all of the times he could get me to step in the traps he laid.

All the same, through sheer determination I began to make progress in pranayama. I marvelled how the formerly tedious task had now become a source of genuine joy. Thus each day after performing all my asanas, I sat on the floor

and practiced pranayama for a good half hour. But I started over doing it and strained my knees by constantly sitting in the full-lotus pose. I imagined that sitting on a blanket would help, but the Master flatly denied my request. "You should sit in a more comfortable pose," he said. But I refused to listen and continued to strain my knees. Through facial expressions, he conveyed his annoyance, but I imprudently chose to ignore those cues.

A few days later, I haughtily repeated my request to be able to sit on a blanket. Then the Guru produced an old synthetic bathroom mat; the kind made to fit around a western style toilet. He handed it over with a menacing smile and said, "Here use this." It looked like someone had pulled it out of the garbage. It was lumpy, soiled and oddly shaped, and when I actually used it, my knees hurt worse.

Now in spite of this being such a trifling affair, I took it very deeply to heart. As I sat cross-legged on the lumpy mat, my eyes filled with tears and I started to tremble. At this point, the Guru's young spiritual daughter intervened. She took pity on me and gave me a blanket. Then she gave a side-glance of scorn to her father as if to say — 'Why do you treat him so cruelly!' But the Guru just grinned a self-satisfying grin and stepped to the patio to have a little smoke. It was difficult to practice pranayama after that. I sat there alone consumed in agitation. I cringed with dread to imagine that the Guru would never put an end to his mischief making.

5. Back to India

Through unflagging perseverance, I finally reached a level of stability in my pranayama practice. I was enormously relieved when the Master consented to my long overdue return to India. He conferred his empowerment and ordered me away shouting — "GO TO RISHIKESH!"

I arrived in Calcutta alone by flight. It was late November and the temperatures were dropping. I decided to go south and booked a berth on the

fifty-two-hour Coromandel Express to Varkala, a tranquil seaside municipality in the Trivandrum district of Kerala state...

Returning to India was like a soothing balm. The two-day rail journey helped abate my frazzled senses. I sat in peace for hours on end and gazed transfixed out of the thin barred windows of the second-class compartment, Spartan and sufficient. As we clamoured our way across the grey-green countryside, a magical spool of rich poetic filament unfurled before my panning eyes.

There was more of the same the following morning. Wistful smiles of sackcloth children squatting in the dust beside the dawn-lit road. Mist-cloaked reapers thrashing grain beneath plodding hooves of their bony oxen.

It was October 31, 1984 when, somewhere en route near the Andhra Pradesh-Tamil Nadu border, BBC World Service Radio reported that the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was brutally murdered by her personal bodyguards while casually walking to her morning office. As her tiny bullet-riddled corpse lay in state, the capital's streets became the stage of a bloodbath performed on a "certain" ethnic community. Riots were spreading like wildfire across the country.

There was a 24-hour delay in Madras in order to safeguard the lives of "certain" passengers. All were cautioned not to leave the station. "Be careful young man," a gentleman warned me, "If rumours of CIA involvement get going, your life will be in danger."

The streets of Madras were quiet but tense. A nation-wide curfew was now in effect. Staff-wielding police officers stood about everywhere pressing their thumbs into the palms of their hands. Shops were closed except a few defiant tea vendors passing out steamy cups of brew through padlocked storefront grilling.

6. Varkala

I arrived at the seaside retreat of Varkala as enchanted as a whisper on the gentle wind. I lazily passed through narrow lanes of jasmine, clove and sweet hydrangea. In front of the Janardanan Svami Temple, I stopped to rest at a tiny tea-stall on the ramshackle verge of elegance. There were bunches of bananas, yellow, green and red, hanging from an old weathered beam.

As I turned down the quiet road heading to the sea I passed by the bathing pool with ancient stone steps. There were echoing slaps and hand-washed laundry spread out everywhere drying in the sun. Then I cut through the palm-groves and thatch-roof housing with terraced rice-fields not far beyond. I was charmed by the gentle murmur of the brook as it moved through the reeds and poured into the estuary. Just before the beach two temple elephants lay on their sides in the warm shallow pools, mahouts giving scrub with coconut husks.

The actual tirtha or pilgrimage point is the shore at Papanasam, literally "the place for cleansing sins." The narrow beige beach runs long north to south with curling breakers gently massaging sandstone boulders strewn along the base of purple-hued cliffs.

I scaled the path of the northern cliff to the muted sounds of gulls and sea waves and picturesque views of the Arabian Sea. At the summit, I came to the Nature Cure Hospital, placid like an ashram for the terminally artistic. This cluster of a half-dozen sun-yellow cottages immediately affected me as brilliant for yoga; and the director, Babu Joseph, shared my view. "It's the best place to stay in all of Varkala," he said. "I invite you for a ten-day regime." I accepted.

I crafted many notes in that airy cottage with its super-abundance of sunlight sublime. I left the windows open to the soft cool breeze and the waves as seen through the pines and the betel palm: fisher-folk totting nets and lines along the sea beach, the far off screeches of gulls oft' intoned....

I was adopting the methods of the French Cloudist painter René Laubiès who happened to be staying in the asylum at the time. René liked painting in the

early morning light, which was also the time that I practiced yoga. But as soon as I finished, I would dash to his cottage in hope to steal a glimpse of his inspired technique. But he was always just winding up, kneeling on the floor midst the crumpled-up papers & colour-stained rags, that broad piece of plywood that he used for an easel; twisted up oil tubes scattered all around him; brushes soaking quiet in a dented old can: the whole place stinking of expensive French turpentine.

7. Rishikesh

Five amazing months had elapsed in South India. As the temperatures soared in the month of March, it was time to migrate north again. I boarded the fifty-eight-hour Trivandrum Express and arrived exhausted at New Delhi Station. From there, it was six more hours by bus to my final destination, Rishikesh. I went straightaway to Sivananda Ashram and paid my respects to Swami Krishnananda who gave me the key to a quiet clean room. The fruit of this gift was marvellous yoga and notable breakthroughs in pranayama. I also took pleasure in sunning my body on the banks of the holy Ganges....

One incredibly hot afternoon I was napping in my room when a bizarre communication came direct from Guru Shord. Deep in sleep, I heard a ringing telephone. The receiver was lifted. The voice on the line said "Come there's more to learn." Click. I arose with a crystalline mind.

8. That's Mysticism

As soon as my plane touched down in Bangkok, I ran directly to the Master's conservatoire. I was given the welcome of a long lost son.

I could now well appreciate the Guru's kindness, having first dispatched and then summoned me back from Rishikesh. I could also accept the trials and tribulations as sacred steps in the rites of passage. The tremors that he caused to jar my soul were after all immense outpourings of love – ingenious strategies

specifically devised to rid the young dreamer of a fatuous ego. Of course, his lovely daughter was there as well, bashfully peeking around the corner as we talked in the cool of patio. Then the Master revealed himself a river of knowledge flowing straight from the source of the heart.

"I've read a hundred books on yoga," he confided. "So have you. But you can't learn yoga from a book."

*

Nor from the teacher's collected sayings: one has got to learn it mystically, in between the lines. In the tension of the love between the guru and the student, there is something uncannily mysterious and beautiful. It is a teaching borne on mind-waves, propelled by love.

Yet, what is the thing that is actually transferred in this mystical exchange of love? Said the Guru,

When a child hurts its finger and starts to cry, the mother kisses the finger and the child stops crying. Not anyone's kiss will relieve the pain. Only the mother's kiss does the trick... It can't be explained.... I like to leave it open... That's mysticism.

Chapter Eight – Anecdotes

1. The Rediscovered Yoga

There is always the possibility of yoga being lost. Actually, it is quite a fragile thing. If not irretrievably, then lost to be discovered – lost and rediscovered, again and again. Yogis do not fear this.

Confucius is an example of a philosopher who feared that his teaching would be lost with time. Therefore, he wrote it all down on bamboo tablets. But the problem with putting things down in writing is that distortion and dilution are bound to set in. This is why the Knowledge, once rediscovered, can only be transmitted via voca, or better, via mente, directly from the Master to the pupil. But it has to be expressed in the idiom of their time, in the form of terse maxims called sutras. Sutras are thread-like distillations of logic sheared of all inessential verbiage. They are aphoristic teachings, refined conclusions. Sutras are the polished end products of thought and observation arrived at only after years of practice. As a Sanskrit term, sutra literally means "thread," and is related to the English words "suture" and "suit." And so as fabric consists of many individual threads that are woven together, so the guru's teaching is represented by these singular, concise aphoristic sayings. The ideal sutra says much in few words. The guru reveals these fundamental principles. But they have to be confirmed by the student in time. And knowing that the student won't accept them in *toto*, the teacher simply has to smuggle them in by way of tersely coined sutras. They are un-emphatic statements of self-obvious truth, likened unto to mundane passing comments. They are therefore uttered without elaboration.

So, when does elaboration come?

In time.

How much?

It depends.

On what?

Many factors.

2. Enlightenment

One fine morning in the well-to-do suburbs, the topic of enlightenment entered our discussion. To be sure, *it was me* who raised the theme, for the Master never stooped to legitimise such extravagance. So what did the Master have to say on the matter?

"That's something that everyone has to find out for themselves, and by themselves."

Bright and early the following morning, September 9, 1985, I arrived to the ashram for my normal studies. Much to my surprise, I found that the house was unusually quiet for a very welcomed change, apparently unvisited by anyone but me. I paid my respects to the jovial octogenarian and casually asked him, "Is today a holiday or something?"

"-Ha! Ha! Ha!" he responded with a belly laugh. "No," he said. "But it doesn't matter anyway because my house is open even on holidays."

He courteously placed a leopard-print beach towel down on the waxed and polished parquet. "Lay down and rest, " he spoke with good humour. "Take your time... There's no hurry."

As I rested on my back, I slowly came to realize that in spite of the house being free of the usual twittering women, there was the boisterous sound of a radio emission coming from the back of the house. Though I understood nothing of the Thai language broadcast, it apparently was some sort of urgent news report. Soon I understood that it wasn't just one, but two portable radios, each one tuned to a different station.

As I stood to perform my sun salutes, I glanced out the window to the garden in the back, and there I saw the Guru with one of his sons. They were both immensely enjoying themselves. The old man was sitting at the table with a

cigarette, intently listening to one of the radios, while his son was standing by the door to the maid's room holding the second radio to his ear. I was baffled.

After completing my sun salutes, I laid down and rested on my back again. Then the Master stepped in with a boyish smile and offered the following explanation:

Some disgruntled army generals have attempted a coup d'état this morning and fighting has broken out in various parts of the city. Just now, the rebel troops have taken over a radio station and they're loudly proclaiming victory. But the government is speaking from another station and they say that everything's under control. We don't know yet who to believe."

The broadcasters' voices were suddenly silenced, a crackle of music perked the Master's ears and he bent his neck toward the back of the house. "They're playing old patriotic songs now!" he said, and withdrew to the patio in a jubilant mood.

Some minutes later, though, calmly smiling, the old man stepped back into the house. "Enlightenment is something like this revolution," he said. "It's not that serious."

He again returned to the garden.

3. Vincent van Gogh

Late one morning in the cool of the patio the Guru and I were sipping tea while pouring over the various daily papers strewn about the pre-lunch table. Vincent van Gogh had made the news. One of the Dutchman's well known works had just been sold for a record-breaking sum at Christie's London auction. The article contained the standard litany depicting van Gogh as a tragic artist who during his career had hardly been able to sell a single canvas. Living thus in abject poverty and unrelenting psychological torment, the painter succumbed to incurable insanity and died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

I had long admired the art of van Gogh, especially his letters, which I read when I lived in Tokyo. As we sat there reading and sipping tea, I began to reflect how for nearly a century van Gogh had been exalted as a veritable saint, as a bearer of the highest spiritual truth. 'How curious,' I thought, 'that we in the West have picked our saints from the ranks of musicians, painters and poets. We have chosen *these* as our men of religion who we honour all the more for the anguish that they suffered in the course of bequeathing us eternal works of art.'

Such were the quiet thoughts in my mind when the Master spoke up without looking from his paper. "He wasn't successful in his life."

4. What is Happiness?

"How to live happily," Guru Shord remarked while sitting one day around the crowded lunch table, "That's the question: How to live happily in this world."

Indeed, it is the quintessential question of Oriental Thought. According to the fundamentals of Indian philosophy, knowledge is deemed devoid of value that hasn't as its aim man's full emancipation. "Aside from this question," the Upanishads state, "nothing else is even worth knowing." Moreover, what could be offered as a clearer example than the tersest abridgment of Gautama's doctrine: "I teach suffering and the end of suffering." In fact, in ancient India even logic was applied to the purpose of liberating humankind from the existential misery of life.

Now, the emphasis given by Shord to "this world" is very crucial to his rediscovered teaching. '*Why?*' "Because the problems people face are *in this world* and not in the past or future worlds. Man only dreams up future worlds when he finds himself unhappy in the present world. Thus happiness holds no store for the future, and contentment never laments the past.

"But in order to know happiness" the Master declared, "you have to know suffering first. You have to learn to stand it, and understand it." According to the teaching of Guru Shord, "Happiness is nothing but the reduction of suffering."

Arriving however to the meaning of happiness, one advances to the question how to acquire it. This is why the yoga hinges on the question of how to live happily in this world. Yoga is the application of a means by which a person becomes increasingly happy.

Having once learned to live happily in this world, one naturally turns to those right around him and helps them learn to live happily too. Compassion is hardly more than this.

5. Tenuous Retorts

Once taken up then the practice of yoga continues throughout ones entire life, and continues right through the process of death. In Yoga, as in Bauddha, there is no real deep consideration of ends. Teleology and eschatology are extrinsic disciplines to Indian thought, where a-temporal mysticism has always reigned supreme.²³ This is why enlightenment so rarely comes up in the philosophy of Yoga, if ever at all. If anything, enlightenment is just the beginning. Arriving to the state of supreme self-sufficiency, or what yoga philosophy refers to as kaivalya, the yogi seeks nil from his external environment. Everything the yogi needs appears before him. He is finished with becoming; all is done. There is nothing to do but to bask in the peace of his own self-luminous divinity.

* * *

One fine day the Master remarked, "My philosophy will never catch on like wildfire."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because it never promises miracles," he said.

²³ Religions like the majority of those in India, which recognize "time" as an endless succession of repetitive cycles, develop only relative or "individual" eschatologies, since the concept of the ultimate consummation of history is alien to them. In Indian philosophy, individual eschatology denotes an individual's liberation from the endless, weary wheel of death and rebirth by escaping into the eternal or timeless, transmundane reality called moksha or nirvāna.

And it's true. Most of us are really only interested in miracles: those powerfully vast metaphysical transformations occurring to the accompaniment of celestial trumpets, rainbow banners and cannon fire.

"But it's also because my philosophy rejects dogma," he added.

To speak about yoga in a dogmatic vein was a tasteless indiscretion for Guru Shord. Still he maintained his rule-ensemble and observed certain philosophical truths, all of which he grounded in the principles of nature.

But he was very open to fielding questions, and invited me to pose them whenever I wished. But if I asked too many, he would shake his head, "No. No, you'll just get confused."

I also got baffled when the answers he gave seemed to lack any bearing to the questions I asked. Later I caught on to his mode of reply, which helped me see the superficiality of my questions. His tenuous retorts were like cryptic axes striking at the roots of my cerebral self-ensnarement.

6. Nirodha

The Bangkok Guru was very well aware that for thousands of years bliss-intoxicated spiritualists had painted grand frescos of an enchanted Kingdom of Nirvāna beyond.

"That's too far away!" he often pleaded. "You have to learn how to live happily first – in this world."

"Or think of it like this," he was also fond of saying: We are all tourists living in the hotel of the world for a very short period. We will leave the hotel, for who knows where?...The basic point is this, if you're all right here, you'll be all right there!" What this signals in Guru Shord's teaching is the practical feasibility of human beings to learn to live happily in this world. It also arrives us to a key attendant fact that is held in common by Bauddha and Yoga. We speak of nirodha or "lessening."

"We should not think of nirodha as the cessation of suffering, but rather its lessening," Shord declared. In other words, one should not view nirodha as an absolute abstraction, vis-à-vis annihilation or extinction. It is more at "diminution" or "reduction," he explained. It is the cooling down of the embers of desire, having entered in the metaphoric stream of things. When applied to the fact of human suffering, nirodha is the pinnacle of human aspiration, which is simply nirvana, the blowing out of the agonizing fires of hatred, greed and delusion, beyond which every opulence befalls.²⁴

7. Anecdotes

One day a sophisticated Colombian man arrived at the Conservatoire posing a whole range of complicated intellectual questions. His line of inquiry exposed an ardent interest in the awakening of kunalini śakti, its upward movement through the sushumna-nadi, the piercing the chakras and the subsequent unfolding of latent human intelligence, and that sort of thing. Yet all he received in the way of an answer was a side-glance of ridicule as the Master stood quietly and walked into the other room.

*

One fine morning a charismatic Korean woman visited the ashram. After lunch, she held many ladies spellbound with her compelling discourse. At one point Guru Shord turned to me and said, "That's showmanism."

"*Showmanism?*" I didn't understand.

He discreetly disappeared and returned with a dictionary. He pointed to the entry on the page.

"Oh" I said, "you mean *shamanism*."

"Is that how you pronounce it?" he asked.

²⁴ Puranic interpretation of nirvāna breaks the word into three particles: nir, 'total' + vān, 'blow away' + na, 'bliss,' or "totally blown away to bliss." Some, however, would regard such analysis as highly fanciful.

*

One fine morning in his 88th year, the old man privately confided in me. He said, "I'm too old to be teaching yoga. My body is like an old car." He then posed the question that was weighing on his mind. "How to call it quits?"

*

On November 6th, 1988, a few weeks before the Master's passing, an earthquake measuring 5 on the Richter scale rattled Bangkok skyscrapers. Though people in high-rise buildings panicked, no one was hurt. I was also around this ominous time that Guru Shord ate a deadly mushroom. It was innocently given by some people very dear to him.

"I didn't want to eat it," he explained the following morning, rubbing his tummy with a little discomfort. "It was given as a gift and considered a great delicacy. That's why I ate it. It's not their fault. They didn't know it was bad," he emphasised. This odd occurrence, this strange re-enactment, was a clear indication that the end was near.

*

One fine afternoon I came across a copy of Theos Bernard's *Heaven Lies Within Us* (1940)²⁵ in a second-hand bookshop on Sukhumvit Road. I immediately purchased the hardcover volume and read it through that very night. The following morning I presented the book to Guru Shord. He expressed exceptional delight to receive it. Not only that, he treated the book in a reverential manner, almost as if it were a holy relic—he was beaming! Nearly fifty years old though, the book was a little worm-eaten, but also in a rather aesthetic way. I told him this, too, as I pointed out the tiny holes scattered along the otherwise well intact binding. The Master then took this as a kind of pretext for placing the book on a chair in the garden, letting it receive bright rays of sun as he stood at a distance gazing on resplendent.

²⁵ Theos Bernard, *Heaven Lies Within Us*. London: Rider & Company, 1940.

Appendix I

Commentary to Bhucha Phra-Athit (Classical Thai Sun Salutation)

1. The Starting Point

As elsewhere stated, throughout the world today the practice of yoga is largely associated with Hatha-yoga. The major emphasis of Hatha-yoga is developing physical health and fitness. And the common means of achieving this is the utilization of bodily postures called āsanās. Hatha-yoga is an initial component of Saint Guru Shord's yokha-booran, too.²⁶

In this way, the starting point of yoga sri tantra is almost always physical culture, specifically employing the highly-Khmerized Classical Thai Sun Salutation, or Bhucha Phra-Athit, to wonderful results. When regularly performed as a sacred ritual, together with its noble benedictions (mantras), Bhucha Phra-Athit bestows on one incalculable therapeutic benefit. It energizes the personality and makes it sensitive to the cosmic power. It cures all blemishes such as disease, despondency and lethargy. It taps the wellspring of life within. As Guru Shord remarked, "When observed with a sentiment of openness and purity, Bhucha Phra-Athit enables a person to adapt oneself to the infinite source of universal energy."

But don't be deceived. Bhucha Phra-Athit in no way corresponds to today's generic surya namaskar. It is set apart clearly by its technical precision, the unadorned elegance of its Siamese-Khmer stylistic modes, by the organization of its rule-ensemble and its subtle philosophic idiom. Pregnant with sophisticated cultural elements, Bhucha Phra-Athit is an integral component to the highly refined vernacular that this Classical Thai Yoga-Tantra signifies.

²⁶ Yokha-booran is a Sanskritic-Khmer-Thai expression: yokha is obviously the Sanskrit yoga; booran is derived from the Sanskrit pūrṇa, which with extended meanings in the Thai language implies 'complete, full, fulfilled, restored and perfected,' among other things. The Sanskrit reconstruction of Thai yokha-booran would be pūrṇa-yoga.

2. Cultural and Philological Underpinnings

Some mention of Bhucha Phra-Athit's distinctive cultural and philological underpinnings would be in order here. Briefly, Bhucha Phra-Athit is a Sanskritic-Thai expression denoting a highly Khmerized mode of Sun worship.²⁷ Its Vedic origins are evident. Bhucha is derived from the Sanskrit pūja, which combines the sentiments of 'worship,' 'reverence,' 'adoration' and 'rite.' The prefix phra- is a Thai honorific (<Khmer/Sanskrit vrah, 'best, very, holy') that functions to exalt the noun it precedes.²⁸ Athit is derived from the Vedic Aditya, one of the twelve ritual names of the Sun.²⁹ Supplication of the Sun as Nature Deity is therefore an extremely ancient enterprise. In the remote Vedic religion its worship is supported by the archetypal myth of the Solar Deity riding in a single-wheeled chariot pulled by twelve horses symbolizing the months of the year as it passes through the houses of the zodiac.

Now this sentiment of heliolatry is no less implicit in Guru Shord's rediscovered yokha-booran. However, cloaked as it is in the Vedic myth, we cannot automatically assume its Indic origin; for there are aspects of Bhucha

²⁷ Its Sanskrit reconstruction would be āditya-pūja.

²⁸ In an earlier draft of the present commentary, I had wrongly conjectured that the Thai form phra- was likely derived from Sanskrit para, "supreme," and furthermore related through fine Indo-European credentials to the Ancient Greek para-. I am now however much more convinced that phra- is in fact a derivative from Khmer vrah, from Sanskrit vara, 'most excellent.' According to Michael Vickery (Society, Economics, and Policies in Pre-Angkor Cambodia: The 7th-8th Centuries, The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, The Tokyo Bunko, Tokyo, 1998: 140-49), "The pre-Angkor supernatural world comprised vrah, nearly all male, and most with Indic names...The vrah included representatives of all three important Indian cults, Śivaite, Visnuvite, and Buddhist, as well as local Khmer deities." The modern Thai phra- is thus an honorific that functions to exalt. As a stand-alone word, however, phra colloquially designates a Bauddha ascetic or bhikkhu, though may also be used ecumenically to refer to any type of monk or priest. Of additional interest, a nineteenth-century Thai translation of the Christian Bible rendered "Thy hallowed name" as phra-nām.

²⁹ Āditya is known as "The Son of Aditi," "the begetter of life," in reference to the sun as deity. The plural Ādityas indicates the chief sons of Aditi. In post-Vedic Sun worship, their ritualized number was established as twelve in association with the houses of the zodiac and the months of the year. The theme was taken over by the Buddha-cult too and Gautama the Buddha was called Ādicca-bandhu (Pāli), "Kinsman of the Sun." Regarding aditi, it means "infinity" (a- "not" + -diti "limited"). Aditi is the Vedic goddess of 'space, the beyond, the unmanifest.' She is an extremely remote divinity found at the centre of the oldest Vedic creation myths. Aditi is "the mother of all" and "queen of the eternal law (dharma)."

Phra-Athit that are strongly redolent of Ancient Royal Egypt, "cobras conferring kingship" and that sort of thing.³⁰ In fact, many scholars are of the view that heliolatry is the origin of all religions. They furthermore postulate Egypt as its birthplace.³¹

³⁰ Lawrence Durrell, *Quinx*, New York, Viking, 1984.

³¹ Egypt's most famous Pharaonic site is the plateau of Giza, a short distance from Cairo. One wonders what faith-inspiring conceptions of life could have possibly compelled an ancient people to carry so many stones and bricks to its monuments. Its geometric constructs are highly exacting, its designs complex and vastly arcane. It was set on a massive physical scale and arranged in accordance with the primordial conception of a North-South Axis. Thus the pyramids are in a geomantic sense aligned between the two other ancient Egyptian theological centres at Onu and Memphis. Onu was established north of Giza. The Greeks knew it as Heliopolis, "city of the sun." Onu was the Ancient World's leading healing centre. It was also the seat of the Royal cult of Re (or Ra) the Universal Sun God. In the later Amarna Period (ca. 1500 BC), King Akenaten achieved a revolution and the cult of Re became overshadowed by the worship of a single god, Aten, arguably the world's first monotheistic deity. But what means aten? Compare Egyptian aten, "universal spirit," "god," with Old High German atum and Modern German, atem, "breath"; and with Pāli attan and atta (from Vedic, ātman), not from Greek/Latin animus, but "steam"; compare also tuma (n), most likely the apostrophe form of Pāli atuma = atta, Sanskrit ātman = higher self].

Appendix II

Performing Bhucha Phra-Athit

by Guru Shord (1984)

The most appropriate time to perform Bhucha Phra-Athit, or the "Classical Thai Sun Salutation" is when the Sun is just at the point of rising above the horizon, that is, in the early morning. But this is not obligatory. Every time that you perform Bhucha Phra-Athit, you should directly face the Sun. As with other forms of exercises, it can be done whenever your stomach is empty. It is best to do this with all the windows of your room open, or in the garden on the lawn under the open sky. You should have as little clothing on as possible, or wear light clothing in which you can move about freely when doing this exercise. It should be done with bare feet.

There are twelve positions in Bhucha Phra-Athit.

In the First Position, you stand erect, alert but not tense, looking straight ahead of you with the palms of the hands joined together at chest, your feet closed in, toe-to-toe and heel-to-heel. Think of the Sun as the eternal source of light and power. Breathe in, and then out as you extend your arms in front of you at shoulder level, palms down.

It seems that many people have forgotten how to properly breathe. They pull in their stomachs when they inhale and push out their stomachs while they exhale. This method of breathing is incorrect. The correct way is to push out or distend your stomach as you breathe in, and to pull in or contract your stomach when you breathe out. This way you can inhale more deeply, as well as exhale more fully. Thus in the first position when you are inhaling, you should throw out your stomach or distend it fully. You pull in or contract your stomach as you exhale. This also exercises your kidneys and liver every time you inhale and exhale.

In the Second Position, you raise your arms high over the head and bend backward from the waist while deeply breathing in.

In the Third Position, you breathe out while bending your body forward so that your hands go down as far as they can. Do not strain yourself. Your head should eventually touch your knees. The legs should remain straight. Your hands touch the ground right beside your feet. Your fingertips and toes mark a straight lateral line.

In the Fourth Position, you move your right leg backwards while keeping the left leg where it is. Here the left leg, which must be kept stationary, is bent at the knee and the knee of the right leg, which is to be moved backwards, should be resting on the ground. The right leg touches the ground only with the toes and the knee. Relax and move your body forward a little. Rise up your chin and chest while inhaling deeply, distending your stomach to the fullest. By doing this, the heels of your hands are automatically raised up, only the tips of your fingers still rest lightly on the ground. If this position is properly done, it tones up your liver and kidneys, and exerts gentle pressure on your abdomen, helping proper elimination.

The Fifth Position is assumed when you throw your left leg back to the full length of the leg, and then throw the right leg back, as well, making a plank. The head, back and legs form a straight line. At this point, you should hold the breath.

In the Sixth Position, you bend the arms and let your body come to rest on the ground with the eight points or ashtanga of your body touching the ground. These eight points are, the two feet (toes), the two knees, the chest, the forehead and the two hands (palms). As you lower your body, exhale as deeply as possible, expelling all the air out of your lungs, while at the same time pulling in your stomach.

In the Seventh Position, you raise your head and chest upward to the full extent of your straightened arms; arch your back and raise your chin up as high as possible. Breathe in.

In the Eighth Position, without moving your feet or hands, you raise up the entire body so that your bottom is in the superior position, like a mountain, with the knees and elbows straight. Try to touch the heels and the top of the head to the ground. Breathe out.

The Ninth Position is achieved by dropping the left knee down on the ground, about half way between the hands and the feet and then bringing the right leg forward all the way to the hands (in reverse of position no. 4). Breathe in.

The Tenth Position is performed by bringing the left leg forward, putting the left foot at the side of the right foot and letting the hands remain on the ground. This is in repeat of position no. 3. Breathe out.

In the Eleventh Position, you return to position no. 2. Breathe in.

In the Twelfth Position, you lower your arms down straight in front of you until they come to rest at your sides. Breathe out.

These twelve positions make one round. It is essential to point out that you should perform Bhucha Phra-Athit twelve rounds at a time. If you are tired after any round of the exercise, you can rest and then start again until twelve rounds are completed.

Finally, Bhucha Phra-Athit is never complete without proper breathing. Breathing is the rhythm, the rhyme and the life of this exercise. You must, therefore, practice this exercise with care in order to master the technique of breathing. Without proper breathing, this exercise is just an exertion. With breathing properly done, it charges your personality with unbounded cosmic energy.

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