

EVERYTHING REVEALS HIS GLORY

BY PEGGY BENDET

*Discovering
the throb
of pure joy
that underlies
all of life*

My first glimpse of the perfection of life came in my junior year of college, long before I had a vocabulary to describe what had happened or a framework within which to understand it. I had just transferred to a school that was much more challenging than the land-grant college I had attended my first two years. The full import of the transfer didn't really sink in until my first final at the end of the fall quarter.

It was in a political science course. I had signed up for it because it was taught by a quirky old professor who gave entertaining lectures and an "automatic B" to anyone who went to class. The professor left midterm, however, and was replaced by a juiceless intellectual whose lectures were oblique and obscure and, for me, unutterably boring. His parting shot in the last class was to tell us to contemplate the effects of various forms of government on national pride — something I didn't think about at all until I saw it on the final exam. The entire course grade rested on this exam, and this was the only question. I had no idea how to answer it.

An empty blue-book was failure, and the thought of returning to my parents' home a failure was so terrifying to me that I went into a panic reaction as strong as if my very life had been threatened. I could feel adrenaline beginning to pump through my body, and then, with some hidden reserve of common sense, I thought, "There is nothing I can do about it now." In that moment I relaxed. The fear that had been building within me was suddenly released and began to move through my body as pure energy, from the bottom of my feet to the top of my head, in wave after wave of the most delicious joy. The experience continued for the entire forty-five minutes I spent on the test. I turned in my essay — it wasn't an "A" but it wasn't an "F" either — and I

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"Every form is an expression of the awareness of the Lord."

walked out the door still buzzing with energy. It was amazing to me that what I had called fear at the beginning of the hour had turned itself into the very power that had gotten me through the test. "How did that happen?" I wondered.

It was ten years before I got an answer to that question. It came after I met a Master of meditation — Baba Muktananda — and I learned about *Spanda*, the power that underlies every event, every movement, every thought that occurs. When Baba said that this entire universe is created by waves of energy, I realized that he was speaking of the selfsame energy that I had felt moving through my body during that test. He said that by seeing everything in our lives as a throb of divine energy, as a *Spanda*, we can experience happiness even in the middle of unhappiness — just as I had that day. Then I realized that by sur-

rendering to a difficult situation during that exam I had somehow vaulted myself into an experience of *Spanda*. I saw that Baba was not talking about an experience I might have if I ever became a "real" yogi or a "good" meditator. He was talking about an approach to life. He was saying that if I recognized the energy behind a situation, I could transform my experience in that very moment.

Ultimately, this information turned out to be much more significant than the experience itself had been. What had I gotten from the experience after all? A passing grade in a difficult course. But by understanding the principle behind that experience — the *Spanda* — I had gotten a context for every event of my life. For the *Spanda* is the ground of everything, the thread that holds it all together. I found that when I remember to look for the

Spanda in each and every situation, any situation becomes a vehicle for joy . . . no matter what it started out to be. Then everything in life reveals God's glory.

Recently when a group of people who run Siddha Yoga meditation centers were taking a training course in the Ganeshpuri Ashram, many of them complained that they were plagued by thoughts in meditation. Gurumayi replied that the problem wasn't their thoughts — the problem was that they weren't in touch with the Spanda principle. She suggested a course on the *Spanda Karikas*, or "Verses on the Spanda," a fascinating text from Kashmir Shaivism, one of the oldest philosophies in the world. These verses describe the creation of the universe from pure Consciousness and the means by which we can realize this in our lives.

What the center leaders discovered was that they didn't need to still their minds to meditate; they needed only to recognize the nature of their thoughts, to see them as pulsations of energy, as the Spanda. With this awareness we don't fight our thoughts, we don't get involved in their content; we are just aware of them. And magically, in the fire of this awareness, the thoughts themselves disappear. We are left with the energy that authored them.

Several years ago when Gurumayi was touring in the West, there was a mother who would come up for *darshan* with her baby. The baby would scream loudly; each time the child saw Gurumayi, he seemed to get more upset. Then one night, when Gurumayi walked past him in the lobby and he started screaming, she went right up to the mother, who was holding the child in her arms, and looked him square in the eye. "Louder," she said. He kept right on screaming. She said, "No! Scream louder!" He did. "No!" she

said. "Louder than that!" And he became totally still. Gurumayi had led him right through his anger and fear into the silence from which the entire emanation arose. As one of the verses in the *Spanda Karikas* says:

The Spanda principle is firmly established in that state a person experiences when he is very angry or completely overjoyed, when he is in a state of impasse, wondering what to do, or when he is in terror and running for his life. (I.22)

If we look closely at any of our responses, we will find the Spanda underlying them, and, as the verse implies, this is particularly true of our strong responses. Anger, terror, joy — these are intense states, and the Spanda is more apparent in them than it is in times of comparative calm. It is not a matter of indulging or expressing an emotional reaction; we become aware of the energy that is inspiring it. When we remember to do this, the result can be nothing short of miraculous.

One man, driving on icy winter roads, went into a slide as he started down a hill; he was heading toward a curb and he knew if he hit it the car would turn over. "My mind got very tight with fear," he said. "Then it occurred to me that the outcome was totally out of my control, and I withdrew from the options of the mind." He stopped fighting his response, and the very force of his fear carried him into an inner stillness — the pure Spanda. "I was suddenly in this still, peaceful place," he said, "and I knew that I couldn't die — only the body could die." With total calm he watched his car, and his body, turn over two and a half times . . . and then he walked away unhurt.

According to Shaivism, *every* form in the universe comes from the Spanda, every form is an expression of the awareness of the Lord.

The whole world comes forth from Him and rests in Him; therefore nothing can veil or obstruct His nature. (I.2)

The whole world comes forth from God, indeed, *is* God. This means that the whole world is an expression of divine perfection — a notion that for most of us is a lot to swallow. Of course, there are glorious sunsets and awesome snow-capped mountain ranges, there are Mozart concertos and Japanese temple gardens . . . But what is perfect about an earthquake? Or a traffic jam? How about divorce, or squaling children? Or mortgage foreclosures? Even in the best of times, we might say that life is good, maybe we would say it's great — never perfect!

In the Western scientific tradition it is understood that nothing in the entire physical universe is perfect: no line is perfectly straight, no circle is perfectly round; a point in infinity can be expressed and even approached — but never reached. "Perfection" is seen as a concept, a fantasy, an impossible goal which we strive for but never attain. But in Shaivism, perfection is seen as reality, the Reality that underlies life.

"Everything in the world is perfect," Baba used to say, "except man's understanding." When you think about it, what we mean when we say that something "went wrong" is that it didn't go the way we *thought* it should. We are living in the world of right/wrong, good/bad — a world created by our minds. "You are so much more intelligent than God is," Baba once told a group of his devotees. "You know what is good and bad, and God — He is so simple-minded He thinks everything is perfect just the way it is." The great ones, the Siddhas, live in the consciousness of the Lord. They experience perfection in every moment of their lives; for them every moment is God's play.

This past winter in Ganeshpuri, Gurumayi would sometimes sit on a tree-ring in the courtyard in the early afternoon, letting people gather around her. These impromptu satsangs were always extraordinary; each grew spontaneously out of Gurumayi's experience of God in that moment. One afternoon as she sat on the tree-ring listening to a *bhajan*, a dog began to bark. "He's singing," Gurumayi said. She made a great play of checking the dog's pitch with the harmonium . . . and then an even greater play of teaching the *bhajan* singer to make sudden short bursts of sound just like the dog had. We all laughed and laughed. Dog as singer; singer as dog — we were enchanted by this antic metaphor of cosmic Oneness. For many of us — for *myself* — the howling dog had at first been a nuisance, an interruption. For Gurumayi, he was another opportunity to go to the heart of things.

The world is God in the eyes of a Siddha — but why don't the rest of us see Him there? According to Shaivism there are three veils between ourselves and Reality, the veils themselves being a part of the perfection of the cosmic play. In becoming the world, the supreme Lord contracts; in assuming a physical body, He who is transcendent and all-powerful identifies Himself with the limitations of the body.

This misidentification is what Baba was referring to when he spoke of the imperfection of man's understanding. Known in the Shaivite tradition as man's "innate impurity," or *anava mala*, this is the first of the three veils. When we feel incomplete or inadequate, when we tell ourselves, "I'm not good enough" or "I'm not perfect — after all, I'm only human!" — that's *anava mala*. It hides our identity with the Lord, evoking in us a longing for our own divine nature. Mistakenly, we begin to look for it

outside ourselves, we begin to differentiate between ourselves and everything else.

Half-joking, my mother used to tell me, "It's us against the world" — always a terrifying thought for me. This is the very essence of the second veil, *mayiya mala*. Because of this veil, we experience ourselves as separate and isolated; we feel needs and aversions. We have the hope that some things will make our lives better . . . and the fear that other things are going to make it worse. And in this way we fall prey to the third mala: self-motivated action, *karma mala*, and its attendant web of habits and perceptions. Karma mala is the feeling, "I have to do it — if I don't, it won't get done."

The scenario with the malas is something like this: "Since I'm not perfect, I'm going to do this or get that, and I'm going to be the one who does it." Each time we perform an action from this stance, we are reinforcing our sense of imperfection. The actions may be subtle — they may be something we say or even something we think — but each of them leaves an impression. Added together, these impressions become our habits, our patterns, our manner of seeing the world. In this way, we are inspired to go after one thing and then another, living in a confused state which the *Spanda Karikas* describes quite graphically:

Robbed of his power by his own impurity and attached to his actions, the limited individual lives in agitation. When that agitation dissolves, then the highest state appears. (I.9)

To dissolve the agitation born of the malas, we must dissolve the malas. The key element in this is grace. The *Spanda Karikas* states that our identification with the Lord comes only after the "real initiation" — which is Shaktipat, the descent of Shakti, or pure energy, from a Siddha.

With this initiation, our own inner energy is awakened and we begin to experience the Spanda within.

A woman recently described to me how this awakening affected her life. Nine years ago, deciding that she needed peace and quiet, she moved from the hustle and glitter of Rome to Kenya, a Central African country that is almost entirely forest. In Kenya she married, and she and her husband moved to a forty-acre property outside of Nairobi. The potential was there for exactly the kind of life this woman had hoped for. "But, really," she said, "what happened is that we spent all of our free time going out drinking and dancing. We would go to parties and talk to people just like ourselves, people who were becoming cynical about their lives."

Three years ago, this woman realized she was as unhappy in Kenya as she had been in Italy — only this time, instead of moving on, she tried a totally new tack. "A friend of mine invited me to a meditation class at the Nairobi Siddha Yoga Center," she said, "and I figured that I might as well try it." The only thing she recalls now from the instruction that evening was a statement that was made just before meditation: "Within each one of us lies a phenomenal love."

"I really liked the way that sounded," she said. "I closed my eyes, and I could feel myself dissolving. I was becoming one with everything. There was this wave of energy that moved up from my feet. When it reached my heart, it exploded . . ." She opened her eyes in that moment, somewhat shaken by the experience — which has since changed her life. She has meditated ever since and has brought her experience of oneness into her life.

"I can't even express what has happened since then," she said recently. "But the main thing is that now I'm content. Every little thing takes so long to do when

you live like we do, without electricity, in the country. Even taking a shower is a major production. But now I enjoy each thing I do. Everything is full now, and rich. It used to be that when the monkeys would come by in the morning to be fed, I would feel that there was something much more important that I should be doing. Now I just enjoy being with them."

Gurumayi has said, "Perfection is accepting your life as it is." But until we receive the grace of a great being, we can't even *see* our life, let alone *accept* it. With grace, with the awakening of the inner energy, the veils are lifted — at least for a moment — and we experience oneness with the supreme Power. "Once I had had this experience," the woman said, "I *knew* it." The remainder of our spiritual journey is the challenge of remembering what we already know, remembering it and putting it into practice in every area of our lives.

Mantra repetition has the power to put us in touch with this state of stillness beyond the mind. The mantra is a pure emanation of Spanda, and so it has the power to take us back to the experience of Spanda itself. People who dedicate themselves to the mantra frequently find that it is there for them in any situation. It's not that they remember the mantra; the mantra seems to remember them.

This was the experience of a woman who was shopping in San Francisco during the much-publicized earthquake last fall. The indoor shopping center in which she was standing began to buckle with the force of the rolling earth. There were glass display cases shattering around her and objects flying through the air; people were screaming. If this woman had focused on what she was seeing and hearing, she would have been terrified. But as she started to run for the door, she could feel

the vibration of the mantra — the Spanda — welling up from within, and that was where her attention went. "I had a perfect awareness that I could be killed," she said later, "but the vibration of the mantra was more powerful."

On her way out of the building, she encountered people who were paralyzed with terror. Rather than running past them, she took them with her. When she reached the parking lot, where the ground was still heaving, she helped to calm a panicked mother and child. It was only after the quake subsided that she realized her heart was pounding. Her experience of the mantra's vibration — "of God's presence," she said — had been so strong that she hadn't even noticed her own fear.

The possibility for recognizing the Spanda is always there, even in the ordinary and the everyday. One man found that he experienced the Spanda by giving his attention to his young daughter. He had scheduled a walk with her as one item on a busy agenda, and as he tried to hurry his small companion along, he began to feel a tide of irritation rising within him. "She's God," he reminded himself, "she is the Spanda." And with that thought, he began to pay attention to her, he began to get playful with her, and as that happened, he started enjoying himself. And then, suddenly, there was no reason for him to rush, nothing else he would rather be doing than walking, as he was, with this tiny form of God.

And it isn't just on our off-time that the Spanda manifests. With the right eyes, we can perceive the Spanda in a business meeting, in a roar of laughter, in a flash of inspiration, in a spurt of criticism. Recently a woman I know was under fire from someone she works with; he seemed to be criticizing everything she did. When she tried to defend herself, the



attacks escalated. The woman was exasperated at first, then furious — and then, realizing that she was being eaten alive by her own anger, she looked more deeply into the situation. She said, “When I told myself that he wasn’t just mean, he was God, I had to look at what he’d been doing with different eyes. And I saw that he was going through a difficult period himself, something I hadn’t paid attention to at all.” She began to ignore the content of this man’s statements, to concentrate instead on the energy between them, on giving him support. Within a day, the ill will between them was gone and, more important, also gone was at least part of this woman’s tendency to see the people around her as different from herself, as something to fear.

It is the attention we give to situations that makes them alive for us, as the

following *karika* explains:

That Spanda principle which makes the insentient group of senses act as a sentient force — going toward objects, taking pleasure in their maintenance, and withdrawing into Itself — should be examined with great care and reverence, because It prevails everywhere. (1.6-7)

When we are aware of the divine nature of the force that operates through us as we move among the objects of the world, then a natural reverence for the world begins to arise within us. It is the Spanda that enables the eyes to see and the ears to hear; the physical apparatus has no power of its own. The senses are only the instruments by which the Lord plays in His universe. It is our attention that gives the play life — the Spanda rests in our own awareness. As one verse says:

Cognitions such as "I am happy," "I am miserable," and "I am attached" have their being in another, that I. They are like a garland strung together on the common thread of the I. (I.4)

Our sense of *I* is always with us in the form of our own awareness. Baba used to say, "Watch the One who is watching you." We can experience this quite simply. Just close your eyes and allow your attention to come to rest on your breath. Watch the breath as it comes in and goes out. Become aware of the force that is moving the breath. Now, become aware of the awareness.

Gurumayi has said that there is nothing in life more important than having our attention on this inner experience. "When you have inner attention," she said, "you have grace . . . you have a relationship with this universe. If you don't have inner attention, it doesn't matter how many qualities you have. You can have great tolerance. You can have a very forgiving nature; you can have a very loving nature; you can be quite efficient, but if you don't have inner attention, everything is lost because everything on the outside is transitory The only thing that will stay with you is your inner attention."

During an Intensive that was held on the meadow on Tapovan Hill in Ganeshpuri, Gurumayi likened the discipline of inner attention to the flight of a bird. After watching a large bird negotiate a particularly graceful descent across the broad expanse of sky overhead, Gurumayi said that we need to approach our lives as a bird approaches flight — we need to be able to hold a posture, a sense of inner poise. "This is the way a bird takes flight," she said, "by holding a posture. If a bird were to peck at himself and look here and look there, he would never make it into the air."

Or, as the *Spanda Karikas* states:

We should always remain alert while observing all objective phenomena and should deposit everything in one place. In that way, there will be nothing to trouble us. (III.12)

If we remain alert to the Spanda, then we will "deposit everything in one place" — that is, we will look for the one source that is behind all of the objective phenomena of this universe. We will come to know the world as God. Then like the great ones, whose gaze is fixed inside even as they move through the world, we will see perfection, we will hear perfection, we will experience nothing but perfection.



Daily Life

CONTENTS

Guest Editor: Patti Hayes

Invocation

Editorial

AT ONE WITH THE WORLD
By Joseph Chilton Pearce

If there is any part of our world in which we cannot be, we are rejecting a part of our own Self.

"GIVE LOVE TO THE CHILDREN"
By Sheldon Lewis with Sheila K. Lewis

The spiritual adventures of a Manhattan family

EVERYTHING REVEALS HIS GLORY
By Peggy Bendet

As the *Spanda Karikas* explains, it is the attention we give to situations that makes them alive for us.

THE WORLD IS GOD
Questions and Answers with
Baba Muktananda

FROM RENUNCIATION
TO REVELATION
By Lee Davis

A writer learns to "dynamite the compartment houses" of his habits and "untangle the spaghetti" of his life.

A HIGHER JUSTICE
A Story

THE STATE OF
STEADY WISDOM
A Talk by
Gurumayi Chidvilasananda

NO MORE BUSINESS-AS-USUAL
By George Weiss

An astute venture capitalist meets the Guru. . .

THE MIRROR OF DAILY LIFE
Experiences

AWAKENING TO LIFE
By Olivia Hoblitzelle

Using the reality of death as a creative force for change in our lives

SACRAMENTS
Rebirth in the Spirit

THE MYSTIC COBBLER
THE LIFE OF JACOB BOEHME
By Jude Berman

Through his inspired writings, this sixteenth-century craftsman shared his experiences of God with the world.

THE MAHABHARATA - PART 2
THE BIRTH OF THE HEROES
By Swami Vasudevananda

The seeds of royal strife are sown. . .



DARSHAN 38
May 1990 DARSHAN
(ISSN0892-130X) is pub-
lished monthly except
September for \$86 per
year by SYDA Founda-
tion, PO Box 600, South
Fallsburg, NY 12779.
Second class postage
paid at South Fallsburg,
NY. POSTMASTER: Send
address changes to
DARSHAN, PO Box 600,
So. Fallsburg, NY 12779