

## INTRODUCTION

# MAKING WAVES

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### EVERYTHING CHANGES.

Mystics and storytellers in South Asia have woven this deceptively simple observation into the Indic consciousness for millennia. Hindu scriptures warn that the true nature of endlessly changing phenomenal reality can be lost to us as we thrash about the crashing waves of life. Yet the Hindu emphasis on the phenomenal fact of impermanence is tempered by the promise of something substantial, enduring, and utterly liberating beyond the very flux of life, so often likened to a roiling ocean, the “ocean of *samsara*.” The phenomenal flux of mundane reality, staggering in its chaos and suffering, nonetheless motivates the journey to cross the “far shore,” the quintessential Indian metaphor for liberation. Among the premier rafts for this tumultuous crossing is the spiritual teacher, the *guru*, a term that, not incidentally, also means “heavy.” The word intimates the higher truth that there is something weighty, substantial, and enduring about life, a truth borne witness to by extraordinary spiritual teachers. Gurus assist in the journey to make the crossing—from the ocean of *samsara* to the ocean of awareness, from the changing flux of phenomenal reality to the far shore of liberation, from death to immortality. The far shore is the “site” for an ultimate ground that suffers no loss or change, understood variously in Hinduism to be an enduring soul, consciousness, an unchanging Absolute or a deity with form.

This book is about gurus who have crossed the far shore, but not necessarily to ultimate liberation. They have indeed crossed roiling oceans—in this case, Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific—landing upon the far shore of America. In making this passage, from the sacred land of India to the bewildering world of

modern day America, they may or may not have achieved the most sublime goal of Hindu spirituality, but they certainly took it upon themselves to teach it, propagate it, and cultivate a subculture dedicated to it. In doing so, they invariably have “made waves,” that is, they have brought a conceptual and cultural matrix that has interfaced with a dominant American cultural matrix. Such interface has produced numerous interesting developments, which we will detail in this volume. Among these developments are reconfigurations and redefinitions of Hinduism by our subjects, a project that becomes a case study on the slippery hold of definitions.

The academic study of religion in the twentieth century has seen a lengthy, though fruitful, discussion of the category *religion*. Most scholars of religion today accept the quixotic nature of the term, agreeing on its fluid boundaries and the need to emphasize its context and frame. Most scholars and teachers of religious studies accept the provisional quality of definitions, at once constructing them for heuristic benefits while later deconstructing them in the face of diverse data. Thus, for example, to teach “religion” we paradoxically find ourselves teaching that there is no such thing as “religion.” To teach Hinduism, we find ourselves teaching that there is no such thing as “Hinduism.” Neither “religion” nor “Hinduism” is a frozen or absolute entity, something that stands above specific concrete cultural, political, and historical phenomena. Instead, there are religions and Hinduisms, collections of shifting but related sets of events that share certain characteristics. About these events—religions and Hinduisms—useful things can and have been said, especially by self-aware thinkers, conscious not only of their own frame of reference, but also of the goals of such framing and educating.

Once we recognize the crucial importance of historical, economic, and political contexts to the study of religion, those of us called to teach the twice-suspect category of Hindu religion often find ourselves caught in moments of cognitive dissonance. We stutter, misstep, walk forward two paces, retreat back another. Ultimately we hope there is increased nuance in our knowledge by this spiral forward, but the process is decidedly awkward; indeed, we may find ourselves in the peculiar position of objecting to our own “working definitions” of Hinduism or other sweeping categories in the study of religion. Moreover, we are painfully aware that we participate in and contribute to the very political structure that perpetuates stereotypes of the complex set of phenomena we so wish to deconstruct: the whistle-stop tour of Hinduism in our culturally mandated World Religions courses. We know the term *Hinduism* to be problematic, but we can’t help ourselves: We are a product of the system, and teach within it.

To teach—not to mention to live—the complexity of events demands a certain comfort with ambiguity, and this is no easy task. Categories and concepts speak to clear lines, decisive boundaries, but, as Steven Batchelor has eloquently reminded us, there are no lines in nature.<sup>1</sup> Things are blurry. One finds

more grey than black and white. Full comprehension often eludes us.<sup>2</sup> Some academics or devotees may prefer clear lines, offering a construction of particular traditions in ways that suggest decisive boundaries, marking off a set of timeless truths that capture the “real” tradition, preserved in its pristine clarity. No doubt, to claim such yields an emotional payoff—clarity resolves the difficult intellectual and emotional conflicts that a fluid universe generates. But in our view, it is disingenuous to assume stability where there is none. Moreover, the appeal to timeless truths is academically suspicious, for it often serves to perpetuate specific social or power structures: What appears to be “timeless” is, on inspection, sets of beliefs and practices emerging and being sustained by patterns of religious, social, and political conventions. In short, it is perhaps permissible for religious leaders to claim timeless truths, but not those who critically study spiritual teachers.

Our goal in this book is to monitor and assess the conceptual and cultural changes that have obtained by the arrival of significant Hindu spiritual teachers in America. The word *guru* by now has become quite familiar to many Americans. Its most basic meaning signifies any qualified teacher, regardless of discipline, in India. However, when the term applies to Hindu worldviews, overtones emerge. The guru is the adept, the skilled one, the preceptor, the saint, the destroyer of karma, the embodiment of god. And, on occasion, the guru appears to be a “confounder” too, sometimes transgressing socially constructed expectations, even those associated with guru-hood. In this book, while the teachers here all express a host of “spiritual” sensibilities, several became quite skilled in “worldly” and entrepreneurial programs as part of their program of propagation, and several have been accused of sexual impropriety. In any case, the phenomenon of the guru is one of the most prominent features of Hinduism in all its permutations. Often considered to be repositories of sacred power and the living vehicle for truth, gurus constitute a phenomenon that most Hindus would identify as important and crucial to their self-understanding as persons of faith. Indeed, the gurus in this book have sometimes been called *mahagurus*—great gurus—“great” or *maha* here usually indicating the significance of their cultural and religious impact, quality of teaching or life example, number of devotees and spiritual cachet.

Our use of gurus is the lens by which we examine religious and cultural change. It is perhaps a commonplace to note that change in religion comes from internal and external stimuli, including movements within a tradition led by thinkers and reformers and the broader cultural interface with intruding forces such as armies, migrants, and missionaries. These external forces can threaten the sanctity and safety of specific cultural “universes.” When alternate universes do collide, both feel the impact of reverberating waves. In this book, we highlight a quite specific manner in which this occurs. In this case, Hinduism, whose “purity” has often been viewed as coterminous with the geographical boundaries of Bharata (the ancient name for India), has seen a

remarkable migratory expansion to Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America. The recent movement to the West has been fueled not only by the migratory patterns of workers, students, and families, relocating under force of circumstance or particular personal aspirations, but the migratory patterns of gurus too, relocating with their own specific aspirations as well. This book marks what might be called the second wave of gurus in America, the first being the seminal transmission that began with Swami Vivekananda at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. The contours and impact of the first wave of gurus have been most notably examined by Polly Trout.<sup>3</sup>

We examine a recent, more contemporary, wave of gurus, noting the effects that occur when they—or their devotees—come to America bringing with them their “alternate universe.” In doing so, fascinating cultural transformations have occurred, the awareness of which we hope has been stimulated by asking our contributors to consider specific questions. Concerning each tradition represented in this volume, how is the identity of the particular guru constructed? How do the gurus understand or represent whatever it is they mean by “Hinduism”? How do they adapt their form of Hinduism to a new cultural milieu? What changes can be seen in such a cultural interaction? What strategies do gurus employ to represent and/or propagate their particular representations of Hinduism? And how does that cultural milieu affect them in return? These inquiries require repeated and persistent self-examination of identity. On a personal level, the central question, as articulated by Ramana Maharshi, one of the spiritual teachers examined in this volume, is simply: “Who am I?” On a social level, the question central to this volume is still one of identity: “What do we—scholars, devotees, gurus—mean by Hinduism?” This collection of essays is the record of one set of scholars’ responses, and, we hope, marks the “forward spiral” that characterizes increasing nuance to our understanding of Hinduism in America.

This volume is unique in its examination of this most recent wave of gurus in America. It is also unique in the way it brings together the contributions of scholars trained in various approaches to South Asian studies. These approaches include the methods of history of religions, anthropology, philosophy of religion, and sociology of religion. This diversity of approaches, with differing emphases on fieldwork, is a methodological illustration of one of the goals of the volume. Diversity reveals difference—and continuities. Perhaps the most unique aspect of this volume is that most of the contributors have had direct personal experience of the guru, or the guru’s *ashram* or community. Several, such as Chris Chapple, Cynthia Humes, Lola Williamson, and Ravi Gupta, have been participants in the tradition embodied and taught by particular gurus. Others, such as Selva Raj, and Jeff Kripal, have had close contact with the gurus whom they have studied, which has not been without positive or formative impact. Still others, such as Tom Forsthoefel and Norris Palmer,

have visited the ashram or worship communities of the gurus they have studied, also with positive outcomes. These scholars nevertheless do not let either their personal experience or their spiritual commitments prohibit their willingness and ability to engage their topics from a critical perspective, nor do they disallow their spiritual commitments to be enriched by their critical study. We hope that the interface of personal experience and academic reflection in this volume produce in our audience a similar response to that of an anonymous reader of the text for our publisher: an awareness of an honesty and vitality to our scholarship that is refreshing. We trust that this unique presentation will cross the boundaries of the academic and lay universes, in turn enriching both.

While the religio-cultural stream identified as Hinduism is vast and multifaceted, the gurus here can be classified for heuristic purposes as belonging to one of four substreams of Hindu thought and practice: Yoga, Advaita Vedanta, Bhakti, and Tantra, all easily recognized as native categories by Hindus. All four traditions share certain assumptions. For example, all four traditions share the notion of a soul, although its relationship to the Transcendent is often construed differently. Second, all four traditions note an existential human problem with the ego, and all assert that the struggle with egoism results in suffering. Third, all four share the conviction that there exists a state of unconditional bliss behind or beyond the flux of *samsara*, phenomenal, mundane reality.

While these and other Hindu traditions share certain assumptions, there are specific differences, too. The Samkhya Yoga tradition, for example, has a different answer to the notion of the human soul than most Hindu traditions. The Samkhya Yoga tradition is clearly pluralistic and dualistic; there are innumerable spirits (*purusha*) and there is matter (*prakriti*). The Yogic Path, which Christopher Chapple addresses in his essay, teaches there to be an infinite plurality of souls trapped in matter, and to remove the soul from this trap of materiality requires a discipline that calms one's mind from the disturbances of material nature to unveil the reality of the transcendent self as it is, free from egotistical imputations commonly mistaken for the true self. While many or even most ashrams in America include physical or *hatha yoga* as part of their conditioning and spiritual discipline, the Yoga Anand Ashram described in Chapple's essay is unusual in its staunch commitment to the dualistic yoga philosophy. Chapple clearly articulates the distinguishing features of classical yoga theory and practice as he discusses the life and leadership of Guru Anjali, the Bengali spiritual leader who established an ashram on Long Island based on the "royal yoga" of Patanjali, the second-century sage and reputed author of the *Yoga Sutra*. Chapple's essay also succeeds in situating the value and meaning of the guru in Hinduism and, drawing from the work of Harvey Cox and others, speaks to the psychological issues and occasional pathologies associated with an institution that gives sacrosanct status to the teacher-disciple relationship.

The work of Forsthoefel and Humes is clearly situated within the Hindu philosophical school of Advaita Vedanta, the tradition of Non-Dualism. Vedanta is one of the six schools (*darshanas*) of Indic thought. Vedanta's primary methodology has been the exegesis and analysis of sacred texts called the Vedas, especially the most esoteric texts in the Vedic corpus, the *Upanishads*. Vedanta itself is heterogeneous: Advaita is just one of three standard representations, and its most famous spokesperson and systematizer is understood to be the eighth-century philosopher, Shankara. The other two forms of Vedanta are Qualified Non-Dualism (Vishishtadvaita Vedanta), systematized by Ramanuja (1017–1137), and the Vedanta of Dualism (Dvaita Vedanta), whose great leader is understood to be Madhva (1238–1317). Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita Vedanta are devotional, privileging the practice of Bhakti, human “sharing” or partaking of the divine through the practice of love of God.

Advaita asserts that all phenomenal differences have no substantial or enduring reality. Reality is one. All temporal and finite differences are nullified upon the realization of truth. This philosophical viewpoint has proved useful in the cultural translation of Hinduism to America. How so? Advaita relativizes the cultural and even “religious” products of Hinduism, opening up Hinduism to a broader swath of humanity besides those born and raised in South Asia. Differences can be downplayed, for at its most basic, there are no differences. There is only the Real.

Forsthoefel highlights the development of such relativization in his essay on Ramana Maharshi, a teacher who never traveled beyond his native land of Tamil Nadu, let alone to America. However, Ramana's quintessential non-dualism paved the way for a migration of an *idea* swaddled in Hindu clothes. Many of the gurus who did come West either claim to be in Ramana's lineage or respond directly to his message and example. Ramana's life and teaching called into question the tendency to exclusivism in traditional Advaita, rendering coherent the universalism implied by the axioms of non-dualism. Ramana's foundation set the stage for the other gurus who did come to America. Such gurus often appealed to non-dualism as a signal strategy for the propagation and promotion of their spirituality, positing its universality, transportability, and malleability. The work of our colleagues clearly shows that Sai Baba, Ammachi, Rajneesh, and Adi Da all have drawn from Vedanta, especially Advaita, in their own pastiche of latter-day Hinduism. The premier value of non-dualism for some gurus may be less its philosophical excellence than its global marketing strategy.

Cynthia Humes highlights the relevance of Advaita to the global transmission of Hinduism as well in her study of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of the Transcendental Meditation program. In particular, she notes the push and pull between appropriating and selling Vedanta on American terms, and subsequent attempts to clothe Maharishi's bare Vedantic meditation frame with Hindu cultural markers. Maharishi became skilled at adapting Hinduism to his

American audience, consciously marketing a spiritual program less bound to culture or ethnicity. He assertively and creatively used the universalism implied by Advaita Vedanta to thrust Hinduism into the global marketplace of ideas. He taught Americans that classical programs of renunciation bound in hoary tradition could be discarded. Instead, “cosmic consciousness,” pared of its cultural baggage, could be attained by the mere recitation of a sacred mantra, learned, Cynthia wryly notes, for a minimum price. But Maharishi became more than a spiritual teacher. He is a consummate empire builder too, creating, through his subsidiaries, a line of consumer goods to be purchased, television programs, a political party that is international in scope, and recently, a new, “sovereign” country, replete with its own currency.

Maharishi’s political developments are crucial to note, for only the disingenuous believe that religion and politics are absolutely separated. Both the Natural Law Party and its Indian variant, the Ajeya Bharat Party, reveal a strong neoconservatism and exclusivism with respect to other religions. But in the Ajeya Bharat Party, the jingoism is blatant and undisguised; its platform position papers rail against Western colonialism, including the very commercial and political structures Maharishi adopts, adapts, and exploits. This spiritual exclusivism holds for the superiority of Hinduism over other religions, and shows a curious development in Maharishi’s program. Although he began with the universalism implied by Advaita Vedanta, he “returns” to a particularism, which steadily imbeds and validates features of Hinduism, gradually revealing it, as Humes writes, as the most accurate vision of true religion. So, while Forsthoefel’s essay demonstrates how Advaita migrates well, Humes shows not only just how well it migrates, but how well it returns to its homeland, too.

Humes shows the versatile manner in which the Maharishi perpetually adapts to each situation. In South Asian terms, adapting one’s message to particular time and circumstance is *upaya*, skillful means. *Upaya* as a category has been used by several of our colleagues as a heuristic device to explain (or perhaps explain away, as Norris Palmer notes) the teaching (or methodology or egregious excess) of the guru. Humes, Palmer, Urban, and even the essay by Goswami and Gupta, all advert to *upaya* as an explanatory tool for the teaching of the gurus they examined. Adapting one’s message to the particular time and circumstance is the very essence of *upaya* (and seems peculiarly recognizable in our modern multicultural teaching, as we have mentioned). Our essays show the features of such adaptations to whatever might be called “classical” Hinduism, and the institutional and authority structures that developed as these gurus or their devotees established foundations in America.

The essays by Norris Palmer, the late T. K. Goswami and Ravi Gupta, and Selva Raj address guru traditions that privilege Bhakti. The devotional tradition in India emerged under a complex set of historical and cultural circumstances. The Bhakti tradition, while heterogeneous, nonetheless promoted religious experience as the decisive, most meritorious, and universalist option for spiritual

progress. The passion and longing seen in the great Bhakti saints of Hinduism reveal a powerful energy ready to be tapped for spiritual progress.

Norris Palmer's essay focuses on Satya Sai Baba, the enigmatic and controversial spiritual teacher easily identified by his Afro hairstyle. Palmer's comprehensive essay includes Baba's life, ontology, and empire, all fueled by Baba's magic (some have said sleight-of-hand) and mystery as well as the fuel of the faith of his ardent devotees. Palmer's study explores the particular way that an inclusivist Hinduism emerges in the relationship that obtains between Hinduism and non-Hindu religions. Some gurus reflect a kind of egalitarian inclusivism; for example, concerning the different religious traditions of the world, Ramana Maharshi was quite clear: "All go to the same goal."<sup>4</sup> This attitude is not universally held by the gurus here. Instead some, including Baba, admit of pluralism while nonetheless holding that Hinduism offers the purest window to the Supreme. So, the symbolic and ritual programs of some of our subjects will include Western religious iconography and even the reading of Western religious texts in certain ritual circumstances. But such inclusivism is not always radical egalitarianism; rather, it is often an inclusivism (all religions have value) with an exclusivist subtext (while all religions have value, all find their ultimate meaning and value in Hinduism). Palmer points out that Baba, borrowing from Vedantic paradigms, is *the* Divine Presence; transcending time and space, his omnipresence therefore renders his spirituality universalist and accessible to all. This accessibility accounts for the spread of Sai Centers in the United States and Europe. The assumption of Baba's miraculous powers and omnipresence naturally leads a global audience and a global program of Sai spirituality, Baba being the other guru in this volume (the other is Ramana) who has "come to America" through his teaching, devotees, and spiritual centers.

However, Baba's agenda is also particularist and his teachings have a conservative goal, that is, reestablishing Vedic and Shastric religion. This "reinvigoration" of Hinduism back in India is especially evident in the careers of Maharishi and Rajneesh as well, whose modernizing and globalizing strategies also saw a return to particularist religion in which Hinduism emerges as the superior religious form. According to Baba, all spiritual wisdom can be traced back to India, for Bharat "was once the guru of humanity." Palmer clearly demonstrates what appear to be incompatible attitudes in Baba's approach: an openness to all persons and religious traditions and a superiority toward Indian culture and Hindu identity.

The inclusivist pluralism is clearly showed in the essays on Gurumayi, Rajneesh, Ammachi, and Adi Da. In his ethnographic approach to Ammachi, Selva Raj shrewdly observes a dynamic interchange between Ammachi's spirituality and Christianity. Ammachi's program is clearly universalist and egalitarian, one of the strongest themes that emerged in the medieval devotional traditions of India. Spiritual merit accrues from experience, not birthright. Women

and low-caste and outcaste saints are among the great models of devotion in the Bhakti movement. Indeed, Ammachi's devotion to Krishna has been likened to that of the sixteenth-century Rajasthani saint, Mirabai. The innate impulse toward the divine (articulated by Guru Anjali as well) is clearly affirmed by Ammachi, whose own universalism is seen in the flourishing Amma centers in America and Europe. In addition to availing herself to non-Hindus for spiritual growth, Ammachi has borrowed liberally from other traditions to speak to themes of unconditional love of the Divine Mother. Moreover, Ammachi has developed numerous cultural innovations, initiating Westerners with "Christ" or "Mary" mantras. Raj also points out a fascinating development in the devotional services held in the West, where certain forms of ritual communion clearly borrow from Eucharistic models of Christian communion.

These changes often lead to the recalibration of Hindu categories. In his essay on Ammachi, Raj neatly addresses a hermeneutic of *darshan*, a central event in traditional Hindu religiosity. *Darshan* is the efficacious encounter, the exchange of sight between deity and devotee. To "take *darshan*" means to encounter God *visibly*, whether in iconography, nature, or human form. Yet, Ammachi's universalism not only breaks the bounds of caste and ethnicity, but also the very method of *darshan* itself. Here, *darshan* includes a potent, robust embrace. Such tactile *darshan* is a radical break with traditional, highly circumspect sensibilities of avoiding bodily contact. Another innovation is "water *darshan*," conducted at her ashram in Kerala, in which devotees receive her embrace in a pool, ostensibly to minimize the physical hardship on Ammachi. A further development involves the fusion of commercial opportunity and spirituality, such as the sale of "Amma dolls" said to be charged with the *shakti* (power) of Ammachi indicate. Finally, as with other gurus in this volume, Ammachi has constructed a powerful institutional structure to promote her numerous charitable and teaching organizations.

While devotion remains the supreme method in the spiritual program of Ammachi and Sai Baba, these gurus do pepper their spirituality with a pungent sprinkling of Advaita as well. This is *not* the case in the illuminating essay by T. K. Goswami, to whom this volume is dedicated. Goswami, whose essay was completed by his friend and colleague Ravi Gupta, looks at the theology implicit in the "transplantation" of Krishna worship in the West. The theology of the Hare Krishna movement is avidly monotheistic, based on the subtle philosophy of "inconceivable difference and non-difference" between the devotee and god. Unadulterated enthusiasm, modeled by the Bengali saint Chaitanya, is the supreme method of liberation, and this is what has been most noticeable about the Hare Krishna movement in America and Europe. However, this tradition does not at all operate from a premise of non-dualism, and instead counts "differences," notably the divine excellences of Krishna, as supremely salvific. Additionally, cultural patterns are also accorded certain sacrosanct

status, with the literal home of Krishna, Vrindaban, being the human realm that best captures and models the divine realm. This means that A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, the missionary of Krishna worship to the West, needed carefully to address what Goswami and Gupta call the Krishna against culture, the Krishna of culture, and, following classical Gaudiya philosophy, a Krishna that both distinguishes and affirms the two. His theology reveals the premier value of Krishna worship over all other cultural and religious programs, and yet, owing to his subtle nuances, he could not condemn in absolute terms either Indian or non-Indian culture. Indian culture, especially in Krishna's homeland of Vraj, models the heavenly realm, and non-Indian culture has value insofar as its resources can be used to promote Krishna consciousness. Despite the inherent conservatism of Bhaktivedanta's theology, he nonetheless cultivated radical innovations in the interface between Hinduism and America, namely, the ongoing use of English in services, the valuation of women's spirituality and leadership, and the possibility for non-Indians to be Brahmins.

The essays of Lola Williamson, Hugh Urban, and Jeffrey Kripal turn to three gurus within the Tantric fold, a complex religious matrix that emerged in India perhaps as early as the sixth century. Steeped in secrecy and fueled by its own version of non-dualism, Tantra is often viewed as radically iconoclastic and transgressive, shattering conventional categories and social mores with the aim of breaking through all mental constructs and organizing filters to an awareness of reality as it is. This tradition "used" all energies to provoke and promote such goals, and, under specific ritual circumstances sexuality itself was such a vehicle. One must note the condition of such sexual activity: *specific ritual circumstances*; in "classical" Tantra, this was not a sexual romp. Tantra is fundamentally a soteriological, not sexual, path. Its countercultural methods aim for the collapse of boundaries and a breakthrough to the non-dual Absolute. Both Rajneesh and Adi Da drew from a central assumption of Tantra—that sexual energy itself can be a vehicle for non-dual experience—but the history of those gurus and their movements shows all too clearly the egregious excesses that can be effected in the name of spiritual wisdom.

Lola Williamson's essay elucidates the history and development of the Siddha Yoga community based in upstate New York, centering on the direction of its current leader, Guru Chidvilasananda, or Gurumayi. Also drawing from the Tantric tradition, among others, the Siddha Yoga community very much shows the "Americanization" of Hinduism in upstate New York. Williamson charts this out, while also demonstrating how Siddha Yoga has become a "global *sangham*," with a vast network of technical and institutional helpers to support it. Williamson explains how the Tantric notions of the transmission of *shaktipat*, the transfer of energy between guru and disciple, are modified to facilitate the guru's global reach. In the newly imagined universe of Siddha Yoga, *shaktipat*—traditionally, a rare and tactile experience—is now transmitted

“by will” over long distances through the international electronic media that serves Siddha Yoga.

Williamson notes other developments in Siddha Yoga’s adaptation of “Hinduism” as it has interfaced with America. Abandoning traditional emphasis on renunciation and even liberation, Gurumayi instead has openly encouraged single disciples to get married, and she has also encouraged her married disciples to bear children. Additionally, to facilitate the movement’s expansion, she initiated an annual singles dance with the express aim of matchmaking. These transitions are a remarkable departure from traditional Hindu emphases on radical renunciation embodied by the *sannyasi*, one who has “cast down” all with the goal of liberation. Gurumayi has intentionally modulated the urgency and intensity for liberation by nurturing a communal lifestyle with the more modest goals of morality and good living, experiencing the power of the guru within the world.

If Gurumayi adapts communal lifestyles to facilitate the creation of generations of Siddha Yoga families, Urban’s essay clearly shows the adaptive style of Rajneesh to celebrate the unconventional individual. Born a Jain, Rajneesh modeled his ashram and message primarily on Hindu texts and practices, but ultimately claimed to be “Osho” (a Japanese Buddhist term for master). In some sense Rajneesh might be considered an ultra existentialist (he began his career as a philosophy professor), pressing his listeners to break through their constricting thought forms in order to come to their truest authenticity, in this case, an identification with absolute consciousness. While Rajneesh drew from Hindu models of devotion, replete with saffron clothes, bead necklaces (*malas*), and iconic photographs, Rajneesh’s decisive style was radically fluid, arguing for a “religionless religion” that rejected all institutions even as, Urban notes, it borrowed freely from a wide array of traditions (most of the gurus examined in this volume employed the same strategy). Rajneesh ultimately refused to be locked in any conceptual boxes. He used Tantra—itsself a universalist philosophy, finding homes in Jain, Buddhist, and Hindu traditions—to chart out his own unique fusion.

According to Urban, Rajneesh shrewdly developed Neo Tantra in the West, knowing that it supported two of the most central concerns of late capitalist consumer culture: sex and money. Rajneesh’s claim to be the messiah America was waiting for may strike one as supreme arrogance, but, given the Western obsessions with individualism and sensuality, Rajneesh may have indeed offered precisely what many Americans seek. While many of the gurus reviewed in this volume have built empires of one sort or another, Maharishi’s remarkable entrepreneurial spirit is probably best matched by Rajneesh. As if conjuring a Tantric version of the Protestant work ethic, Rajneesh made the accumulation of material wealth the expression and manifestation of his charisma. Urban notes the history of Rajneesh in America, the fall of his

empire, and his return to India as Osho. While a host of spiritual activities are supervised through the Pune center, Rajneesh, after his death, has been transfigured from sex guru to an icon for a high-tech global and business enterprise. Urban closes his essay with a careful analysis of the interface between economics and religion in the global market.

Jeffrey Kripal's essay on Adi Da points to the logical extension of non-dualistic thought: Just as it can appropriate and subsume other cultural forms, it can be appropriated by others. Jeff examines the life and thought of, as he comments colloquially, a "white guy" from Long Island. Adi Da (born Franklin Jones) is an American guru who borrowed heavily from Hindu categories, especially Tantra, as he attested to non-dual truth. There is a coherent logic to the appropriation of Hinduism by an American spiritual teacher, no matter how much such appropriation may aggravate some South Asians who consider it cultural theft. The logic is the very principle that emerged in India (and elsewhere for that matter): non-dualism. If non-dualism is true, then in absolute terms it does not matter one whit if a white guy from Long Island "rips off" Hinduism. If non-dualism is true, there is no white guy, no black guy, no male, no female, no Hindu, no Christian, no "one" but the One. The logic of non-dualism terminates not only in the spread of Hinduism in America by these gurus, but the emergence in America of gurudom with teachers such as Adi Da. As with Rajneesh, Da's method included the shock tactics of "crazy wisdom," which embraced confounding conceptual and moral categories in an attempt to expand one's consciousness of the one true Real.

While Kripal's essay explores the life and career of Adi Da and the notion of "American Tantra," the subtext of his essay is the relativizing logic of non-dualism. Kripal's essay is a fitting end to our "gathering of gurus," for it shows what can happen when alternate universes collide: Change occurs, morphing takes place, and cultural adaptations flourish. At first glance, these changes seem surprising, but a sustained gaze reveals the inner logic of cultural negotiation in a world of permeable boundaries. In Adi Da's case, a white guy from Long Island dons the accoutrements of Hinduism, follows the logic of non-dualism, and claims his stance as a guru. If the flap of a butterfly's wing somewhere in the deep forest has its own decisive reverberation (as physicists tell us), how much more the mutual penetration of cultural systems?

This volume emerged from a panel at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 2001. Daniel Gold's response to the original papers, marked with synthetic and astute observations, has been amplified and serves as the epilogue here, and we are grateful for his contribution. *Gurus in America* addresses key questions about the nature of the guru, the diverse histories of each guru and movement, the varied constructions of Hinduism, and the complex process of cultural interaction. It is our hope that this unique view of a number of significant cultural and religious frames contributes to answering the questions that emerge from the most recent wave of gurus to

the United States. Crossing the far shore to America, these gurus have indeed “made waves.” It is precisely these waves, the conceptual and cultural repercussions of their impact, that we register and assess here.

## NOTES

1. Stephen Batchelor, *Buddhism without Beliefs* (New York: Riverhead, 1997), 76.

2. David Knipe beautifully captures the “uncapturable” in India with the epilogue in his book, *Hinduism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). Knipe comments on a photo of a dark, gnarly tree, from which hang a number of burlap bags. Having no unequivocal sense for the meaning and purpose of the tree in that village, the photo, for Knipe, “hangs here as a reminder of how much of Hinduism I do not understand (152).” Such a statement is a model of humility.

3. Polly Trout, *Eastern Seeds, Western Soil: Three Gurus in America* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 2001). Trout focuses in the main on a “first generation” of gurus in America: Swami Paramananda (1884–1940), Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952), and Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986). See also Anthony Copley, ed., *Gurus and Their Followers: New Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford, 2000).

4. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 9th ed. (Tiruvannamalai: Ramanasramam, 1994–1996), 114.

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ONE

## RAJA YOGA AND THE GURU

Gurani Anjali of Yoga Anand Ashram,  
Amityville, New York

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CHRISTOPHER KEY CHAPPLE

ONE DISTINGUISHING FEATURE of spiritual life is the need for a guide or preceptor. While the specific texture of spiritual life differs among religious traditions, it is safe to say that, differences notwithstanding, the spiritual teacher provides a map for a deepened spirituality. The teacher in effect marks the path toward “home,” that is, the most complete expression of human fulfillment in the context of the sacred.

In the Indian tradition, the teacher or spiritual preceptor takes on sanctified status, as indicated by the term Guru-Deva, “divine teacher” or “teacher of divinity.” The *Yoga Sutra*, a text on meditation dating back nearly two millennia, claims that all teachers have been instructed by a special unencumbered soul (*ishvara*) who has been untouched by afflictions or attachments. The idealized teacher symbolizes a state of perfection, and from that vantage point can offer counsel and model techniques for meditative acuity.

The *Guru Gita*, a text of 182 verses that appears in the *Skandha Purana* (ca. sixth to eighth century CE) on the relationship between the teacher and the student, lists many benefits that accrue from following the instructions of the preceptor, including good health, long life, happiness, and prosperity. Two modern classics attest eloquently to the quest for and commitment to following one’s guru: *The Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda (1946) and *Be Here Now* by Baba Ram Dass.

The spiritual preceptor within Indian religious traditions generally grounds his or her teaching in a textual tradition. In addition to drawing on an

authoritative theological source such as a written text or a particular chanting sequence, the guru also provides direct instruction in meditation techniques and often gives personal counseling or advice. In some instances this can be conducted in a mass conveyance of *darshan*, particularly if the movement is quite popular. Often a guru will deputize key disciples to assist in this aspect of the work.

This chapter will first discuss the development of the guru tradition in the United States, and then shift to a personal narrative regarding the author's relationship with Gurani Anjali, a teacher from Calcutta who established a small meditation center in Amityville, New York, in 1972 for spiritual direction within the path of classical yoga. Drawing from literature on the advantages and disadvantages of the guru-disciple system, the chapter will close with some reflections on the theology and psychology of the guru tradition.

#### DEFINING THE GURU

One of the most well-read books on the topic of finding and following one's guru is Baba Ram Dass's *Be Here Now*. This widely read book was published in 1971 and has sold nearly a million copies by the time of its forty-third printing in 2001. Although not generally recognized as fitting with the realm of academic scholarship, *Be Here Now* was in fact composed by Richard Alpert, a former Harvard professor of psychology whose guru bestowed on him the name Ram Dass, "servant of Lord Ram." Richard Alpert found his guru Baba Neem Karoli while traveling in India and remained devoted to his teachings even after Karoli's death in 1973. Ram Dass writes:

At certain stages in the spiritual journey, there is a quickening of the spirit which is brought about through the grace of a guru. When you are at one of the stages where you need this catalyst, it will be forthcoming. There is really nothing you can do about gurus. It doesn't work that way. If you go looking for a guru and you are not ready to find one, you will not find what you are looking for. On the other hand, when you are ready the guru will be exactly where you are at the appropriate moment.<sup>1</sup>

The famous guru Paramahansa Yogananda described such a moment in his autobiography, when Shri Yuktishvar appeared to him on the street in Banaras.<sup>2</sup> Their "chance" encounter forever altered Yogananda's life, and eventually led him to establish the Self Realization Fellowship in Los Angeles. However, not every disciple personally meets his or her guru; Ram Dass notes that "[t]here have been many saints who realized enlightenment without ever meeting their guru in a physical manifestation."<sup>3</sup> In such instances, devotion to a chosen deity (*ishta deva*) as mentioned in the *Yoga Sutra* might substitute

for the actual presence of a living spiritual preceptor, and a community of fellow believers will help form the support network required to keep balanced on the path.

In the Hindu faith, the guru can become identified with divinity. For example, Ramana Maharshi, another *mahaguru* (great guru) examined in this book, once claimed, "Guru, God, and Self are One."<sup>4</sup> While this statement is perhaps best understood from the viewpoint of non-dualism, other traditions in India clearly affirm the divine status of extraordinary teachers as well. For example, it is not uncommon to see graffiti in India that proclaims "Gurudeva," an expression that clearly imputes divinity (*deva*) to the spiritual teacher. Within the context of India, this makes sense. The conventional world occupies continuous space with the spiritual world. Special places and natural objects such as trees, stones, groves, and river systems are said to possess spiritual power (*shakti*), which abounds, permeates, and pervades what otherwise would seem ordinary. The attribution of divine qualities flows freely in India, where one's parents are proclaimed to be God, a wife's husband is said to be a God, and one's teachers are proclaimed to be God. However, we must consider what is intended by the term *god*. The religions born in India do not share the eschatological worldview of the prophetic monotheisms. They do not predict the final end of the world, only an occasional downturn in the cycle of epochs (*yugas*). Nor do they announce the coming of a single messiah, as hinted in Judaism and certain sects of Islam, and believed in Christianity. Rather, divinity comfortably finds a home in India's saints and in the epic stories of the *avatars*, heroic figures sent forth by Vishnu, the Lord of Preservation, to restore order to a world in chaos. The continuity in the Indian worldview between spirit and nature allows for certain places and individuals to be seen as infused with divinity.

#### FINDING THE GURU

In writing about the role of the guru, I must confess that I am not a neutral or objective assessor of this phenomenon. In the late '60s and early '70s, while still in high school, I set out on a spiritual quest. I was involved with Quakerism and religious theatre, performing at church services regularly with Wakefield Players, a troop recognized by the Episcopal Church. I augmented this with a bit of Zen meditation as learned from Philip Kapleau and some Yoga that I picked up from the Sikh community also known as 3HO: Happy, Healthy, Holy. In 1972, as I was setting off to college, I had an important dream, wherein Meher Baba introduced me to a gracious Indian woman. I had been reading his voluminous *Discourses* slowly over the period of that summer and from it I learned the foundational vocabulary of Indian philosophy. Of Persian descent, Meher Baba had a profound awakening experience in 1913 at

the age of nineteen. In 1925, he took a vow of silence that lasted until his death in 1969. He communicated through the use of a letter board, wrote several books, and traveled throughout the world. He wrote about the spiritual significance of dreams noting that “Masters have not infrequently first contacted aspirants by appearing in their dreams.”<sup>5</sup> I was thus prepared to experience what turned out to be a remarkable number of profound dreams that summer.

In the fall of 1972, I set off to the State University of New York at Buffalo. During my first semester, a fellow first year student told our philosophy class about a woman named Anjali, her yoga teacher in Amityville, Long Island, New York. Intrigued, over Thanksgiving break I visited the newly dedicated Yoga Anand Ashram, located in what had been the hayloft of an old barn, and Anjali’s house, a nineteenth-century tenant farmhouse in the midst of Massapequa’s sprawling suburban tract homes. Anjali served us soup as we sat around her oak table discussing the *Bhagavad Gita*, which I was studying with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness at the university. She spoke of her dedication to the yoga path and the power of spiritual practice (*sadhana*) in self-transformation and self-discovery. She encouraged me to read from a sacred text each day.

After returning to Buffalo, I remembered one of my significant dreams from the summer. Meher Baba was pulling a plow down Genesee Street in my hometown of Avon, and led me to an old farmhouse where I met a gracious Indian woman dressed in white. We discussed spiritual matters around an oak table surrounded with books by Kluckhorn and other anthropologists. I realized that the dream had come true! After further visits during my first year of college, I decided to transfer to the State University of New York at Stony Brook to continue my studies. I moved right after the end of the spring semester, got a job working in a pool factory, and embarked on a course of rigorous spiritual training.

The yoga path as taught by Anjali followed the theology and practice of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra* (ca. second century CE), and referenced popular teachings such as that found in the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Like Samkhya, yoga ascribes to the perspective that each life holds its own trajectory and that each person shapes his or her own circumstances either through actions influenced by the past or through concerted effort in the present. One does not look to an external god to effect changes in one’s life nor, strictly speaking, to another person for anything more than guidance and inspiration. Each individual shapes and controls his or her own destiny through the practices of *sadhana*. The guru (or in this case, the Gurani, a feminized Bengali form of the word), sets forth the principles and procedures for spiritual practice, but the doing lies in the hands of the doer. No one other than oneself can bestow spiritual accomplishments.

The solitary nature of the yogic quest allows for multiple styles of spiritual practice. Depending upon the personal history and proclivities of each practitioner, yoga can take many different forms even within the context of a shared community. Patanjali outlines dozens of practices in the *Yoga Sutra*, from chanting the names of God (*japa*) to careful adherence to ethical precepts to various types of concentration and meditation. All these practices seek to allow a person to restructure and redirect one's intentions and desires. Within the ashram, some individuals loved chanting and the recitation of God's names, a practice associated with the yoga of devotion, *bhakti yoga*. Others reached deeper levels of purification through selfless action or *karma yoga* (for example, through work in our vegetarian restaurant!). Others gravitated toward study and reflection, with many pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees in philosophy and religion, in the style of *jñāna yoga* (the yoga of knowledge, which privileges study and reflection to gain enlightenment). To some degree, nearly all engaged in "cross training," as it were, expressing their *sadhana* through song, work, and study.

Anjali, known by the late 1970s as Gurani Anjali or Guruma, generally taught one class a week and conducted a meditation service each Sunday morning. She trained a core group of people known as pillars or *dharma* who helped out with the business aspects of the ashram and taught beginning yoga classes. She also composed scores of songs, and many of her meditation talks have been transcribed.<sup>6</sup> Her message through song and the spoken word emphasized selfless service, purifying the senses, and honoring the lives of great spiritual leaders, including Jesus and Martin Luther King Jr.

Born and raised in Calcutta, Anjali began teaching classical Patanjali Yoga on Long Island in the 1960s. Her instruction consistently avoided specifying a single name for the supreme deity. This inclusivist, pluralist approach made her teachings accessible to suburban New York clientele as well as remained true to her own lived pluralism, for she had been married to a Jew for several years. At the time of her own initiation as a girl in India, her guru bestowed upon her the chosen deity (*ishta deva*) of Jesus, not unusual in Brahma Samaj-influenced West Bengal. She, in turn, bestowed on her first initiate the deity Krishna, and did not necessarily specify a chosen deity for subsequent initiates.

Within the context of the ashram ritual life, deities were of little or no importance, aside from Agni, the deity manifesting as the ever present flame kindled with ghee upon the fire altar (*havan*). Aside from her own personal devotions and the devotions she encouraged among her first initiate, she preferred to refer to the goal and purpose of yoga as ascending to higher levels of consciousness, and would often talk about the *maha purusha* or great soul. However, despite her unwillingness to specify the name of God, she spoke often of love, of devotion (*bhakti*), and of Mirabai, the sixteenth-century Rajasthani princess who rejected all social expectations in her ardent passion

for Lord Krishna. Anjali clearly drew inspiration from Mirabai while developing a method of spiritual practice for those who studied yoga under her guidance. In fact, within nine years of founding the ashram, Gurani Anjali published forty-four songs, each expressing profound devotion and spiritual yearning. One such song, “Someone is Calling,” speaks to the yearning that often accompanies the spiritual quest:

Someone is calling, Someone is calling, Someone is calling us  
 Someone is calling, Our hearts are yearning, Someone is calling me  
 Someone is calling, Our hearts are yearning, Someone is calling you and  
     me  
 The world is hearing, Our hearts are yearning, Someone is calling me  
 Without the cymbals, Without the trumpets, Without the sounding of  
     the drum  
 We hear the calling, Our hearts are yearning, Someone is calling me

This song recognizes and praises that capacity within the human being to be called to a higher purpose. Her songs reveal a clear philosophical anthropology, indicating that spiritual yearning is a fundamental feature of human experience. She asks the singer to recognize the immediacy of this innate longing by claiming that the specific individual is being called, indicated by the word *me*. Then, recognizing the universality of this spiritual impulse, she claims that we are all in fact being called, and that the world itself can hear this invitation for conscious evolution. However, this “upward movement” happens in silence. Only the heart can hear. No cymbals, trumpets, or drums beat or blare forth to announce this sacred invitation, only the whispered silence in the heart issues this call.

Theologically, this theme of the unheard sound finds precedent in the *Rig Vedic* hymn of creation, which talks of the one breathing without air and proclaiming that even the sages and gods in heaven do not really know definitively about the origin and nature of the world. Gurani Anjali sings to that unseen seer of the *Upanishads*, the uncreated and uncreative *purusha*, the Yogi in sacred isolation (*kaivalyam*), idealized by the sage Patanjali as the liberated soul free of all karmic impressions.

Guru Anjali’s songs often advert to *Samkhya Karika* (ca. third century CE), a text that encapsulates the metaphysical assumptions of the yoga and Samkhya schools of Indian philosophy. These schools affirm a realistic dualism of soul and matter; that is to say, while an ontological superiority is granted to spirit, the physical world is not at all illusory as some have interpreted in Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta. The physical world in fact is the vehicle or instrument for liberation while also being the proximate cause for suffering (for even the most sublime mental and physical satisfactions are fleeting). Indeed, Patanjali writes in words that very much evoke the teaching of the Buddha, “all is suffering for

the sage” (*Yoga Sutra* 2.15). By this he means that attachment to impermanent events inevitably produces suffering. Realizing this, the sage transcends it.

To express the mystery of the dualism of soul and matter, Samkhya often appeals to a famous metaphor in the *Mundaka Upanishad*. Two birds sit in a tree; one is silent, the other active, busily pecking at fruit. The former is the soul, the silent witness to phenomenal events, and the latter is the embodied ego, bearing and “eating” the fruit of ego-driven impulses and activities. This tension is further symbolized in the *Samkhya Karika* as an eternal and mysterious dance between material activity (*prakriti*) and consciousness (*purusha*). The following song of Guru Anjali clearly refers to this:

I know that you are watching me  
 In the silence you are watching me  
 I know that you are watching me  
 So I'll dance, yes I'll dance, yes I'll dance  
 This dance for you, alone  
 Yes I'll dance, this dance for you, alone  
 I know that you are there beside me  
 Ever silently beside me  
 I know that you are close to me  
 Silently watching, watching me  
 When I am caressed  
 In the arms of ecstasy  
 The joy becomes the pain I bear  
 Then I know you are watching, watching me

Here we see Anjali's metaphysic clearly informed by Samkhya Yoga philosophy. The soul is the seer of all activity of the mind-body complex, and therein ultimately lie the seeds for freedom. The mind-body complex establishes a host of ego-identifications either validated or invalidated by experience. But this process is inevitably frustrating, as if we are perpetually riding a roller coaster of success and failure which either affirms or insults our various ego-identifications. Guru Anjali and the yoga system both indicate that we are more than such identifications: We are the unseen seer of all phenomenal events. And yet the pain we experience in our more limited perspective paradoxically is to be celebrated, for it is exquisitely instructive, ultimately serving as a “slingshot” into deeper self-knowledge. In this sense, “experience” becomes the greatest guru of all, for embedded within it are the conditions not only for suffering but eventual liberation. In this regard, there is a clear telos to experience in Samkhya Yoga; mundane experience, with its fascinating array of pain and pleasure, tends ultimately toward liberation.

The theme of pain and its instrumental role in Samkhya continues in the following song, entitled *Purusha*:

O *Purusha* bound from within / without  
 Looking without from within  
 Form drifting by  
 Silently absorbed in the play  
 Curtains rise and they fall  
 To be or not to be  
*Purusha* bound from within / without looking on  
 No wonder the pain is never too painful  
 The joy never complete  
 No wonder the pain never too painful  
 The joy never complete  
 Spring showers  
 Summer heat  
 Autumn breezes  
 Winter cold  
 O *Purusha* bound from within / without looking on  
 Forms drifting by  
 Silently absorbed in the play  
 Curtains rise and they fall  
 To be or not to be  
*Purusha* bound from within / without looking on  
 No wonder the pain is never too painful  
 The joy never complete  
 No wonder the pain is never too painful  
 The joy never complete  
*Purusha* bound from within / without looking on  
*Om Satyam Shivam Sundaram*

This song contains a wistful celebration of the irony of life highlighting the presence of the world in its beauty and agony as constitutive and necessary for the spiritual quest. In the philosophy of Samkhya Yoga, we in fact *must* exhaust our phenomenal experience, burning up all the habituated egotism associated with it. Pain then becomes a mere phenomenal event, to be witnessed along with every other phenomenal event. In this case, there is pain, but no suffering. Suffering obtains from attachment to egocentric identifications. The process of “burning up” these identifications occurs through meditation. Meditation stops the mind and allows the witness to emerge. Here, yoga (“yoke,” “unite”), while often construed as a method of “attaching” oneself to the divine, is very much about “detaching” oneself from the spinning drama of mental and physical events.<sup>7</sup> Suffering has value, however, as premier catalyst for the spiritual life. In the last song I will quote, Anjali sings about the process of meditation. She again acknowledges that people are moved to meditate because of the burdens of life. Anjali often mentioned in her talks that Mirabai took up the

spiritual life because of the agony she experienced at the hands of her in-laws. Just as Mirabai was driven to ecstasy in the context of persecution, so also the yogi reaches for the transcendent because of the pains that come from affiliation with the phenomenal world, illustrated in this song, *Meditation*:

There is a place called meditation  
 Brought through deep concentration  
 Born of the afflictions  
 There's a place called meditation  
 Beyond the senses  
 Beyond the mind  
 Beyond the body  
 Beyond you and me  
 In this place  
 There is no fear  
 The heights are soared beyond the stars  
 All those that have been there  
 Have taken rebirth  
 Born of the silence  
 Words cannot express  
 A place called meditation

Singing praise to the meditation process, she creates a meditative space for reflection on the power of silence that can be felt at a song's end. This silence is the "still point of the turning world" that T. S. Eliot speaks of in his own extraordinary poem, *Four Quartets*. The practice of classical yoga aims to calm the mind precisely in order to arrive at that sacred still point.

I had always felt a keen draw to classical yoga philosophy, and in 1972 I had successfully found my guru, Anjali. During our undergraduate years, through graduate school, and for our first years of employment, my wife and I participated in yoga training under the guidance of this remarkable woman. We entered life in the ashram with great energy. While with Gurani, we helped to establish a vegetarian restaurant, co-managed a bookstore, helped with editing and publishing her book *Ways of Yoga*, and supported the spiritual and ritual life of the community, which generally numbered no more than one hundred people.

During the 1970s, relatively few Asian Indians had settled on Long Island, and nearly all the people in the ashram were representative of the local demographic: largely Jewish and Christian, mainly white, with some African Americans participating from time to time. Most were in their late teens and twenties; including veterans, high school dropouts, college students, and some older housewives. Anjali was firmly committed to offering yoga to people from all walks of life. Rather than re-crafting a purely Asian ashram, she chose to deemphasize the "Hindu" aspects of the tradition. Though she often read from

the *Upanishads* and assigned to us memorization of entire sections of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Yoga Sutra*, she was as likely to refer to the Bible or Jesus or the practices of Judaism and Islam in her lectures and meditations. Education led her from Calcutta to New York, and a variety of circumstances brought her to Long Island. She established the ashram after teaching yoga through night classes at the local school district.

One of the central issues of this volume is the interface of “traditional” Indian cultural assumptions within a Western cultural context. The edges of this interface at Yoga Anand Ashram were no more evident than in gender roles and relationships. Gurani’s commitment to inclusivity extended to both genders. Guruma worked with both men and women at the Yoga Anand Ashram. Yet from time to time, she would follow the Indian convention of asking the men to sit on one side and the women on the other, or the men in front and the women in back. These formalities were periodic and sometimes puzzling. She would often make allusions to Hindu folk wisdom regarding gender, joking that men are always searching, and that women ultimately hold great power because of their creative powers. Women, she would say, are active, like *prakriti*, the creative principle in Samkhya. Men are watchers, not doers, and need a woman to keep them engaged and moving. While such representations clearly issue from a South Asian cultural context, especially in the Samkhya philosophical worldview, her practitioners at times became confused: she sometimes advocated traditional gender roles, but particularly through her own example, she generally flaunted social gender norms, more from a place of fearlessness than of pride or aggressiveness. She taught the women of the ashram how to wear saris, and designed a simple tunic and *salwar* outfit for the male “pillars,” those individuals who chose to share in her vision and dedicate their life to assist her in creating, upholding, and maintaining the ashram. The pillars were all encouraged to wear combinations of yellow and green, with the yellow representing *purusha*, the sun, and the male gender, and green representing *prakriti*, the material earth, and the female gender.

Guruma’s own guru had been a storefront yoga teacher in Calcutta called Krishna. After several years of living in the United States, she visited her old neighborhood in India, but could find no trace of her teacher’s operation. By contrast, Guruma proved to be a whirlwind of extraordinary creative activity, accomplishing a great deal in her lifetime that endures after her passing. She built from scratch a spiritual organization that has lasted more than three decades, and an array of businesses, including an art gallery, a bookstore, and a restaurant. She also established a women’s organization named Shakti Sangam, which continues to meet and discuss women’s issues and women’s spirituality.

To make the ashram attractive and meaningful to the local Long Island clientele, Anjali arranged feasts and festivals that did not reflect the Hindu holiday cycle but were adapted from her own growing intimacy with the climate and local flavor of Long Island. She would occasionally tell stories of her own

training, but she did not maintain any active links with India or other spiritual organizations. Though many conventions within the ashram clearly found their inspiration from India, Anjali did not seek to attract Indian devotees. In the tradition of the *raja yoga* lineage, Anjali had become a truly independent guru, standing alone in sharing her unique interpretation of spirituality to disciples.

#### THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

I welcomed the invitation to contribute to this book as an opportunity to reflect on my experience in the context of the overall context of the guru-disciple tradition. What attracted me to Yoga Anand Ashram? In his 1977 book *Turning East: Why Americans Look to the Orient for Spirituality and What That Search Can Mean to the West*, Harvard Divinity School theologian Harvey Cox explores several paths of alternative religious experience and outlines six “types” who join such communities. The six reasons are a search for friendship, to “experience life directly,” to be delivered from “overchoice” by an authority, to live a more simple or natural life, to escape male domination, and for environmental reasons.<sup>8</sup> Religious communities of whatever faith might provide some fulfillment of the six needs listed by Cox. Most, however, will offer some approach or avenue to a religious experience that transcends the somewhat conventional or psychologized needs articulated by Cox.

Upon reflection, three of Cox’s categories clearly did not fit my situation: I had plenty of great friends before my ashram life, I did not crave an authority figure to mandate the details of my life, and I did not feel particularly oppressed by male domination. My own reasons did include three of the six: a quest for immediacy, simplicity, and ecological integration, and I will explain below how my ashram experience moved me toward those three areas, as well as attempt to articulate some additional reasons, drawing from personal experience, to explain the allure of the guru-disciple relationship. Notably absent from Cox’s list are the two prime reasons given in Indian texts as to why people pursue a religious quest: desire for knowledge (*jijñāsa*) and desire for liberation (*mumukshu*).<sup>9</sup>

The path taught at Yoga Anand Ashram grounds itself in classical or *raja* (“royal”) *yoga*. Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra* defines yoga as “the restraint of fluctuations in the mind” (*yogas-chitta-vritti-nirodhah*). After defining five different states of mind, Patanjali gives more than two dozen techniques for bringing the mind to equanimity or dispassion (*vairagya*). This dispassion allows one to conquer thirst, the core cause of suffering. Patanjali lists several dozen methods to accomplish yoga. These techniques range from reflection on auspicious dreams to different styles of meditation, breathing techniques, postures, devotionism, ethical behavior, and clear thinking. In one way or another, all these methods were employed in the course of Gurani’s yoga training. The result would fit

into Cox's first category: an ability to experience life directly. According to yoga psychology, past actions (*samskaras*) cloud a person's ability to see the world clearly. The practices of yoga purify a person's karma, allowing one to see things as they are, to stop expecting or projecting, and move into a mode of acceptance and absorption (*samadhi*). The final goal of yoga is described in various ways, including becoming "like a clear jewel" (*Yoga Sutra* I:41), the destruction of all karmic seeds (*Yoga Sutra* I:51), becoming the pure seer (II:20), gaining sovereignty over all states of being (III:49), dwelling in a cloud of *dharma* (proper behavior, duty, righteousness) (IV:29), and, finally, pure isolation (*kaivalyam*), defined as steadfastness in one's true nature and the power of higher awareness (IV:34). Some have criticized the philosophy and practice of yoga as a form of escapism. In my experience, yoga can only be understood through rigorous self-analysis and self-correction. To me, yoga has been more of a confrontation of oneself than an escape from oneself.

Ram Dass has written that the guru serves as a mirror that reflects back to oneself one's state of mind and level of attachment. In a very informal style, he explains the guru as follows:

He has no attachment either to life. Or death. And: if he takes on your karma it is your karma. That he should take on your karma. Simple as that. You see: You are the guru . . . and *that's* what you finally know when you are hanging out with one of these guys. You hang out with yourself because there's nobody at home there at all. So to the extent that there's hanging out (in the interpersonal sense) all you can be seeing are your own desires. He is a perfect mirror since there's nobody there.<sup>10</sup>

For the first three years after the initial excitement of beginning yoga training, the process of self-reflection was quite painful. I struggled with seeing thoughts and behaviors of mine that—while not pathological—were uncomfortable, and I sought purification and improvement. At times, Gurani would mirror to me my own expectations and attachments. For instance, after one singing practice she praised everyone else in the room, but ignored me. For me, accustomed to being rewarded for good behavior, this was devastating. Then I realized the source of my attachment, and I struggled through the foul mood that overwhelmed me and surrendered into an unspeakable place of acceptance. Simultaneously, I felt the concern and compassion of her desire for me to rise to a higher state and I felt my grade-school-engendered search for praise and acknowledgment loosen. It was a transformative moment.

The second aspect discussed by Cox entails simplicity. In his book, Cox includes an extended critique of spiritual consumerism. Citing Veblen's famous essay on conspicuous consumption, he describes a "new gluttony" that, in the twenty-five years since the publication of his book, has only increased. Cox observes that religion—even "Oriental" religions—has become big business, and he satirically refers to this phenomenon as "Enlightenment by Tick-

etron.”<sup>11</sup> Eventually, Cox suggests that true spirituality for America should be found within biblical roots, citing the commercialization of non-Western faiths as one reason. In my experience, however, the ethics of yoga explicitly address Cox’s concern with gluttony.

The most systematic aspect of Patanjali’s system includes eight discrete practices: disciplines, observances, yoga postures, breath control, inwardness, concentration, meditation, and *samadhi* or absorption. Disciplines (*yama*) and observances (*niyama*) constitute the ethical core of Patanjali’s eightfold system. At Yoga Anand Ashram, students in the applied method (*sadhana*) classes are given a discipline and/or observance to practice for the week. The first time I heard about this practice was in conversation with Carole Zieler in the Student Union at the State University of New York at Buffalo. She said that she had received her *sadhana* in the mail, and she was to practice nonviolence or *ahimsa*, which meant, among other things, that she needed to find cookies made without eggs! I became intrigued with the detail of this practice, which was my first introduction to dietary orthopraxy. Several months later after moving to Long Island, I entered a *sadhana* class, and each week brought a new challenge. How could I make my life more austere? We routinely observed a weekly day of fast and weekly day of silence as an aspect of austerity (*tapas*). But what more could be done? We worked at not walking off with little things such as pencils and or hoarding intangible things such as time while practicing not stealing (*asteya*), another of the five ethical disciplines in the first stage of Patanjali’s eightfold path. Truthfulness (*satya*), another discipline, was always a great challenge. How could I resist the temptation to exaggerate? Was my being in the world fully authentic? Though my wife and I shared these practices with one another, the bulk of our days were spent on a university campus where such topics were not appropriate to bring up in conversation. So we cultivated a life of ethical introspection rooted in Patanjali’s yoga while engaged in our studies and campus jobs, enjoying the company of our fellow yoga students while in class at night and on the weekends. In little and big ways, we forged a different path than that dictated by the dominant culture, which was promoting disco dancing and the hustle. Perhaps the biggest culture gap came with the practice of non-possession (*aparigraha*). For our teacher, this meant avoidance of debt. In India, lending policies have historically been draconian. Until recently, even houses were paid for with cash. We came to value and stretch our meager resources and live a truly simple lifestyle that has carried over to a certain extent in our adult years.

The other aspect of my relationship with my guru that merits mention pertains to Cox’s sixth category, pertaining to those who “had turned to some version of an Eastern tradition as the result of a concern for health, ecology and the conservation of the planet’s dwindling resources.”<sup>12</sup> Having been raised in an intensely rural environment, I carried an innate aversion to settling in the country’s largest and most densely populated metropolitan region. In the

ritual life of the ashram, however, I found a sense of comfort and connection with the rhythm of nature. Compared to the tropical climate of Calcutta, Anjali observed great beauty in New York's changing seasons. She initiated festivals in honor of each of these changes and eventually asked me to serve as the ritualist or *pujari* to organize these events. As *pujari* of the ashram, in addition to organizing the seasonal festivals, I was responsible for blessing the ashram each sunrise and sunset with the *Gayatri Mantra*, maintaining the flowers and fruits on the altar (*havan*), making certain the incense was lit during Sunday morning meditations, and, on two occasions, officiating at weddings.

Anjali would tell us stories about the power of the monsoon rains, and encourage us to fully experience the extremes of heat and cold that characterize the weather on Long Island. During the Christmas season, she designed Deva Devi Ratra, a festival in honor of great sages from Buddha to Zoroaster to Jesus. Acknowledgment was made to the power of the sun at each equinox and solstice. In the summer, we would gather for a picnic, replete with volleyball and other traditional summertime pastimes. In the winter, we would sing late into the night and light candles in honor of the world's great sages. In fall, we would share poetry and prepare food in the style of a New World vegetarian harvest. In spring, the festival would celebrate the return of the flowers and the warm weather. Though none of these festivals bear much similarity with the traditional religious celebrations in India, Anjali saw these to be important events for raising the consciousness of her American students. As she often emphasized, she had to invent new traditions reflecting life on Long Island.

Additionally, our yoga training included an intense study of the five great elements, or *mahabhutas*. Over a period of several months we dedicated a space of time each day to gazing and reflecting upon the power of the earth, then the power of water, of fire, of air, and finally of space itself. This set of concentrations (known in Buddhism as the *kasinas* and in Brahmanism as *bhuta shuddhi*) brought me into that sought-after immediacy, a connection with the fundamental aspects of reality that can be found regardless of the specificity of one's environment. Having been a connoisseur of the sweeping vistas of the Finger Lakes and the glimmering sunsets of the cloud-studded western New York landscapes, I remember commenting to a fellow yoga student that the little bit of median strip along the Grand Central Parkway in Queens included it all: green earth, moist soil, glimmering sunlight, grasses swaying in the breeze. This simple observation brought all my years of wandering through fields and forests into the immediacy of a parkway moment, and helped release my nostalgia and wistfulness for being elsewhere.

In addition to working with the elements, we were also given *sadhana* that included concentration on the sensory process and sustained observations of animals. I would revel in seeing Anjali interact joyously with her own dogs. She seemed simply to merge with the consciousness of animals; they would respond to her quiet signals with alertness and eager compliance. Our trainings

in the elements, the senses, and animals, combined with an ongoing practice of *ahimsa*, served to anchor some of my later scholarship, which has focused on issues of ecological concern.

#### FINDING THE GURU WITHIN

As my life in yoga matured, my relationship with the guru also changed. When I first came to the ashram, I was in awe, a bit dumbstruck by the power and gracefulness of this woman who had dedicated herself to building a refuge where people from any and all walks of life could learn the joys of yoga. As mentioned earlier, she made a spiritual home available and open to anyone. Some of us were college students, some of us were college educated. Others (many others) were high school dropouts who were drifting through life. She treated all of us equally. I received no special praise for my chosen career in scholarship (though I was told later that she was happy for my work on behalf of elucidating yoga). In fact, much of her time was taken up with helping people in great need: cancer survivors, people recovering from various types of addictions (or at least attempting to), and people who were sad and lonely. Her generosity seemed endless. And yet I also saw a human side, as she dealt with her own family issues and worked at finding a balance between motherhood and ashram management. As she became humanized in my eyes, I not only came to a deeper appreciation for her seemingly boundless energy, but I gradually came to a fuller recognition of my own gifts and calling in life.

An added duty I held as *pujari* was to greet the car when the Gurani would arrive to speak, open the door, and escort her upstairs. To my great surprise, after several months (or years?) of this routine, one day she hopped out, ushered me into the car, closed the door, and then went through the formalities of opening the door for me! It was all in great fun, but also signaled a lighthearted change in our relationship.

Achievements along the yogic path were marked by various rites of passage. After several months or years in the beginners' class, one would move into a more advanced class, generally taught by Anjali or her assistant director, who was a graduate student studying Indian philosophy. All students were encouraged to study the Sanskrit language. Additionally, several dozen students entered Pillar training, an intense preparation to accept more responsibilities within the ashram. For instance, all *pujaris* have been Pillars. Special ceremonies were held to acknowledge the completion of Pillar training, including a small ceremony for my wife and me after we had moved to California. Gurani Anjali passed away in 2001. During her lifetime, Gurani bestowed her final initiation on only four people: Padmani, Indu, Viraj, and Satyam. In this ceremony, each individual received a special *mantra* and a new name. Though neither my wife nor myself received this honor, our lives have

been enriched beyond description by having the opportunity to grow into maturity with her blessing. She modeled a wonderful style of teaching for both of us: Meet people, know their needs, be bold, be tactful, be fun. Her life also spoke to us in lessons unsaid. We learned to be busy but to avoid being overextended, an accomplishment not realized until our move from New York to California. Anjali, reflecting her commitment to Samkhya philosophy and its emphasis on individual souls, commented frequently that “we come alone and we go alone.” Our physical parting from the ashram after twelve years of constant involvement shocked the community, but did not result in ostracism or resentment. We felt our inner growth propelled us to a new environment. We continue to benefit from and give back to the world some of the wonderful lessons we learned from our teacher.

#### INAUSPICIOUS ENCOUNTERS

Not all the lessons learned in life are happy lessons. Though I of course encountered my share of power struggles and internal jealousies and sometimes confusing administrative decisions in the ashram, in the process I learned a great deal about the structure of organizations and about human nature. Not all people have pure intentions. Unfortunately, spiritual communities can sometimes become a trap, particularly if an individual does not have the fortitude to integrate ethics with power. After college, one of our acquaintances, Fred Lenz, who had studied with a different New York City Hindu guru, announced to us that he had learned how to lecture, mesmerize his listeners, and attract followers. He had also learned how to obtain free publicity. He preceded us in our move to California and though we never saw him again, some of my university students in Los Angeles were his disciples. His photograph was even displayed with Yogananda and Krishnamurti in the Bodhi Tree Bookstore, the spiritual center of West Hollywood! In his ten or so year career as a guru, he amassed millions of dollars, beautiful houses, and enjoyed relationships with hundreds of women. Having known Fred fairly well, we were surprised and skeptical. We knew that he used flattery to gain followers and had faked a book on reincarnation. Sadly, our intuitions proved correct. After a scandal, he was driven from California back to New York. He committed suicide on Long Island in 1998, drowning with his dog in his beloved Conscience Bay after overdosing on barbiturates.<sup>13</sup>

Was Fred a sad aberration, or is there something inherently flawed in a system that accords divine status to its leaders? The *Guru Gita*, a medieval text in praise of the guru tradition, states in verse 13 that “the water of the Guru’s feet (has the power) to dry up the mire of one’s sins, to ignite the light of knowledge, and to take one smoothly across the ocean of this world.” This attitude toward the guru is wonderful and essential for the disciple. Devotion to a

guru allows one to adopt the ultimate role model. The guru symbolizes the best of all human possibility. According to the *Yoga Sutra*, all gurus have been instructed by Ishvara, the supreme teacher who has been untouched by karma or its afflictions. By ascribing divine qualities to the teacher, the disciple creates for himself or herself a new standard for excellence, a paradigm to be emulated. Feelings of deep love and respect often accompany this devotion or *guru-bhakti*. But what does it do for the guru? If the guru can withstand all the adoration and the rigors of being constantly on call, as can be seen with several contemporary teachers, then everything will feel safe. But in some cases, things have gone terribly wrong, as with Fred Lenz.

Some critics will seemingly condemn gurus categorically, as found in the work of Anthony Storr. Though he acknowledges that some gurus are saints, he also writes that some are simply mentally disordered. Storr attributes a form of narcissism to all gurus, saying that they “retain this need to be loved and to be the centre of attention together with the grandiosity which accompanies it.”<sup>14</sup> He goes on to note that the guru “remains an isolated figure who does not usually have any close friends who might criticize him on equal terms.” He cites Gurdjieff, Rajneesh, and Ignatius of Loyola as prime examples. Though he does not impugn the basic notion of the validity of religious transcendence and the need for spiritual leadership, he feels compelled to present a typology of pathological behavior. Jeffrey Masson has attempted to do a similar analysis in his discussions of Shri Ramakrishna and Gurdjieff.<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Kripal created a great controversy when he attempted to find psychological causes for Ramakrishna’s visions,<sup>16</sup> and Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad devote an entire volume to the dangers of blindly following authoritarian mandates.<sup>17</sup> A critical reevaluation of the guru-disciple relationship is being attempted, with, in the case of Kramer and Alstad, the suggestion that the institution be replaced by more democratic, relational structures.

Despite a generally positive assessment of gurus after a rather harrowing experience in the 1980s, Georg Feuerstein cautions about “crazy-wise adepts and eccentric masters”:

To the extent that they can help us free ourselves from the blinders with which we block our Reality and conceal ourselves (or our Self) from ourselves, we would do well to heed their message. At the same time, I feel, they are relics of an archaic spirituality that, sooner or later, will be replaced by a more integrated approach to self-transcendence. This new approach will be sustained by teachers, including holy fools, who place personal growth and integrity above the need to instruct, Reality above traditional fidelity, and compassion and humor, above all role-playing.<sup>18</sup>

Interestingly, he cites Ramakrishna as an example of a guru who established friend-like relations with disciples, and commends Sri Aurobindo for encouraging frank debate among his followers.

The literature on the controversial aspects of the guru tradition is quite extensive, as the bibliographies in any of the books cited will indicate. Our own teacher expressed a slight sorrow at her situation from time to time, saying: "It is lonely at the top," "Heavy is the head that wears the crown of thorns," and, "Even the therapist sometimes needs therapy." Standing by the vow to help others can be beautiful and liberating, but it can also become burdensome. Having witnessed the comportment of many spiritual leaders or gurus of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, and Jaina faiths, I feel compassion for them because of the great burdens they have assumed. Driven by an inner calling to be of service to others, they run the risk of placing their own well-being in peril.

#### REVISITING THE GURU TRADITION

Do the counterexamples of Fred Lenz and others and the hesitations put forth by the various scholars mentioned above in any way invalidate the tradition of spiritual leadership? I would argue not, based on my own experience. Without the commitment of men and women willing to serve others, the world will even more rapidly fall into the consumer-driven pit of gluttony. We need heroic figures such as the environmentalist Julia Butterfly, the young woman who sat for months high in the tree called Luna, to do the unexpected, to demonstrate that the human being can ascend beyond the humdrum existence to embrace a higher cause. We can learn from others, as long as our intentions are clear and we hold sight of our own dignity. A guru or spiritual advisor must be grounded in creating a safe place that acknowledges an underlying spiritual equality. When this space serves as the ground, then the work of spiritual introspection can begin. On the one hand, the guru has the difficult task of respecting the student; on the other hand, the guru needs to devise techniques and seize opportunities to awaken the student and move him or her to transcend the constraint of their ego-defined self. For me, this training was not always pleasant. It was, however, clear that *sadhana* was given not to enhance the status of our teacher or even our organization, but for the purposes of my own purification. By exerting one's will and creativity, one advances along the spiritual path. As long as one seeks to please the teacher, no growth can be effected. Ultimately, the boundary between teacher and student, guru and disciple, needs to melt.

The guru tradition arose within the context of a highly hierarchical society. In traditional India, one's status in the family and caste determines one's expected behavior. Obedience to one's parents and elders, rather than any questioning of authority as found in the United States, is the norm. As noted above, texts such as the *Guru Gita* extol the need to submit to the authority of a higher teacher. Seeming inequalities can be seen throughout the traditional,

pre-independence society that stem from this assent to hierarchy, from special privileges accruing to people of high caste to sometimes crude treatment of women.

Some organizations have questioned the usefulness of continuing the guru-disciple tradition, such as can be seen in the institution of a complex governance board for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and the replacement of Amrit Desai as head of Kripalu, a large yoga center located in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. However, will these changes diminish the guru tradition? William Cenkner makes the following potent observations about the centrality of the guru to the Hindu tradition:

The guru occasions the immediacy of the religious experience of the devotee. For the faith-filled devotee, he [*sic*] is the center of mystery. The sacred center of Hindu life is the living guru . . . his followers experience him as the restorer of the *dharmā* order. . . . The guru is the center of sacredness. In his company the scriptures, idols and even liberation paths pale in importance. . . . The guru is the context wherein an individual gathers spiritual resources in order to encounter mystery; likewise, the guru is mystery itself in the faith experience of some devotees.<sup>19</sup>

Though Cenkner primarily refers to India's thirteen-hundred-year-old Shankaracharya tradition, he also includes within his definition of gurus the many new teachers and religious leaders who fall within the rubric. Daniel Gold, in his study of north Indian saints (*sants*), notes that "the redemptive power of *sants* of the past is made available through the living guru. His words convey their instructions, explain the meaning of scripture, and make known the will of the highest divine."<sup>20</sup> However, at the same time, Gold comments on the human qualities of the guru: "The earthly embodiment of the guru known to close disciples is a living, changing person whose behavior may seem continually paradoxical, and his outer worship is performed through practical service that is often unpredictable and almost always most mundane."<sup>21</sup> The mercurial nature of the guru seems both to reflect his or her humanity and mysterious allure.

Theology in India seems well equipped to accommodate the notion of *gurudeva*, viz., the idea that divinity can be revealed through one's relationship with a living teacher. Persons generally approach such an individual with an understanding that the spiritual path requires at least two elements: a desire to learn and a desire for liberation. The Advaita Vedanta text *Atmabodha* begins by suggesting that persons on the spiritual path should already be of "diminished sin due to their austerities, peaceful, and free from attachment." In the traditional context, a guru often ascends within the confines of a preexisting organization with a number of social controls in place. This is not always the case in the West. In the American context specifically, as noted by Harvey Cox, people might more readily approach a guru from a different sort of need. In some

instances, disciples might be seeking to replace a weak relationship with authority or a desire to be “re-parented,” a phenomenon that I witnessed within the ashram and other spiritual organizations with a strong leader in charge. I have seen some of my own university students drawn to spiritual teachers in an attempt to undo damage incurred during childhood. By devoting themselves to a new mother figure or new father figure, they hope to return to an earlier state of innocence and unload whatever had burdened them in their younger years. Gurani Anjali spent a great deal of time with some of the more psychologically needy of her students and, in some instances, I have seen some lives transformed by her care and attention. However, some persons did not find that the practice of Yoga met this specific need and moved on rather quickly. Such a situation complicates the job of the guru, whose training does not necessarily include being able to assess the mental health of his or her disciples.

The guru-disciple relationship remains one of the most complex and dynamic of possible interpersonal encounters. For me, it gave focus and grounding to my life. Combined with the good guidance of various professors and a wonderful family, my experiences within a traditional ashram context have been formative, informative, and transformational. I see in my own university a desire for many faculty members to mentor their students, to guide them into appropriate career paths, to give them advice from time to time on personal issues. Though seemingly less hierarchical, it seems that even in such a seemingly mundane context as a university, the precepts and intentions of improving others through instruction and examples can be found in abundance.

#### NOTES

An earlier version of this chapter appeared in Norvene Vest, ed., *Tending the Holy: Spiritual Direction Across Traditions* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2003), 32–44.

1. Baba Ram Dass, *Remember Be Here Now* (San Cristobal, NM: Lama Foundation, 1971), 4.

2. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1946), 92–97.

3. Dass, *Remember Be Here Now*, 5.

4. *Ibid.*, 7.

5. Meher Baba, *Discourses*, 7th ed. (Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Press, 1987), 180.

6. See Gurani Anjali, *Ways of Yoga* (Amityville, NY: Vajra Printing and Publishing of Yoga Anand Ashram, 1993).

7. For an extended discussion of yoga metaphysics and objectives, see the first chapter of Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

8. Harvey Cox, *Turning East: Why Americans Look to the Orient for Spirituality and What That Search Can Mean to the West* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 95–100.
9. Sankaracarya, *Atmabodha*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1970), 1.
10. Dass, *Remember Be Here Now*, 65–66.
11. Cox, *Turning East*, 129–45.
12. *Ibid.*, 100.
13. Beth Landman Keil and Deborah Mitchell, “The Yuppie Guru’s Last Seduction,” *New York Magazine*, 1999.
14. Anthony Storr, *Feet of Clay: Saints, Sinners, and Madmen: A Study of Gurus* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 211.
15. See *The Oceanic Experience* for his critiques of Ramakrishna and *My Father’s Guru* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1993) for the intriguing story of his family’s relationship with Gurdjieff.
16. Jeffrey Kripal, *Kali’s Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).
17. Joel Kramer and Diana Alstand, *The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power* (Berkeley: Frog, Ltd, 1993).
18. Georg Feuerstein, *Holy Madness: The Shock Tactics and Radical Teachings of Crazy-Wise Adepts, Holy Fools, and Rascal Gurus* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 259.
19. William Cenkner, *A Tradition of Teachers: Sankara and the Jagadgurus Today* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), 186–87.
20. Daniel Gold, *The Lord as Guru: Hindi Sants in North Indian Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 213.
21. *Ibid.*, 44–45.