

Symbols of the Self

I visited India for the first time in 1969. Although it has since become a cliché, it would be fair to say that on my arrival in Bombay I felt that I had 'come home.' I could not put my finger on the source of this feeling at the time but I later realized that perhaps India was so special for me because she did not speak only of herself. In the West the objects we encounter daily are purely self-referential. You meet Joe and his name takes you nowhere. It is just a label for the body standing in front of you. What does it mean to say that an automobile is a Chevy or a Ford? Public buildings say, "I am an insurance office" or "I am a hamburger joint" and nothing more. Even churches rather resemble dental clinics than point to the heavens where their God presumably dwells.

In India things are what they are, but at the same time they are doorways to the limitless world of spirit. This is enticing for an inquiring mind but it can be a problem because you will never mine the depths of this fascinating culture unless you are given the code to her apparently obscure, oftentimes bizarre and apparently irrational symbolism.

Wherever you turn you are reminded of the mystery that pervades every atom of the visible. When you meet a man named Shiva or a woman named Laxmi the mind journeys to the realm of myth, the world that gives form to what must forever remain formless.

The 'big rigs,' goods lorries, are the lifeblood of commerce but also serve as chariots of the Gods sporting names like Garuda Transport or Hanuman Trucking. Garuda, a massive golden eagle capable of supersonic flight, is the vehicle for the great god Vishnu, 'the one who pervades everything.' Hanuman, the monkey God flew through the air carrying a whole mountain of herbs from the Himalayas to revive the simian army of Sri Ram, an avatar of Vishnu who came to earth to reestablish Dharma. The boy at Shiva Shakti cleaners who tends your laundry is called Govinda, 'the keeper of the light.' An ochre clad sadhu or garlanded cow with a sandalwood paste third eye wanders past and your mind leaves the cares of the day to wander in the infinite.

Indians swim in a sea of symbolism. A wealth of positive associations settle and reassure an anxious mind, but visitors are invariably confused by the riotous display of arcane symbols. As early European visitors to the Subcontinent did a century ago, we may be inclined to deem her culture primitive or pagan, but we would be wrong.

To understand India's symbols we must go back several thousand years before the birth of Christ and investigate the ideas enshrined in civilization's oldest extant spiritual texts, the Vedas, ideas that account for the exceptional longevity and vitality of Indian culture. The Vedas say that the world that appears as insentient matter to our senses is actually ever-free limitless consciousness. It further contends that the beings in the world are non-separate from it, and therefore...again contrary to appearances...are not condemned to suffer, but, like it, enjoy limitless freedom. And while their innate freedom may be hidden from them, it can be rediscovered by contemplation on the truths contained in the Vedas. The freedom that is our birthright is called *moksha*, liberation and is defined as freedom from dependence on objects. An object is anything other than one's self. The consistent realization of this freedom by untold millions over thousands of years accounts for the homogeneity and longevity of Vedic culture.

Though too subtle for an extrovert to grasp, the idea that our nature is ever-free will never die because it fulfills our deepest need. Vedanta, the ancient tradition that enshrines it, survived through a special educational system dedicated solely to the purpose of maintaining Vedic Dharma, a way of life that leads to freedom. But as India became agrarian and urban and society turned its attention to less lofty pursuits interest in Vedic Dharma declined. So to keep the Dharma alive, the seer-poets whose luminous minds revealed the Vedas came up with the Pauranas.

The Pauranas are called Dharma Shastras, scriptures on Dharma. They provide an outlet for the ethical and religious needs of the people and simultaneously present the knowledge of consciousness, the innermost self, in code. They convert cryptic Vedic mantras, which require considerable brain power to decipher even when unfolded by a sage, into action-packed stories and meaningful imagery. The Pauranas are the seer's stealth technology and carefully embed Upanishadic ideas about the nature of reality into an exciting, baroque and romantic mythological facade. The confounding abundance of Gods and Goddesses that shock and bewilder India's modern visitor are Pauranic deities.

The genius of the Puranas lies in the way they convert mundane experience and objects into symbols of the self. For example, from a geographical and material point of view mount Kailas is just one of the many snowcapped peaks in the Himalayan range. But because of the meaning invested in it by the Pauranas it is regarded by Indians as a spiritual Everest, even though it is not the highest peak.

Mountains are good self symbols for several reasons. They are relatively eternal. The self is eternal. They jut above everything else,

affording an unsurpassed point of view. The self is the highest part of our being, jutting above the plains and valleys of our body/mind territory affording us unlimited vision. They are unmoving like the non-dual self, which could only move were there something other than it to move into. They are silent like the self, 'the unstruck sound.'

Rivers too have been converted to self symbols because they give life, nourishing everything with which they come in contact. In fact the elements (air, fire, water, earth and space) are not only the self in material form but, for the purposes of worship and contemplation, function as self symbols, the meditation on which may open the door to the shining world of self knowledge. In South India five major temples are dedicated to the worship of the self in the form of the five 'great' elements. For example, there is a temple in Southern Andhra Pradesh at a town named Kalahasthi that represents the air element. Air, like water, is an appropriate self symbol because we cannot live without it. It is our 'life's breath.' Like the self, it is formless and unseen and 'moves in mysterious ways.'

Animals, plants and minerals represent spiritual truths. The elephant, because of keen intelligence and long memory has come to represent Vedic wisdom. Gold, because of its great value and non-tarnishing quality and silver for its reflective ability are well-known self symbols. Colors too are imbued with meaning. White, for its similarity to light, is an obvious self symbol. And black, because it is opposite white, symbolizes ignorance of the self. But black in certain contexts sometimes symbolizes the self because, as the self encompasses everything within its panoramic awareness, black includes all the colors of the spectrum. Because the relatively infinite sky is blue, blue has come to symbolize the limitless self. Red typically symbolizes passion, in this case the self as the passionate dancing energy, *shakti*, that creates the universe.

According to ancient Tamil sources a temple town in Andhra Pradesh named Kalahasthi has been known as the 'Kailas of the South' for slightly more than two thousand years and the small river on whose banks it sits, the 'Ganges of the South.' Kailas is perhaps India's most revered spiritual symbol. It is the abode of Shiva, from whose head, according to legend, the Ganges is said to flow. Shiva, 'that which is auspicious at all places, times and in all circumstances' is a symbol of the self and the Ganges flowing from his head represents the awakened mind. A mind sourced in spirit is a river of immeasurable power and life-giving goodness. The claim that Kalahasthi is the 'Kailas of the South' simply means that the small hill near the temple is to be taken as the spiritual equivalent of the Himalayan Kailas. Likewise, the small river

flowing in a northerly direction beside the temple is to be taken as the mighty Ganges.

Even the cardinal directions take on spiritual significance in Pauranic culture. Obviously context should be taken into account when divining the meaning of a symbol, but north, for example, is said to be the abode of the self because from its unchanging frozen immortal world, one looks out on the fecund, changing 'southern' world of time and death. The idiom to "head south" means to go downhill, to decay, the most essential characteristic of the world in which we struggle to find lasting meaning. The God Dakshinamurthy whose name means 'the one facing south' and whose idol is installed in the Kalahasti Temple, faces south. East represents the dawning of wisdom, the sun being another common self symbol. The symbolic use of direction accounts for the idea of building temples at the point on a river where its meandering points it back to its source. The holiest city in India, Benaras, is built on a stretch of the Ganges that flows northward toward the Himalayas, the idea being that when the mind turns back toward its source, the self realizes its innate divinity.

The Vedas posit four ends for which human beings strive in their search for happiness: pleasure (*kama*), security or wealth (*artha*), duty (*dharma*) and freedom (*moksha*). These universal motivations are represented by four deities facing in the four cardinal directions. Shiva in the form of *Dakshinamoorthy* represents wealth, the sense of prosperity (*dakshina*) that accompanies self knowledge. At Kalahasti the Goddess *Gnanaprasoonamba* (the giver of knowledge) represents great pleasure conferred on the one who is set free by self knowledge. The deity *Kalahastishwara* (the lord of Kalahasti) faces west and symbolizes liberation. Liberation, the death of one's sense of limitation upon rediscovering the self, is the final stage of life just as setting is the sun's last act before it disappears over the horizon. Unfortunately the temple literature from which this information was gleaned neglected to include mention the name of the fourth deity.

The most revered and universal symbol of the self is the human form, 'man cast in the image of God' and its spiritual significance is difficult to overestimate. Rather than conceive of us as tainted sinful human creatures, the Upanishad tells us that we are divine. It says, "That which you worship there is this that you see here." The ineffable formless self perceived by mystics in the heart cave is this whole world and everything in it. While Hindu deities often sport dozens of arms and animal heads their essential forms are recognizably human. Probably no other idea accounts for the astonishing fact that one billion people stuffed into a land mass one third the size of the United States

undoubtedly handle their lives more confidently than their prosperous Western counterparts.

The plethora of symbols that enhance temple culture not only point to the self, they reveal the deep psychology of Vedic culture. According to the Vedas human beings suffer, not because they are sinners, but because they have unwittingly separated themselves from their spiritual source, the self. Furthermore, they state that everyone, consciously or unconsciously, strives to rediscover this source of wholeness and peace.

Although there are many variations, one archetype illustrating this truth is marriage and divorce. In the Ramayana, perhaps the most popular Purana, Lord Rama's (the self) wife Sita (his loving peaceful mind) is deluded by a golden deer (the sense objects) and abducted by a ravenous demon (the ego) who carries her off to a foreign country (a selfish materialistic 'state' of mind). Rama sets off on a long and arduous journey (the spiritual path) to regain her. Only with the help of an intelligent monkey (devotion) can he locate her. He kills the demon with a whirling discus of light (the teaching "Tat Tvam Asi" which indicates the identity of the individual self and the self) and reclaims his wife (attains enlightenment).

The Gods as Experiential Entities

The purpose of the Upanishads is to awaken the mind to the self. In the Mandukya Upanishad a discussion of the self and its relationship to the waking, dream and deep sleep states of consciousness unfolds. It states that with reference to the self, which it defines as reality, the other three states are 'unreal.' Reality is what exists before, during, and after time and what illumines and transcends the waking, dream, and deep sleep states. Because something is unreal does not mean that it cannot be experienced. A mirage, for example, is experienced as water even though it doesn't exist as water. Our three 'normal' states of consciousness are experientially or apparently 'real' but have no lasting reality because they are caught in the web of time, continually dissolving and recreating themselves.

Scientific materialism, the dominant thought system in the West, only accepts sense information as valid knowledge and therefore defines reality in terms of waking state experience. And conversely, it dismisses as unreal experiences that belong to the dream state, the mind, although with the advent of psychology, which is lobbying to become a science, this view is under attack.

Is subjective experience unreal? From the scientific materialist point of view, yes. And by the Upanishadic definition, yes. But if we use the Upanishadic definition, the waking state is as unreal as the dream

state. Or, to express it differently, assuming ignorance of the self, the dream state is as real as the waking state. Considering this, it is not surprising that the Indian mind views subjective phenomena as at least as real, probably more, than waking state events. Although it is not ultimately real, dismissing subjective experience as unreal creates a serious problem because, although the body does not function in the dream state, the mind functions in the waking state. Therefore, waking state experience is an amalgam of sense perceptions and subjective activity: emotions, feelings, beliefs, ideas, memories, dreams, visions, judgments, discriminations, etc. If anything, inner experience is more valuable, much more 'us' than anything that happens in 'reality' outside. Because how we see and feel about things conditions how we survive in life, our feelings and thoughts need be understood and accepted, not dismissed as unreal.

Temple worship in India is not just about intellectually divining the meaning of the plethora of self symbols one finds enshrined there or understanding profound Upanishadic ideas as they outpicture in stone and ritual, but of experiencing the self through symbols. Just as people attend sporting matches or their local pubs to experience a different state of mind, the temple experience transforms the mundane mind into a devotional mind by giving it '*darshan*,' a vision of the self through the deities enshrined there.

How does this ineffable, apparently untouchable, formless reality become so easily available for experience? Because it is ongoing in the hearts of everyone. And how does a given temple deity awaken one to it?

One of the most touching temple experiences is a mother teaching a toddler to prostrate in front of a deity. The child does not understand what it is doing but accommodates the mother out of duty or love. Nonetheless the prostration does not change its state of mind. But slowly, over time, as its mind develops, it becomes aware of the mother's devotional feelings and temple atmosphere. Slowly it absorbs the devotional experience by osmosis. And since this experience occurred in a temple in the presence of a deity or at home in the *puja* (worship) room, it associates the experience with the ritual of worship and the symbol on the altar. When this state of mind is established subconsciously any familiar symbol can awaken it. And because it feels so good, the act of worship is repeated over and over, deepening the feeling of love.

How does this work? Obviously, since the self pervades every atom of the universe and every thought and feeling in our minds, we need not run to the temple to experience it. In fact everyone has unconsciously developed devotional habits and worships deities of their

own making: nature, a film star, a guru, money...you name it. And whether our deities are sacred or secular, the devotional mechanism is built into the human heart.

Deities work because the self, our own consciousness, knows what we need even when we don't. "The light knoweth the darkness but the darkness knoweth not the light." When a devotee approaches a deity he or she typically wants something, the solution to a problem, for instance. When approaching someone who has something we want we assume a humble anticipatory state of mind. And when we lay out our problems the mind is free of them...at least temporarily. And in that problem free moment the peace and bliss of the self floods the heart. We assume that this feeling of peace and bliss comes from the deity in front of us but in reality the deity was only a catalyst, unlocking the door to the self. When I feel good problems tend to no longer be problems. Additionally, when I feel good the people who can solve my problem are often attracted to me and may feel inclined to help me solve them.

The temple and its deities need not be used exclusively to remove obstacles. They may be used to express appreciation of God, the self. Contrary to what a Westerner might imagine, many in India feel grateful for who they are and what (little) they have and use the temple to express their gratitude. When this attitude is enshrined in the mind, even a little seems like a lot. Consequently, India's temple complexes, with few exceptions, are charged fields of devotional energy.

To enjoy this energy, you must leave your mental and emotional baggage behind. Several rituals help the devotee enter sacred space. The most common involves discarding ones footwear outside the temple. At some temples it is customary to remove one's hair which is considered to be a symbol of ego. It is very common to touch the threshold when entering the temple to show respect for the Lord.

Invariably the first deity one confronts at the temple entrance is the elephant God Ganesh, the remover of obstacles. One should ask that all obstacles to a successful experience of the Lord, the self, be removed before beginning the symbolic journey to the inner sanctum where one comes face to face with the deity, one's own inner self.

Tiruvannamalai

The temple at Tiruvannamalai, dedicated to the fire element, represents the temple as spiritual journey, a movement from change to the changeless, the passage from time to the timeless. The temple is a haven of peace in the midst of the chaos and frantic motion of the typically Indian town, a place where one can journey into the self.

The spiritual journey is a movement through five layers or levels of ones being. These five layers are described in the Upanishad as (1) the food sheath, the physical body, (2) the breath or vital air sheath, our physiological processes, (3) the emotional body, our sensate, feeling nature, (4) the mind or intellect sheath, and (5) the bliss sheath. Passing through these, transcending them, one arrives at the inner sanctum, the self. At the entrance to each of the temple's five levels one finds a large black stone cow contentedly staring toward the inner sanctum. This cow, Nandi (bliss) represents a clear, purified devotional mind turned inward and worshipping the self. The fire temple is situated on the slope of the holy mountain Arunachala with the lingam closest to the summit suggesting an ascent from the lower to the higher, from time to timelessness, from self ignorance to self knowledge.

South Indian temples are typically surrounded by very high square or rectangular stone walls that form a protective barrier around the deity just as the human body, for which they are a symbol, surrounds and protects the self within.¹ Access to the temple is gained through four *gopurams*, gates, which tower above city and are noticeable from great distances, calling the devotee to worship. The word *gopuram* means 'city of light' because they are usually adorned with sculptures of hundreds of Pauranic deities. The deities or Gods represent the luminous self shining in the mind. The four *gopurams* represent the four elements, gateways to the self.² The elements are 'gateways' because we cannot journey into the self until we have understood the nature of the world in which we live.

Important as it is, the fire temple at Tiruvannamalai is overpowered by the holy mountain Arunachala, one of India's most revered spiritual symbols. As noted above, mountains are self symbols for several reasons. Apart from that, however, the word '*arunachala*' tells us all we need to know. '*Aruna*' means dawn or light and '*achala*' is a compound. '*Chala*' means moving or changing and '*a*' is a negative. So the word means 'the unchanging light.' The self is the unchanging light that illumines everything, including the light of the sun.

The temple at Tiruvannamalai is called *Arunachalishwara*, (the Lord of the unchanging light). The self is often referred to as "the fire of consciousness." Fire is an appropriate symbol because it produces light and light illumines objects just as the self illumines our minds and, through the senses, the world around us. At every shrine leading to the inner sanctum, and indeed at many seemingly unlikely places throughout

¹ Symbolism pervades every aspect of temple architecture. Temple walls are typically adorned with red and white stripes. Red stands for the feminine, the Goddess, who is in turn a symbol of energy and matter. And white symbolizes Shiva, pure consciousness.

² The four entrances may also be taken to represent the four directions. The meaning is that one can approach the deity from any path.

any temple, small oil and camphor fires burn. When a devotee feels the need to worship, he or she will contribute his or her camphor to the fire to keep the fire alive. On full moon nights, when upwards of one million devotees circumambulate Arunachala, one can witness large fires at significant places on the path around which scores of devotees are clustered in devotional fervor “taking the light.” Taking the light is a beautiful ritual indicating the desire to receive blessings from the self in the form of Arunachala. The devotee offers his or her heart, symbolized by the white wafer, into the fire, the self. With each contribution the ‘self’ fire blazes and the devotee bends (surrenders) to ‘receive the light,’ by symbolically scooping up the fire in his or her hands and washing his or her face with it. In its deepest sense the ritual acknowledges the simple truth that our intelligence, our lives, are not separate from the one fiery intelligence illumining the whole cosmos. This intelligence or “fire’ not only illumines our bodies and minds but has taken form as the elemental world and is, therefore, to be honored. Accordingly, the temple at Tiruvannamalai has been designated the ‘fire’ temple.

The story behind the mountain told in the Shiva Purana is exceptionally mystical and is undoubtedly responsible for its enduring fame. Long before human beings appeared on the face of the earth, Brahma, the four-headed Creator, was flying through the transcendental skies on his swan when he came to Vaikuntha, the heavenly abode of Vishnu. Vishnu, attended by millions of Gods and Goddesses, his eyes half open, was lying blissfully on the endless coils of the serpent Sesha who was floating in an infinite ocean of milk.

Brahma was annoyed when Vishnu did not open his eyes and acknowledge his presence so he said, “Who do you think you are that you can afford not to pay homage to the Creator of everything? Without me you would not even exist.”

Vishnu, irritated that his sleep of yoga had been disturbed, replied, “I think you are slightly confused. Perhaps you did not notice this lotus growing out of my Divine navel. If you look closely you will see a small God with four faces suspiciously similar to yours sitting in the middle. The fact, my dear friend, is that only I am self created and you are merely in charge of the creation of the universe. You are little more than one of my executives, albeit an important one.”

“What rubbish,” said Brahma, “this lotus with me sitting on it is just the product of your *yoga maya*, as unreal as a hare’s horn.”

The argument became increasingly heated and the Gods witnessing it were concerned for the welfare of the world should they

actually come to blows, so Indra, king of the Gods,³ suggested that they consult Shiva, who, he assured them, would resolve the issue.

So they all journeyed to Kailas, the abode of Shiva, who agreed to settle the dispute.

“See here,” he said, casting down a blinding blazing column of white light that stretched upwards and downwards as far as the eye could see, “whoever can find the end of this column is indeed the greatest.”

Brahma, certain that he would easily reach the end, assumed the form of a swan and began to ascend the column. But it proved to be much taller than he thought. In fact he became slightly discouraged after flying at supersonic speed for several thousand eons with still no end in sight. Just as he was becoming tired and considered abandoning his search he encountered a lovely flower emitting an intoxicating perfume falling slowly down the column.

He flew over and the flower said to him, “I am the Kartigai flower falling from the head of Shiva. I have been falling for infinite aeons and will never reach the bottom. You cannot reach the top. Go back and tell Shiva that you have reached the summit. I will back you up. Even falsehood is recommended in times of distress.”

This idea appealed to Brahma who flew leisurely back down the column accompanied by the Kartigai flower.

In the meantime, Vishnu, who had assumed the form of boar and had begun digging down the column, also became discouraged after many aeons and decided to give up his quest. He turned around and began ascending, arriving back in Kailas at the same time as Brahma. Both stood in awe in front of the wonderful flaming form of Shiva.

“How did it go?” Shiva addressed the Gods.

Vishnu replied, “Great indeed you are! I bow to you, Shiva, whose glory can never be measured. I bored for aeons and aeons and was unable to find the end of this blazing column of light.”

Shiva turned to Brahma who said, “Unlike this inept fellow, I found the end. It’s true, this is an impressive column of light and I had to fly rather fast to reach the end, but it was really no big deal for a creative energetic person like me.”

The Kartigai flower nodded in assent.

Shiva smiled inwardly and transformed himself into a gigantic terrifying monster that reached down and caught Brahma by the neck.

“You lie,” he thundered. “And for this lie I am going to remove all four of your arrogant heads. You’re finished!”

³ The divine mind.

Fearing for the world should the Creator be destroyed, the Gods and Goddesses fell at the feet of the monster and pleaded for mercy. Shiva, the fount of all compassion, returned to this true form, recanted and released Brahma to a sigh of relief from the deities.

“It is not right to lie to make yourself look good,” said Shiva. “Perhaps I was a bit hasty in my wrath. Death is a punishment that does not fit the crime. However you should not go scot-free. Therefore, I decree that henceforth you will not be worshipped in any temples on earth. Nonetheless, I can see that you are contrite so I also decree that even though a sacrifice is completed according to the scriptural injunctions, it will not bear fruit without you.”

As they stood before him, Brahma and Vishnu saw the infinite column of light transform itself into Shiva himself. They realized his (and their own) true nature and immediately began to worship him.

Shiva said, “Oh, devotees, I am infinite, the same in everyone and everything. I pervade every atom of the universe. This column of light, which you have realized is not different from me, is a fitting symbol of me. It should be worshipped every day. But because only Gods can directly behold my radiance, I encase this column inside a red mountain and place it on earth for the benefit of human beings. This mountain is the only true means of enjoyment. Viewed, touched, or meditated upon, it removes the ignorance that causes human beings to suffer. Many holy centers will spring up around this mountain. Prayers offered to it will be fulfilled. To live at its foot and see me in it, grants salvation.”

Brahma and Vishnu said, “Ocean of mercy. Forgive our arrogance. You are the one God that everyone is entitled to know. You are the primordial fire without beginning and end. You can only be worshipped in your *linga* state. You are the holy mountain Arunachala. We prostrate to you.”

This myth bears scrutiny because it expresses several spiritual truths, the first of which, non-creationism, is unique to the Vedic tradition. Non-creationism means that if this is a non-dual reality everything that we see is nothing but the self and is therefore uncreated and unmade because the self is uncreated. The idea of a Creator, God, depends on the idea of a creation. If this is so, why is does there seem to be a creation apart from me, the self? Because, the sages say, you are looking at the self through a deluded mind. And this mind is interpreting or ‘creating’ non-dual reality as if it were a dualistic universe locked in time.

At the same time, since only those who know the self know this, the creation is accepted as having a ‘qualified’ reality and therefore a creator is admitted. The lotus springing out of Vishnu’s navel bearing the four-headed Brahma, the Creator, illustrates this truth. We see it

also in the relationship of Shiva, the primary self symbol, to Brahma and Vishnu, the Creator and Preserver. Clearly, they do not enjoy his lofty status.

But the myth is really about self realization, the means of self realization, the main obstacle to self realization, and spiritual self delusion.

Self realization is depicted here as a journey to discover the end of an endless column of light. The efficacy of two traditional techniques, meditation and inquiry, are examined and their limitations exposed. Brahma riding on a swan symbolizes transcendental meditation, a flight into the spiritual sky, attempting to take the mind beyond itself for the purpose of self realization. Vishnu riding on a boar represents the process of self analysis: asking questions, boring into the self, trying to figure it out with the mind. According to the myth, both are limited means, incapable of delivering the spiritual goods. This is not to say that either cannot work, just that the purpose of this myth, and indeed most of the Puranas (which were designed to bring Vedic wisdom to the masses) is to develop devotion, in this case to Shiva.

The Kartigai flower that has 'fallen' from the head of Shiva represents a mind 'fallen from grace,' one bereft of self knowledge. After years of spiritual seeking before reaching the goal it is natural to become discouraged and listen to the lies of the separated or 'fallen' ego. This ego, which is prone to self delusion, suggests that the seeker claim enlightenment before it is attained. The lie prompts a severe reaction from the self which cannot stand untruth. Compassion, however, is depicted as greater than truth and Shiva relents. Vishnu, who represents integrity, is not rewarded because virtue is its own reward.

As a result of their quest both Brahma and Vishnu, who represent a mind prepared by spiritual practice, enjoy a *darshan*, direct experience of the self. The story says they "saw the infinite column of light transform itself into Shiva himself. They realized his (and their own) true nature and immediately began to worship him." Once they have begun to experience the self, Shiva cements their self knowledge by describing his nature. "I am infinite, the same in everyone and everything. I pervade every atom of the universe." And lest they forget who they are he proscribes a path for reawakening; worship my *linga*, Arunachala.

Ramanashram and the Mountain Walk

As predicted in the Purana many holy centers have sprung up around the mountain, the foremost of which in modern times is Ramanashram, named after 'the sage of Arunachala,' Ramana Maharshi, who experienced the self as a boy of seventeen and lived at

the foot of the mountain all his life. Ramana was an exceptionally luminous and compassionate sage who in the fifty years since his death has nearly attained the status of a deity. Consequently his ashram and the mountain caves where he meditated attract people from around the world.

Circumambulation of the mountain is thought to confer many blessings and on full moon nights hundreds of thousands of devotees regularly journey from all over the region to make the ten mile walk. At a particularly significant spot on the inner path a small temple dedicated to the hunter saint Kannapan sits on top of a large rock. The place is known by meditators as an energy vortex and is meant to enjoy special sanctity owing to its location at the base of a small hillock known as Shiva's feet. The feet are of great significance in Vedic culture because they symbolize under standing, in this case knowledge of the self.

According to legend Kannapan was a devotee of Shiva who worshipped twice daily, before and after work. To make the lingam, a black monolith, seem more lifelike two eyelike reflective circles are often placed several inches below its rounded top. When the lingam is adorned with flowers, the dark inner sanctum, seen from the distance of a few meters, appears to have a living deity staring out at the devotees. The purpose of this is to give the devotee the feeling that the Lord is sending blessings through the eyes. The technical term for this experience is 'darshan,' seeing the Lord. Or, alternatively, letting the Lord 'see' you. When the devotee locks his or her eyes on the Lord, the mind becomes quiet and blessings in the form of peace or love floods into the devotee's heart from the self within.

One evening after the temple was closed, the lingam's eyes, which were affixed with a crude glue, came loose and fell to the floor. When Kanappan, a simple rustic, came for his morning *darshan* he became distressed because the Lord was unable to give *darshan*. Such was his love of Shiva that he walked into the inner sanctum, took an arrow out of his quiver, cut out one of his own eyes and tied it on the lingam. The story goes that he was about to remove his remaining eye when Shiva appeared out of the lingam and granted him liberation, thus sparing his eyesight. The small temple on top of the hill at Kalahasti is also dedicated to Kannapan who has attained the status of a deity.

Kanchipuram, The Earth Element

A creation and redemption myth stands behind the Ekambishwara (the lord of the indivisible oneness) temple at Kanchipuram. The temple is dedicated to the earth element because it was on earth that the

Goddess Parvati, the wife of Shiva was sent to atone for the sin that started the world, the separation of matter and spirit. The myth, which humorously and elegantly presents the idea of separation from and re-union with the Divine, is classic Vedanta in the form of the following story.

The state of things before the creation of the universe is symbolized by the happy 'heavenly' married life of Shiva and his consort, Parvati, the Divine Mother. In this primordial 'state' energy/matter is potential in consciousness. It says in the text that Parvati served her three-eyed lord with immense love. She worshipped him with a myriad of offerings. To keep her from becoming attached to him, Shiva, who enjoyed her love, feigned indifference, causing Parvati to become despondent.

One day Rati, the winged god of love, who had the power to enchant all living things, came across Parvati moping in her garden. Upon learning the cause he offered to help her cast a spell on Shiva. So he taught her how to adorn her lovely body and move in the seductive ways that always attract men. When she had learned everything necessary to capture a man's heart he encouraged her to try her wiles on Shiva. One day as she was charming and enchanting her Lord she playfully placed her hands over his three eyes. Suddenly the cosmic dance stopped and whole universe was plunged in darkness. The myriad cosmic suns and moons refused to shine and creatures fell into a sleepy hypnotic trance. And even though she kept them there for a few seconds darkness reigned on earth for aeons.⁴

When she removed them an immense radiant beam of light burst forth, reducing a gleeful Rati, who had been hovering in front of Shiva watching the seduction, to ashes and causing the whole cosmos to once again pulsate and vibrate with life.

Because of his immense compassion for the universe and to teach his passionate young wife a lesson Shiva said, "Your innocent mind was led astray by the God of love. And had your intemperate act been without consequence I would forgive you immediately, but see the suffering it has brought on the creation. Therefore, to atone for your sin, I am beaming you down to earth where you will do intense meditation for the purpose of becoming reunited with me.

In the twinkling of an eye Parvati found herself sitting under a mango tree on the banks of the River Kumba. Feeling the immense loss of Shiva intently she entered the shallows near the tree, fashioned a

⁴ This doctrine of the cosmic blackout, or Maya, is a rough equivalent of the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin.

lingam out of the wet sand and began to worship it, praying that she would be reunited with her Lord.⁵

To test her devotion to his earthly form Shiva created a flash flood and sent it roaring downstream.⁶ Instead of running for high ground, the Divine Mother wrapped herself around the lingam to protect it from the raging torrent. When the waters subsided the lingam was intact and she heard Shiva's voice booming from the sky, "You have passed your first test. To make your devotion perfect you must do further penance at the holy Mountain Arunachala."⁷

Another Arunachala Story

Accordingly the Divine Mother, full of devotion for her Lord, journeyed to Arunachala. She climbed to the top of the mountain where she sat in the lotus posture, withdrew her senses into her mind and began to search within for the place from which the "I" arises. She became aware of a powerful radiant silence and sank into deep meditation on it.

A powerful demon, Mahishasura,⁸ flying by in his aerial chariot noticed her sitting there, glowing with ethereal beauty and became enflamed with lust.⁹ His unwanted attentions so angered Parvati that she assumed the form of the wrathful goddess Kali, mounted a lion, and with a thousand weapons in her thousand hands, began to battle with the demon. The battle raged for many years until the Goddess gained the upper hand and severed the demon's head with one stroke of her gigantic sword.¹⁰

She resumed her meditation with renewed concentration, worshipping Shiva with a terrifying passion. It created so much heat that even Agni, the god of fire, was forced to move from his home atop the mountain. The heat scorched the earth for miles around, killing all the plants and forcing the animals to leave. Such was her desire to be reunited with Shiva that her energy turned the mountain (and indeed the whole earth) into a shimmering molten golden mass of fire.

The situation became so critical that the gods and goddesses who had been drawn there by her immense devotion became concerned that

⁵ When we separate ourselves from the self the desire to return leads us to religion and we begin to worship our chosen deity.

⁶ The flash flood is the subconscious resistance to the desire for union with God. It threatens to wash away our devotional resolve.

⁷ When the vasanas, one's subconscious tendencies try to wash away one's vision of the self one needs to cling tightly to one's symbol until the waters subside.

⁸ Maha means big. An asura is a demon. The big lustful demon in everyone is the ego.

⁹ Once the devotee withstands the flood of negativity then next spiritual trial is the confrontation with the ego.

¹⁰ Discrimination, the power to separate the Real (the self) from the unreal (the ego.)

the three worlds would be totally immolated and went en masse to Kailas to speak to Shiva.

“Obeisance to the self-born one from whom the three worlds with all the animate and inanimate beings have originated,” they said. “Profuse obeisance the great self, destroyer of Karma,¹¹ illuminator of everything that is.¹²”

“Get to the point,” said Shiva who did not enjoy flattery even though it was all true.

“The heat from the Divine Mother’s penance is so intense that it threatens to destroy the universe that you created,” they said. “Please do something to save the three worlds.”

“This whole business started when she fell under the spell of that little devil, Rati, the god of Love,” said Shiva. “It is a great sin to leave the bliss of union with me for paltry emotional excitements. See the trouble she has faced trying to get back to me. It is a lesson to you all. She must pass one more test before her work is finished. Go to Arunachala and see if she desires anything other than union with me.”¹³

They approached the mountain and said to her, “For what purpose are you doing this meditation? It is threatening to destroy the three worlds. Don’t you think you are behaving recklessly?”

“Don’t laugh, when I tell you this,” Parvati said, “but it is my ardent desire to marry Lord Shiva.”

The Gods rolled their eyes and said, “Come, come my dear girl, how is that possible? You are a mere mortal and Shiva is the Lord of the whole cosmos. How can such a union ever take place?”

“You don’t understand because you are only Gods” she replied. “I love only him. I will prevail. Even if the heat from this longing destroys life as we know it, I will not relent. Please go away.”

Seeing that she was ready to be liberated, Shiva appeared in the guise of a Brahmin priest and asked what she was doing there, meditating so one-pointedly.

Parvati honored the Brahmin and said, “Please do not think me presumptuous O learned Brahmin, but I wish to wed none other than Lord Shiva. Unfortunately I have been meditating on him for aeons to no avail. He seems quite indifferent to my prayers. Therefore I will end my life. Without Shiva life is worthless.”

So saying she created a blazing fire and prepared to jump into it, much to the surprise of everyone.

“Before you leap,” the Brahmin said, please listen to what I have to say. “I know Shiva very well. He is not worthy of you. He is completely

¹¹ Knowledge that one is the self destroys the tendency to try to attain happiness through activities.

¹² The self is that because of which whatever is known is known.

¹³ Enlightenment will not happen until all the other desires have been sublimated into the desire for it.

lacking in manners. He sleeps in graveyards and wanders about clad only in a deer skin. His matted locks are filthy and full of lice. He associates with ghosts and goblins. He has no pedigree and is of such low status no caste will claim him. Consequently he is unemployed and unemployable. So what will a fine, cultured woman like you do for friends and money? Furthermore, he is a heartless bastard, incapable of love. Do you know that he reduced the God of love to ashes with one glance from his third eye? He's a beast through and through. I suggest that you reconsider."

"Ha!" said Parvati scornfully, "You say you know Shiva but you cannot know Shiva. He is beyond all your paltry means of knowledge. You say he has a certain form but you are quite mistaken. He is beyond all forms. His true form is formlessness. He fills every atom of the universe with his being. He is pure and beyond reproach. All the gold in the three worlds cannot begin to measure one small fraction of his immense wealth. He is the only friend I want! Because he has not answered my prayers I will end my life."

Hearing her fervent words the Brahmin melted into nothingness leaving Shiva standing before her in all his glory. "Because of your pure devotion I will serve you through all eternity. Come assume your rightful place next to me."

Parvati circumambulated the mountain and melted into the side of Shiva.

Chidambaram – The Cosmic Dance

The myth behind the temple at Chidambaram shares elements of other myths and introduces a new idea, the cosmic dance. The story begins when Shiva and Vishnu appear in the forest at Chidambaram to confront a group of sages¹⁴ whose spiritual wisdom has made them exceptionally arrogant. Shiva appears as a Brahmin renunciate and Vishnu as a beautiful woman. All the locals are smitten by their celestial beauty but the sages are unimpressed because they know who they really are. To show their superiority the sages raise a sacrificial fire from which a fierce tiger springs on Shiva. Shiva subdued and skinned the animal, wearing its hide as a glorious ornament. Next the sages caused a huge snake to emerge from the fire and attack Shiva who tamed it and wrapped it around his neck. The *rishis* final weapon was a powerful dwarf who Shiva also subdued. With the dwarf writhing on the ground beneath his feet Shiva began a victory dance, much to the delight of the Gods who had gathered to witness his confrontation with the sages.

¹⁴ A sage is called a rishi. A rishi is a seer, one who 'sees' or knows the self. The Pauranas consistently counsel against the spiritual ego, the person who makes a story out of his or her enlightenment.

When Adishesha, the Cosmic Serpent on whose infinite coils Vishnu reclines in Heaven, heard of Shiva's dance, he immediately incarnated as the sage Patanjali and came to the forest to witness the dance. There he met a sage who, owing to his great devotion to Shiva had obtained tiger's claws for hands and feet. The claws permitted him to climb up trees and suck the nectar from the flowers.¹⁵ The two of them journeyed through the forest until they found Shiva dancing ecstatically in a grove near the shrine of Kalika Devi.

Kalika Devi, also known as Shakti, was unhappy to see another God dancing in her territory and attracting so much attention, so she challenged him to a dance competition which Shiva won. His dance produced so much bliss that his audience would not go home so he agreed to perform it forever in the inner sanctum of the temple at Chidambaram.

'*Chid*' means consciousness, the self, the essence of things, and '*ambara*' means space or place. So the word means 'the place where consciousness dwells,' the 'Heart Space.' Both 'space' and 'heart' are common self symbols. The self is like space because it contains everything in it and at the same time it pervades everything. The word 'heart' should be taken as 'essence' as in the phrase, 'the heart of the matter. The self is the essence of everything. This myth presents many interesting ideas. In most Pauranic stories the Gods do not manifest their real forms when they first appear on earth but are disguised as normal human beings or animals. By this we are meant to understand that within every living creature the Divine dwells. So we see Shiva, the self, masquerading as a human being, a Brahmin priest. He is accompanied by Vishnu as Mohini. Mohini is a name that comes from the word '*moha*' which means delusion. So we can interpret this to mean that when he descends from this Himalayan peak (the self) he forgets who he is. The statement that ordinary persons are deluded by the appearance of these two celestials can be taken to mean that in the state of spiritual ignorance we only see the surface person. That the reality dwells beneath the surface is indicated by the statement that 'the sages were unimpressed because they knew who they (Shiva and Vishnu) really are.'

The purpose of life on earth according to the Vedas is to know who we really are. This knowledge results in our liberation from all the false concepts about who we are that we have developed over the course of our lives. The way we test our self knowledge is by putting it up against the wisdom of scripture, symbolized here by the sages and their

¹⁵ Trees are common self symbols. To climb a tree symbolically means to inquire into or investigate the self. When the self has been understood one 'sucks the nectar' from its flowers. The nectar is the bliss of knowing who one is.

sacrificial fire. Self knowledge is often referred to as the fire of knowledge¹⁶ and is given as a *jnana yagna* (knowledge sacrifice) by those who know it.

The first erroneous self-concept that a human being needs to be overcome is 'I am the body,' symbolized by the fierce tiger. The body is our animal nature, full of passion and fear. Shiva destroys this idea and wears the skin as an ornament. The 'skin' symbol is apt because it carries the notion of something non-essential. The meaning is that he has peeled away all the romantic notions about the body and seen it for what it is, a superficial dead outer covering, a 'sheath'¹⁷ to use the technical Vedantic term. The idea that the body is 'dead' means that it is composed of matter, food to be specific, and only seems to be sentient because of its association with the eternal living consciousness within it.

The second realization he needs to gain before he can perform the victory dance of self realization is that the subtle and causal bodies are equally not self. The Subtle Body is our emotional and thinking faculties and the Causal Body our unconscious mind, symbolized by a gargantuan snake. The snake lives in dark hidden recesses below the surface of the earth like the unconscious mind which is the source of Subtle Body phenomena. Shiva does not kill this snake but subdues it, and wears it as an ornament. This means that the mind must not be destroyed to realize the self, but that it needs to be tamed through understanding.

The final stage of the process of self realization is the domination of ego by the self. The ego is considered a dwarf because it is a stunted, obdurate idea of self, one that refuses to grow. It should be noted that the ego has not been slain, merely subdued. However it is not dominating the self as it does in unenlightened people. Instead it is firmly under the foot of the self.

Finally, the defeat of *Shakti* in the dance contest is an important symbol. It means that the self is awareness, not energy. Many people on the spiritual path worship *shakti* (spiritual energy) without consciousness of Shiva, pure awareness. So the dance contest is the Purana's way of saying that awareness is a higher principle than energy. Shiva depends on nothing. He is self created and self supporting. But *shakti*, energy and matter, is completely dependent on awareness. To worship *shakti* is foolish because she is always changing. Once she has lifted you up she lets you down.

Churning the Milky Ocean

¹⁶ 'jnana (knowledge) and agni (fire)'

¹⁷ *Sarira* in Sanskrit

A long time ago the gods learned of a chalice of nectar, symbol of the self, sitting on the bottom of a deep ocean, the mind. The one who possesses this chalice attains immortality. The Gods tried to find the chalice but were unsuccessful.

Dejected, they went to the Vishnu, the omniscient all-pervading Supreme Being and told him of their desire. Moved by compassion Vishnu agreed to help.

"Churn the ocean until the chalice comes to the surface," he said.

"Churn the ocean? It cannot be done," they said.

"Sorry," said the Lord, "it's the only way. Think about it. Maybe you will come up with something."

In those days mountains had wings and flew around doing what mountains do when they have time on their hands. Indra, king of the Gods, saw a holy mountain flying around and had an idea.

Hey," he called, "Mount Mandara, please come down here. We want to talk with you."

The mountain, always eager to chat with the king of the Gods, flew over and landed nearby.

After explaining the situation, Indra said, "So you see, you would make a perfect churn. You could sit down in the middle of the ocean and enough of you would stick out so we could wrap a rope around your neck and pull. What do you say?" he said, pleased with his idea.

"Why not?" said the mountain affably. "As long as it does not take too long. I have things to do next week."

"No time at all," said Indra who had no idea what time was because he lived in a timeless world. "We'll have you out of here as soon as we get the treasure. Not to worry."

The day was hot and Mandara had been flying around all morning so the idea of cooling off in the ocean of milk seemed attractive. He flew out to the center and settled in.

"So far so good," said Indra. "Now we need a rope."

"There's no rope in heaven that long," said the Gods in unison. "Not a chance. Forget it."

"I hate to admit it but I think you're right," said Indra sitting down in despair.

Just then Vasuki, the cosmic serpent, slithered by and Indra was struck with another idea.

"Hey Vasuki," said Indra motioning him over. "I want to talk with you."

"Ok," said Vasuki, "What's up?"

Once Indra had explained the situation Vasuki agreed, swam out and wrapped himself around the top of the protruding mountain, his head

resting on one shore and his tail on the other. One group of gods took the head, another the tail. They pulled and pulled but nothing happened.

Dejected, they approached Vishnu who suggested enlisting the help of the demons who were very strong, an idea they found distasteful but eventually accepted.

Indra instructed the demons to pull on the tail. They felt insulted and refused. "You pull it," they said. "We want the head."

The gods did not want the tail either and a furious altercation broke out.

To resolve it Vishnu suggested flipping a coin. The Gods got the head so the demons unhappily agreed to pull on the tail.

Their enthusiastic churning brought forth many interesting and valuable treasures from the depths. Each time one would appear they would retrieve it and ask Vishnu if it were the immortal nectar.

"Keep churning," Vishnu said, "You'll know it when you see it."

They continued to churn and after some time noticed a foul black liquid start to bubble up.

"You're getting closer," said Vishnu.

Soon, however, they realized that the black liquid was a virulent poison that spread itself over the land killing every living thing. The fumes were so toxic the gods and demons who are normally immune to such things began to feel faint and lessened their efforts.

As it so happened at this moment that Shiva and Parvati were flying through the air on the cosmic bull, Nandi. Parvati noticed that something was wrong and called Shiva's attention to the situation. He immediately landed on the shore, strode out into the middle of the ocean, scooped up the poison in his hands and drank it. When Parvati realized that he would die trying to save the Gods and Demons she choked him and the poison came to rest in his neck. Henceforth Shiva was known as Neelakanta, the 'blue necked' god.

Seeing that there was no longer a threat, the Gods and Demons renewed their efforts and eventually an emerald green chalice glowing with an ethereal light and filled with the immortal nectar arose from the depths to the cheers of the participants. It was so luminous and beautiful that everyone understood immediately what it was.

An argument ensued about the division of the spoils and when it became particularly heated the demons grabbed the chalice and ran off with the gods in hot pursuit. Eventually, somewhere over India they caught up, grabbed the chalice, and in the ensuing struggle four drops of nectar fell to earth, landing on holy rivers at Haridwaar, Nasik, Allahabad, and Ujain.

These places are therefore considered to be extremely sacred and, in addition to serving as pilgrimage centers, host the Kumba Mela, a

celebration of immense importance that attracts tens of millions of pilgrims every three years. Astrologers have calculated to the minute the moment when each drop landed at each spot and it is believed that to bathe in the river at that time washes away all sins. Although carefully organized, occasionally at the most auspicious moment the crowds stampede into the river many die. Death in these circumstances is considered fortunate, however, because it is thought to release the soul from bondage to the eternal wheel of birth and death.

What it Means

Hidden in this entertaining myth are some very important spiritual truths. The 'nectar' is the self. Nectar means essence. Immortality is the nature of the self. To know that one is the self is to know that one is immortal. Immortality is liberation from the ravages of time, the most sought after goal. Who seeks it? Gods and Demons. Gods represent the spiritual forces in the mind. These forces always seek to know their origin. Demons represent the negative materialistic forces in the mind. These powerful forces cause suffering and therefore it is in the interest of the mind to remove them. It is only by 'drinking the nectar of self knowledge' that the mind is purified of its negative tendencies.

Where is the nectar located? At the bottom of the 'milky ocean.' The 'milky ocean' stands for a pure mind. Milk is a symbol of purity. That the nectar is at the bottom means that the self, luminous awareness, is the foundation, the substrate of the mind. To bring this great treasure up to the surface is the task that awaits anyone seeking self knowledge. 'The surface' symbolizes the conscious mind. The knowledge "I am limitless awareness" needs to be the foundation of one's conscious identity. How is this to be accomplished? By churning the mind. Churning is a common spiritual symbol in Vedic literature. The purpose of churning is to bring forth the butter (self) hidden in the milk (the mind). Inquiry involves stirring up one's beliefs and opinions with the mantra, "Who am I?" This allows the seeker to separate false self notions from the truth of his or her nature. When the mind consistently engages in self inquiry it becomes powerful and eventually free. The 'valuable treasures from the depths' that appeared before the poison represent the psychic powers that accrue to anyone doing intense spiritual work. These are meant to be rejected.

Just before the self is to be realized the mind vomits forth all its deepest darkest poisons. It is attacked by intense doubt. Fears and temptations arise in it. How should these dark forces be dealt with? They should be neutralized by the practice of non-attachment and kept away from the head and the heart so they do not poison one's thinking

or one's devotion to the truth. The neck is a neutral zone between the head and the heart.

Devotional Symbolism

The idea that *bhakti*, devotion, is a unique path is relatively modern invention. It is not mentioned in the Vedas. This is because what has come to be thought of as Bhakti Yoga, the devotional path, is nothing more than the practice of rituals. Rituals are karma. Therefore devotees are *karmis*, doers of action. The Vedas proscribe only two lifestyles: the *sannyassi* and the householder. *Sannyassis* are people who, owing to the understanding that there is no doer, are not enjoined to practice ritual. Householders take themselves to be doers and therefore they practice *karma*. They practice *karma* because they desire things and rituals have proven to be a legitimate path to the attainment of various sought after ends. Both are going for *moksha* and both are motivated by love of truth. Therefore devotion cannot be a separate path. Devotion is simply the motivation to pursue whatever one pursues. It is common to all human beings.

It so happens that people seeking liberation will only be successful if the mind is prepared. To prepare the mind the ancient texts recommend that devotion for God be cultivated. The preparation consists in changing the way the mind views its world. It needs to see itself and the body as objects given by God for the express purpose of worship rather than as vehicles for satisfying worldly desires. It must be trained to take everything in life, not just religious symbols, as God. For example, the devotee is to see food as God, the eater as God, and the body as God's temple. One's spouse and children are to be regarded as God's own, every spoken word taken to be the name of the Lord and all actions, no matter how apparently mundane, as service to God. Bending, lying, or kneeling are to be considered prostration to God, walking as circumambulation of the Deity, all lights as symbols of the self, sleep as union with God, and rest as meditation. Every person the devotee contacts must be offered loving service, as if he or she were the Divinity itself. With the intention of keeping God's name continually in the mind, in this manner mundane rituals from washing dishes to sweeping the floor are converted to sacred rites.

To a fervent devotee religious icons (stone, wood, paper, clay, and metal statuary) are not viewed merely as elevating or provocative symbols but are to be bathed, fed, entertained, spoken to slept, and worshipped as living Divinity. On special holy days in India at the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Orissa State, God is removed from the temple on an astrologically auspicious day, placed on top of a multi-story

intricately-carved brightly-painted wooden car, and pulled through the streets by thousands of ecstatic devotees on the way to the ocean for an afternoon at the beach. Although the custom has been outlawed in recent years, in the old days it was not uncommon for worshippers in the throes of ecstasy to hurl themselves beneath the great wooden wheels, crushed to death at the feet of the Lord which was meant to confer liberation.

To the materialist mind, projecting life into inanimate objects seems the height of irrationality but the practice is good psychology from a devotional perspective. Just as an actress 'becomes' the person she is portraying by totally identifying with every aspect of the character's life, the devotee discovers identity with the inner self through intense identification with the symbol. The greater the identification with one's chosen symbol the greater is the love for what it symbolizes. Contemplating on the life of an avatar or saint intensifies devotion, for example. The more intense the devotion the more likely it is to cause an epiphany, a vision of the self. Having witnessed the beauty of the self it is impossible not to fall in love and become passionately attached. Because worldly beauties pale, outer attachments, personal views, automatically fall away.

The tension between the mind's inward moving spiritual forces and its outward turned material forces make devotional practice difficult. At the onset material energies dominate and redirecting attention to God is difficult. The worship of every thing as the Beloved, however, counteracts the dark forces.

Relationship Symbols

Nobody lives in a cave these days. No matter how 'spiritual' we are we are caught up in a web of relationships all our lives. Even if we are not immediately involved with people in a meaningful way the relationships that set us on our paths still exist in our minds and color the way we think of ourselves and respond to life. These psychic remnants need not be a source of psychological dysfunction and send us off to the therapist's couch; they can be transformed into devotional tools that prepare the mind for self realization by converting worldly emotions into devotion for the self. Any psychological tendency and the relationships it spawns, no matter how negative, can awaken love of God. For example, if a parental relationship functioned successfully, we will have developed love and respect for elders, an attitude or '*bhava*' that can quickly be converted into love and respect for God.

The Slave

Slavery is a common spiritual symbol. It is based on the idea that we are all slaves to our conditioning. Who isn't chained to physical passions, indentured to selfish feelings, painfully shackled to unforgiving thoughts? The more we strive for freedom, rail and rebel against the injustices of society and aggressively court empowerment, the more we admit our bondage to the unreal.

To convert the feeling of powerlessness into a positive devotional force is the purpose of '*dasya bhava*,' a devotional psychology ultimately leading to self love and freedom. A service-oriented psychology, the devotee worships God and Its manifestations, people particularly, with a whole heart, putting his or her life completely in God's hands, seeing his or herself as God's property, faithfully and diligently executing all Divine instructions with mindless efficiency. Such devotees support and maintain religious, charitable, and spiritual institutions, faithfully serve enlightened souls, spiritual teachers, and God-intoxicated devotees.

The Slave is considered a sophisticated love game because it develops loyalty and respect, natural feelings in the presence of The Master/Mistress. Secondly, to distinguish God's voice from the many self-serving ego voices requires a quiet mind and keen discrimination. Diligently practiced, this *bhava* quickly reduces ego inflations to rubble.

The Wife

If The Slave is not your cup of tea try The Wife, another high devotional stance. The tie between the husband and wife is the strongest and sweetest in the world, containing all love expressions, particularly sexual intimacy, which is taken to symbolize the union of the devotee and God, the ecstatic wedding of the individual and supreme Selves. In this mood of complete identification and attachment the devotee, regardless of sex, sees God as the husband or wife, to honor and obey in every life situation, even beyond the grave. Just as devoted spouses will gladly suffer for each other, the devotee will suffer any misery on behalf of his or her beloved Husband or Wife.

A quotation found on the back of an eighteenth century painting reproduced in a book entitled, Krishna, the Divine Lover, illustrates the mood as practiced by a sect of devotees known as the Shakti Bhavas, worshippers of the Divine Mother, Radha, consort of Krishna.

"This sect is in favor with those with an effeminate turn of mind. They declare themselves to be the female companions of Radha, with the idea of paying her homage and establishing identity, even taking on the manner of speech, gait, gestures and dress of women. At monthly intervals, in the manner of menstruating women, they put on red-colored

clothes as if affected by menstruation and pass three days in this state. After menstruation is over, they take a ceremonial bath. In the manner of married women anxious to be physically united with their husbands as enjoined in the scriptures, they take to themselves on the fourth night a painting of Sri Krishna, and stretch themselves, raising both legs, utter "ahs" and "oohs," adopt coy women-like manners, and cry aloud, "Ah Krishna, I die! Oh Krishna, I die!" Through practices like these they believe they earn great merit and please the Lord by engaging themselves the whole night."

The Friend

Friendship is a more common devotional style. In it equal love flows between God and the devotee. God is seen as a tried and true confidante, a close relative or family member, one with whom innermost secrets can be shared. "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what the lord doeth, but I call you friends, for all things I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you."

Practitioners of this *bhava* find their greatest happiness in the happiness of God in others and dedicate themselves to the spiritual welfare of their friends. As do close friends, the devotee acutely suffers moments of separation, continually craving God's company, either in the form of a deep experience, or through communication and conversation with other devotees. The tender, joyful, and playful relationship of nine and ten year old children serves to model this charming mood which sees God as a dear playmate sporting among His or Her creations.

The Child

A popular *bhava* because we so easily identify with childlike parts of the psyche, this method is based on the universal need of children to love their parents. The devotee is enjoined to love God with the unsuspecting faith of the child, acknowledging and accepting his or her state of total helplessness, ignorance, dependence, and attachment. Practically the devotee treats all fatherly and motherly figures as God, including his or her own parents. Parents, our physical source, make nice symbols of God, our spiritual source. The realization that we are part and parcel of His or Her being instills confidence in our own divinity.

Similar to The Slave, this love game is considered an imperfect vehicle for God realization because it does not, except indirectly, cultivate knowledge of God, leaving the devotee vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation from both inner and outer sources. Ultimately, of course, love begets knowledge because the intellect

develops natural curiosity for what the heart loves, but in the short run this devotional posture is at best a preliminary step in the soul's long march home. Because this style of worship produces such deep attachment, unless the devotee cultivates understanding of the formless aspect of God through scriptural study and meditation, he or she is in danger of forgetting God's greatness and glory, and merely using God, like a child its parents, to satisfy basic needs.

Mom and Pop

The parent symbol is said to be superior to the child because parental love is tempered with understanding, a sense of duty and responsibility. The precious and profound love of God produced by this mood is balanced and enhanced by an equally deep attempt to probe the mysteries of the Divine through scriptural study, meditation, and reflection.

It taps the universal need to parent and can be successfully practiced by anyone who has felt the need to protect and nurture a small helpless creature. Children, because of their purity, innocence, and guileless bliss, make excellent symbols of God. When the devotee develops the parental feeling for his or her inner self, he or she shines with maternal or paternal splendor. When maternal feelings for God achieve rapturous intensity, this mood is even known to produce mammary secretions in women!

Because it forces the devotee to identify with the "inner parent," this mood helps heal the negative views of parents that accompany the reluctance to leave their 'inner child' and attain spiritual maturity. The *bhava* also teaches the devotee to detach from ideas of power, fear, and punishment associated with God. Calling into questions ideas of reverence and obedience, the *bhava* also roots out atavistic concepts of low self esteem and unworthiness associated with God's glory, majesty, and grandeur - projections of a primitive religious consciousness. Unlike the child, the mother and father are not moved to awe in the presence of the child. Because they cannot ask favors of a child the *bhava* negates the tendency to ask favors of the Lord. And, like parents their children, the devotee is enjoined to make any sacrifice for the sake of God.

The Passionate Lover

A selfless lover eager to gratify his or her beloved is the intriguing model for this *bhava* which takes the bliss of physical orgasm as a symbol of the powerful experience of ecstatic meditation on the self. It is often considered the most advanced love game because passionate

spiritual love is the hardest to develop owing to the difficulty of consistently experiencing the self. Because of excessive attachment brought on by the experience of extreme joy in the presence of God, it is equally difficult to break.

A completely spiritual love, the devotee sees God, the innermost self, as divinely beautiful and lovely, an Adonis or Aphrodite, to be worshipped with an affection verging on the erotic. In this style of love, all conventions, reservations, hesitations, and personal views are cast aside and an exclusive, potentially jealous, love cultivated. A gargantuan appetite, craving for the embrace of God, is characteristic of this love game. Just as lovers locked in the throes of orgasm do not know what is inside or outside or which body is which, the devotee in union with the self knows neither internal nor external, and is unable to distinguish his or her body from God's (all matter). In the culmination of this *bhava* all sense of duality disappears, leaving only the sweetest bliss.

Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

No experience lasts forever. The ecstatic mind eventually returns to its normal state. In this *bhava* the normal state is treated as an opportunity to develop love in absence, just as a lover's desire for the beloved is increased by separation.

The emotional symptoms of the absence *bhava* are sleeplessness, helplessness, fickleness, depression, and anxiety. When they descend from the ecstatic heights of devotion, devotees practicing this *bhava* often see God as a fickle, inconsiderate, unfaithful lover prone to selfish disappearances and are not above exhibiting signs of haughty superiority and disdain, fervent yearning, regret because of the Beloved's uncaring attitude, and a sense of folly for having become involved with God in the first place. Occasionally the separation causes such anguish the devotee accuses the Lord of cruel injustice: the perverse dispensation of pleasure to others while the devotee, who has not forgotten the Beloved for a minute, continues to suffer.

The Forbidden Lover

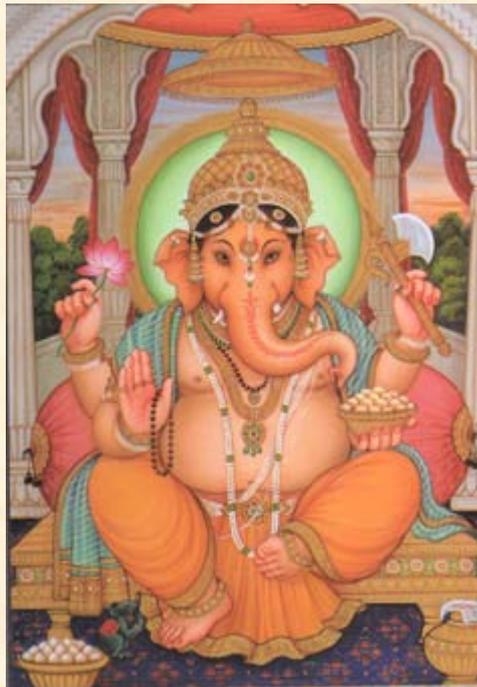
Operating under the assumption that the more love is obstructed, the more it intensifies, this *bhava*, a variation of the Passionate Lover, converts feelings of secrecy and shame associated with love into a positive devotional psychology.

Love of God often awakens in the most unlikely and inconvenient circumstances. When a declaration of love would invite ridicule,

condemnation, and persecution, taking God as a forbidden lover is helpful. Devoid of outer signs, the Forbidden Lover is a "stealth" psychology, through which the love of God grows by inner yearning, silent repetition of the Holy Name, and meditation. Devotees whose possessive, insecure, and jealous spouses can't tolerate the idea of inner freedom and divine love can benefit greatly from this *bhava*.

The Deities

Ganesh



Some effort is required to read the Pauranic stories of the Gods but access to the self through the popular deities is effortless because their images are ubiquitous. I think it would be fair to say that Ganesh, the elephant God, is the most popular deity in the Hindu pantheon and the easiest to decode. If you wish take him as a charming somewhat bizarre cartoon, ask him to remove the obstacles to the satisfaction of your desires and leave it at that. Or if you want to go deeper use his divine form to enter the shining world of the self.

Ganesh has a fat human body and the head of an elephant. How he got the elephant head and what it means is revealed in the following story. Shiva had been meditating on the top of Mount Kailas for fifty thousand years when suddenly he had the desire to make love with his wife. He had been away for so long that he decided to knock before entering his house. A chubby young boy answered the door. He did not know that the boy was his son because he had left to meditate shortly

after the boy was conceived. The boy in turn had never seen his father so he took the man at the door to be a stranger.

‘What do you want?’ he asked Shiva.

‘Step aside,’ Shiva said, ‘I want to see Parvati.’

‘You’ll have to wait,’ said Ganesh, ‘I’ll ask her if she is willing to receive visitors.’

‘I said get out of my way,’ Shiva replied with considerable irritation.

‘I said you’ll have to wait,’ replied Ganesh protectively. ‘I don’t know who you think you are but you certainly are lacking in manners.’

At this Shiva who was known to have a short temper brandished his Trishool and shouted, ‘Get out of my way you fat little dwarf or I’ll cut off your head.’

‘Over my dead body,’ said Ganesh digging in his heels.

Shiva swung his trishool and cut off his son’s head just as Parvati, hearing the shouting, arrived at the door.

‘What have you done, you beast!’ she screamed looking at the dead body of her son. ‘You better fix this right away or you will never see the inside of my bedroom again.’

Realizing that his chances of getting laid were fast approaching zero Shiva said, ‘You do one thing. Run out and bring the first creature you see that has a head.’

When she got to the street she saw an elephant coming her way. She led the elephant to Shiva who cut off its head and stuck it on Ganesh’s body. He immediately revived, Parvati was thrilled to have her son back and Shiva was invited in.

What it Means

A Freudian psychologist might have a field day with the Oedipal implications of this myth but it was never intended as a statement about the condition of the human psyche. The purpose of the Ganesh symbol is to reveal the nature of the self beyond the mind.

Ganesh as a boy represents any human being who does not know who he is. In fact he is the son of Shiva, which is to say, the son of God. He does not know this, however, because his understanding is limited. He is just a ‘boy’ spiritually speaking. Elephants are symbols of intelligence and memory. When Ganesh confronts Shiva, his own innermost self, he is relieved of his limited understanding. The elephant head represents the Vedas, the knowledge of the self. The self is the source of our intelligence. The message of the Vedas are what needs to be remembered if we are to gain self knowledge. What is self knowledge? That I am limitless awareness, without name and form.

If you look into the meaning of his name you will discover that he is the self. *Gana* means planet and *isha* means the ruler. He is the ruler of the planets. The thoughts in our minds revolve around awareness just like the planets revolve around the sun. This means that the mind is useful only because it is structured by an eternally consistent power. The millions of subjective events that take place in our consciousness depend on awareness just as the planets need the sun's gravitational field to remain in orbit. Without it they would spin out of control and the solar system would no longer be a 'system.' Life would be an impossible chaos because purposeful work would be impossible. So awareness 'rules' the mind. It illumines the mind like the sun illumines the planets. If awareness is withdrawn from the mind, as it is in deep sleep, the mind dies.

Ganesh has only one tusk. This means that the self is non-dual. Two symbolizes duality and one non-duality. Shiva was entreated by the Gods to give out the Vedas for the sake of the world. He agreed but with one stipulation; that he would not repeat even one word. Ganesh agreed to record the Vedas and duly took up his pen. Shiva began but in the middle of the discourse Ganesh's pen ran out of ink. Fearing that he would miss something while filling his pen he broke off his tusk and continued to write without missing a word. This means that the words of the Vedas destroy one's dualistic views. In other words Ganesh attained enlightenment hearing the teachings of the Vedas.

Every aspect of his wonderful form speaks of non-duality. His huge round belly, for instance. Non-duality, you say? What is the connection? Answer: the self is *purna*, fullness. This means that nothing can be added to you or subtracted from you. As the self you are always satisfied.

Ganesh rides on a rat or has a small mouse at his feet. Rodents are symbols of desire. They have so much desire they are continually active. Desire is synonymous with the ego. Because it feels limited, inadequate and incomplete the ego desires to complete itself by obtaining things in this world. Desires control people who do not know who they are but the enlightened have transcended desire; they are non-doers. You can only attain the status of a non-doer if you realize that you are whole and complete by nature. If you know this you do not feel the need to do anything to gain anything.

Ganesh has four arms. This means that the self has four 'limbs.' They are (1) *manas*, the emotional/feeling function, (2) *buddhi*, the intellect or thinking function, (3) *ahamkara*, the ego or 'I' sense and (4) *chittta*, memory.

In his upper right hand he is holding an open lotus. The lotus is a symbol of enlightenment. It is closed at night (spiritual ignorance) and opens in the light (self knowledge).

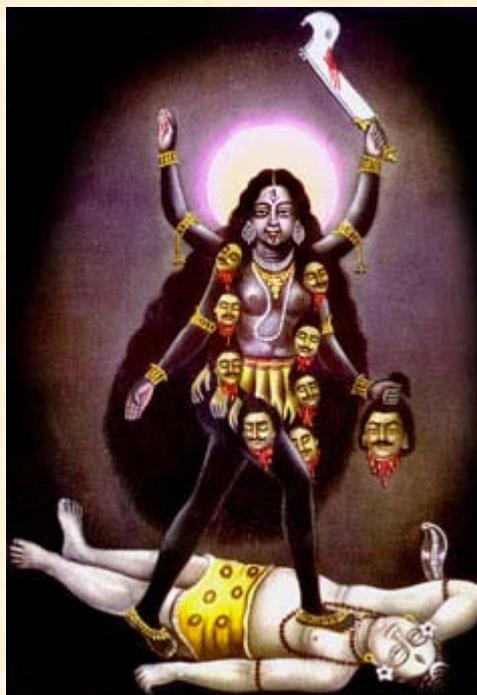
In his upper left hand he carries an axe representing discrimination. Discrimination is the power to distinguish what is real from what isn't. The self alone is real, meaning enduring. It's forms are unreal. Enlightenment is nothing but discrimination.

His lower right hand is in *abaya mudra* and is holding a mala. *Abaya mudra* is the gesture of fearlessness. The self is fearless and grants protection from fear. The mala represents spiritual practice. The purpose of a *mala* is to remove *mal*. *Mal* is subjective impurities. Subjective impurities fall into two categories: *rajas* and *tamas*. *Rajas* is passion and desire. It produces much emotional and mental agitation and is inimical to self realization. *Tamas* is stupidity, sloth, and inertia. It causes the mind to cloud. The self cannot be seen in a sleepy mind. Discrimination does not function when the mind is dull or passionate.

In the lower left hand Ganesh is holding a big bowl of sweets. This means that the self is bliss, the sweetest thing. There is nothing dearer or more sweet than one's self.

Ganesh sports a beautiful golden crown, symbolizing dominion, power, and overlordship. The self has dominion over everything in so far as it is the source of everything. It is omnipotent and as such rules the world.

Kali



The Pauranic Deities are a divine smorgasboard of meaning. There are many self symbols because people's tastes are diverse. Since all of these deities reference the same object just as all food serves the same purpose you can access the self through innumerable pathways.

Kali is one of the most provocative symbols of the self. Yes, she is intelligent and compassionate but she is also aggressive and prone to combat. Feminists and lesbians love her for obvious reasons. But, like all Hindu deities, she is not a statement about the mind. There are many images and stories of Kali but the one I have chosen to discuss reveals a particularly important truth about the quest for enlightenment.

Kali is the self in the form of Time. Time is the great destroyer. She is the feminine counterpart of Shiva. Yes, the self is responsible for the decay and destruction that is one aspect of its creation but the destruction we see depicted here...murder...is of a different order. To divine the meaning of this symbol we need to understand the stages of enlightenment.

We come into this life experiencing our limitlessness and oneness with everything but, because the intellect has yet to develop, we do not understand what we are experiencing. When the intellect does develop it is trained to think of the self as limited, incomplete and inadequate and is encouraged to solve the problem of inadequacy by picking up experience in life. At a certain point, the individual comes to realize that no matter how much experience he or she can garner, the experienced objects and activities do not produce lasting happiness. This is usually an unpleasant realization, often resulting in a profound disillusionment. It is frequently referred to as the 'dark night of the soul' in religious literature or 'hitting bottom' in popular culture.

Most react to this existential crisis by sinking into distracting habits, mind numbing substances and/or frivolous entertainments, but for unknown reasons a few begin to enjoy a variety of peculiar and invariably confusing religious or spiritual experiences that lead them to the idea of God or some sort of 'inner light' or 'higher state.' And at some point during this period the person becomes convinced that he or she can find happiness 'within.'

The second stage is the conscious search for the self because the self, it is rightly believed, is the only source of lasting satisfaction. During this stage the mind 'enters the stream' to use a Buddhist metaphor; it finds a spiritual path. Spiritual culture is the road to liberation. However, it can also become the final obstacle because the seeker can develop and cling to a developed identity as a seeker. Liberation is the

realization that the self is limitless and that the 'I' is the self. In this image the dead Shiva represents the spiritual path and the destruction of the seeking identity. Kali, the self, stands proudly over its dead body. This same truth is encapsulated in the Zen saying, "If you meet the Buddha on the path, slay him."

How has this final realization been accomplished? With the sword of discrimination. The 'sword of discrimination' is an extremely common Vedantic symbol because it represents the Upanishad's fundamental view of enlightenment...discrimination. What is this discrimination? It is the ability to separate what is real from what isn't. The self alone is real. What changes is unreal. Yes, in a non-dual reality everything is real but during the seeking phase many ephemeral manifestations of the self still seem real and it is the duty of the seeker to reject them and cling to the self alone. Realization, enlightenment, happens when the sword of discrimination is used to lop off the head of the one who is wielding the sword. In other words when one calls off the search and embraces his or her limitless identity.

How has this discrimination been accomplished? Kali is almost always depicted as wearing a necklace of skulls or in this case bloody severed heads. Skulls represent death. Death is not a physical statement in spiritual science. It is a symbol change...time. So the necklace of skulls represents the self as immortal...beyond change. In this image she wears a necklace of bloody severed heads. The 'head' in spiritual iconography invariably represents thought. What thoughts have been cut off? All thoughts of limitation. This means that she is left with only one thought, 'I am limitless awareness' because you cannot kill awareness and the knowledge of oneself as awareness is not separate from awareness itself.

The skirt of severed hands is another interesting symbol. Hands represent doing. Most of our physical activities require hands. To do, you need a doer. Most people identify themselves with their accomplishments or roles in life. This identity needs to be removed if one is to attain full spiritual maturity. It is accomplished when you realize that you are the self. The self is not a doer because it is non-dual. There is no activity in awareness, the self. How can there be activity if there is nothing other than it? This is why enlightenment equals peace...all one's striving to be more, better or different cease.

Kali's halo is a cliché symbol of illumination. The final symbol, her uncut hair, represents the self as the natural state. Cut hair is unnatural. Only humans do it. In spite of considerable research I have been unable to come up with a reasonable explanation for Kali's extended tongue. I'm leaning toward the following explanation but it is a stretch: the tongue is hidden within the mouth. Enlightenment means that everything is

known and nothing is concealed. Therefore one is not afraid to show everything that is 'inside.'

Vishnu



Vishnu is a benign, intelligent and compassionate deity. He is the self in the form of the preserver and represents the principle of light in the universe. The word '*vishnu*' means 'that which pervades everything' and refers to the self. In this image, which is perhaps my favorite spiritual symbol, Vishnu is reclining on the coils of the seven headed cosmic serpent, Adi Sesa in an infinite ocean. From his navel a lotus is growing and in the center of the lotus sits Brahma, the creator of the universe. He is attended by celestials, Gods and sages. His wife Laxmi, the Goddess of wealth, is at his feet. In one hand he holds the lotus of enlightenment and a noose in the other. The sun and the moon look on. The graphic was scanned from an old poster and some of it was damaged beyond repair so Laxmi, the noose, the moon and part of the sun are missing.

Vishnu is reclining. Reclining, rest, and sleep are common and appropriate self symbols. They are appropriate because the self is a non-doer. It is always at rest. It is the substrate for the universe and the source of its creative energies. It is 'asleep' i.e. unconcerned by the problems of the world. The self rests on itself in the form of the seven headed infinite cosmic serpent. This simply means that the self is limitless. The seven heads symbolize the seven cosmic levels the Vedas speak of: three heaven realms, three hell realms and earth. The most subtle and important symbol is the lotus coming from his navel with the four-headed Creator sitting in it. It is important because it says that the self is more than just the creator of the universe. It is the

consciousness because of which creation is possible. It is uncreated, unborn, and unmade. The creator, Brahma, is of a lower order because it is created out of consciousness. And because the creation is an effect of which the creator is the cause it is also consciousness. This is so because any effect is just a transformation of a pre-existing cause. The word *brahma* means limitless and therefore the creation is limitless. It is limitless because the substrate, the self, is limitless. Brahma's four heads represent the four cardinal directions, the four elements and the four limbs of the Subtle Body. This accounts for both matter and spirit. These two principles make creation possible. Spirit can't create without a substance. And a substance cannot shape itself because it is inert and insentient. The creation can only happen in duality. In consciousness itself creation is impossible because it is non-dual. The sun and the moon also represent the dualistic principles that make up the cosmos. The sun represents awareness and the moon reflected awareness, i.e. the energy/matter that make up the creation.

The lotus symbolizes enlightenment. Enlightenment is the knowledge "I am that which pervades everything, limitless awareness." The self is compassion; it sees everyone and everything as itself. Therefore it is the 'wielder of the noose.' The noose symbolizes liberation. Vishnu reaches down into the ocean of *samsara* and grants liberation to souls drowning there. The 'ocean of *samsara*' is the state of mind of *samsaris*. *Samsaris* are worldly people, caught up in their conditioning. *Samsara* means whirlpool or 'circling.' Conditioning happens because people do not know they are free, i.e. the self. They get caught up in it and go round and round on the 'wheel of *samsara*.'

The Gods and sages looking on mean that both the unseen world of spiritual forces (the gods) and the world of humans (the sages) depend on the self for their existence. Finally Laxmi, the Goddess of wealth, worships at his feet. It means that our only source of real wealth is devotion to the self. On Vishnu's forehead is the caste mark of Vaishnavas. It is a symbol of a Vedic sacrificial rite, a *yagna*. The white portion represents the *kund*, the bricks that contain the sacrificial fire. They symbolize matter. And the red mark in the center represents the sacrificial fire, the 'fire of consciousness.' The self is seen as a fire because it gives both heat (love) love and light (wisdom).

The Story of Vishnu's Avatara as a Dwarf

A very long time ago a powerful demon, Mahabali, gained control of the earth, set himself up as its ruler and instituted a reign of materialism. He hated religion and promulgated laws banning religious rituals. The gods live from the offerings from sacrificial fires and

because of the ban were beginning to starve. The offerings of the few brave souls who worshiped in secret were not enough to sustain them so they went to Vishnu who was reclining on Sesha in the infinite milky ocean and asked him to come down on earth and destroy the demon. Vishnu, an ocean of compassion, agreed and took the form of a dwarf *sannyassi*, a renunciate.

It so happened that once Bali had consolidated his grip on power he understood the importance of keeping the public happy and decided to distribute gifts to various cronies and supporters. As a public relations gimmick he promised to gift the general public as well. On the day of the giveaway the Gods and the dwarf Vishnu showed up and got in line. When it was their turn Indra, the king of the Gods stepped up and said, "You are indeed a great and generous ruler, O Bali."

Bali was used to flattery and not impressed by it. "Get to the point," he said, "What do you want?"

"As you know, Sir, we are mere Gods and have no physical bodies so we don't want anything for ourselves but we do have a small request on behalf of this small *sannyassi*. We think it would be very good public relations with the religious community if you were to gift him with a small plot of land. He's very tiny and doesn't need much, just a little parcel on which to build his hut. If I am correct you own the whole world and could easily afford such a modest request."

The idea appealed to Bali but his chief minister was suspicious. "You know, Bali," he said, "I don't trust the Gods. They are always up to something. Besides look at that dwarf. There is something positively supernatural about him. He glows like a saint."

"You're right," Bali replied, "but it's probably due to his tapas (spiritual practice) and nothing else. What harm can it do? And as the Gods point out it is good public relations. I'll see to it that he only gets a tiny plot."

"OK," Bali said to Indra, "He can have as much land as he can cover with three steps."

"I did not misspeak when I said you were generous," Indra said, barely able to conceal his contempt.

It so happens that one of Vishnu's names is 'long strider' owing to the fact that he pervades the whole creation. There is no place where he isn't so he already is where he would be if he were to attempt to go there.

"Get on with it Swami," Bali said to Vishnu. "I haven't got all day."

"Thank you, so much," Vishnu said. "You are indeed a great man."

With that he took his first step and claimed the whole material world. Bali's jaw dropped in amazement and the crowd went wild because they knew that Vishnu would now rule the land fairly. With his

second step Vishnu claimed subtle unseen spiritual worlds. The Gods were overjoyed because it spelled the end of Bali's influence in Heaven too.

"Wait a minute," said Bali who had realized the glory of the Lord by Vishnu's awesome display of legerdemain. "I don't know what is left to claim but please make your third step land on top of my head.' Accordingly Vishnu put his foot on Bali's head and he attained enlightenment.

Shiva



Shiva is an immensely popular deity in India and there are many images of him meant to reveal different aspects of the self. The image above is called Shiva Nataraj, the Lord of the Cosmic Dance and the myth behind his appearance in Chidambaram is recounted above. He is dancing in a ring of fire which symbolizes the cosmos. Fire is a symbol of the self, pure consciousness and it means that although the cosmos appears to be insentient it is actually dancing consciousness or energy... a view that is supported by elementary particle physics. Shiva is the power that resides in the heart of every atom that makes the cosmos pulsate with life.

In his upper right hand he is holding a small drum, a *damaru*, meant to symbolize the creation of space. The existence of space makes vibration possible and this vibration creates the worlds. In the upper left hand he is holding a small flame. This represents the destruction of ignorance, the 'fire of knowledge' that consumes the fuel

of unknowing. The lower right hand with only the palm and fingers visible is *abaya mudra*, the gesture of fearlessness. The self is fearless and protects the creation from fear; Shiva's is a benign universe. The lower left arm and hand sloping downward indicates, grace or compassion. For aesthetic reasons I was unable to include the dwarf under his feet but this is an essential part of the story because it represents the relationship between the self and the ego.

Saraswati



Fire is one of the most pervasive symbols of the self. During the Vedic period Agni, the fire god, was the most popular deity. And many thousand years later fire is still an essential element in religious ritual. Fire is an appropriate symbol because it gives both light and heat. Light is an obvious self symbol because it removes darkness just as self knowledge removes spiritual ignorance. Heat is a common symbol of love. The self is the love that glues the whole creation together causing each part to work in harmony with the others. Fire also consumes dry wood just as self knowledge consumes hardened dry egoic habits. In this graphic the fire of wisdom is consuming the stone out of which the Goddess is carved. The Goddess, Saraswati, is sitting in a lotus. The open lotus symbolizes enlightenment, the realization that one is perfect, i.e. fully developed already. The lotus is fitting symbol for spiritual awakening because it opens in daylight and closes at night. Night is a common symbol of spiritual ignorance. Her four arms represent her as the self, limitless awareness, in the form of the Subtle Body or the human mind. One limb represents the intellect, another the feelings and

emotions, the third the ego or 'I-sense' and the fourth memory. The left hand resting on her lap symbolizes the receptive negative feminine energy and the right the positive masculine energy. Together they represent duality. The original icon can be found on a temple at Gangaikondacholapuram in Tamil Nadu.

Appropriate Self Symbols

Light/Vision/Seeing

Why do light and vision symbols most accurately represent the self and self knowledge? Because the self is limitless non-dual awareness. Awareness is the 'light' in which what is known is known, the 'eye of consciousness.' It is not physical light but it is similar to physical light because it illumines all objects, including physical light, just as physical light illumines the objects in space. Shankara says, "Realize That to be the self which illumines the sun, but is not illumined by the sun." Fire works too because it produces light. Because of this the sun is a common self symbol. Perception, is 'seeing.' Seeing is knowing. Knowing is experiencing. Because the eyes bring knowledge and experience they are appropriate self symbols. Although the moon illumines things it is not an appropriate self symbol because it does not generate its own light from within. It borrows its light from the sun. Therefore it is an appropriate symbol for the mind.

Third Eye

We have two eyes for seeing objects and one, the self, for seeing reality. What is that 'eye?' It is knowledge. Knowledge brings 'light' to things. Ignorance of physical objects is taken care of by the physical eyes. But what kind of 'eye' removes self ignorance. It would necessarily be a 'third' eye.

Fish Eye

The prize for the most creative symbol goes to the person who named the famous Shiva temple in Madurai, the Meenakshi Temple. Meenakshi means 'fish eye.' I puzzled long and hard how such a wondrous edifice could have been given such a bizarre and apparently profane name. One day I met a South Indian pundit who confirmed my suspicion; because it has no eyelid a fish eye, like the self, never sleeps.

Problem Symbols

Union, Becoming, Merger, Experiencing and State

It is true that owing to the plethora spiritual words one encounters on the path it often seems easier to give up thinking altogether and become an advocate of 'surrender' or some equally ill-considered belief. But we cannot escape words. Even in the silence of the presence of the self they operate, coloring and shaping our quests. As we approach the end of our journeys, however, the words we cling to or have rejected become more and more important.

It would be fair to say that even those of us that imagine we have given up concepts actually formulate enlightenment in terms of action words. For example: the ego is meant to "become' or 'merge into' the self; the individual is supposed 'experience' the 'state of non-duality;' to 'finish' our work we are enjoined to 'experience' the self; enlightenment should 'feel' like endless bliss; enlightenment is the 'union' of the individual and the total. Formulating enlightenment in terms of action words and experience reflects our belief in the reality of duality.

However, if reality is actually not a duality then action words become a big problem. If our world is a non-duality as scripture contends, then the appropriate words to describe and conceive it would be nouns. And statements about it would be appropriately framed as simple statements of identity. Let's examine some words and see how they might either aid or prevent enlightenment.

Union/Becoming

It is the contention of Yoga that enlightenment is a union of the individual with the Divine. What kind of union is it? Supposedly it is an experience in which the subject and the object 'become' one. So what is this 'becoming?' 'Becoming' means that something that was in one form previously subsequently changes into another form. In short, something limited, inadequate and incomplete 'becomes' limitless adequate and whole. This is all fine as an idea but it presents a real problem. 'Becoming' is experiencing. Experience never stops changing. Therefore there is no such thing as a permanent experience. If enlightenment is an experience and there is no such thing as a permanent experience there is no permanent enlightenment. If there is no such thing as permanent enlightenment why would it be more desirable than any of the many pleasurable experiences that are available to us on a daily basis? Why would we seek it in the first place?

If this is a non-dual reality there cannot be two separate selves. If there are not two separate selves how can they 'become' one? Yes, it seems like there are two or more selves but what if the mind has played a trick on us and caused us to take what is one as two or many? If this is so then there is no lower self to 'become' a higher self and all attempts to make this happen are ultimately futile.

Someone who has 'become' the self through an experience 'unbecomes' the self when the experience runs its course. These temporary self realizations are useful in so far as they give the experienter an idea that there is a self and that it is limitless but if the person believes that enlightenment is the 'permanent experience of the self' he or she will simply develop a craving for self experience. Is the craving for an epiphany different from any other craving?

Merger

For a merger to take place two objects are required but if this is a non-dual reality there are not two objects. Therefore trying to merge oneself into something else is pointless. If, however, reality is described in terms of what is, then the search for experience would necessarily become a search for understanding. Understanding means that I don't have to change myself or my world, I just have to expose myself to a means of knowledge and let it work on me. Knowledge is not something you do. It is something that happens. If this is a non-dual reality but I believe it is a duality then my only problem is lack of understanding. This is why Vedanta formulates the solution to limitation in terms of knowledge.

Waking/Sleeping

Another metaphor for enlightenment is 'waking up.' The problem with this idea is that if 'waking' is an activity then whatever wakes up eventually goes back to sleep. Formulating enlightenment in terms of 'awakening' does more harm than good. Because of this idea the spiritual world is brimming with frustration. The problem is centered on the word 'you.' If you are a changeable karmic entity then you will wake and you will sleep. But if you are unchanging awareness then there is no question of sleep or waking. You cannot 'become' unchanging awareness because you are unchanging awareness to begin with. This fact can only be 'experienced' as knowledge.

State

This is not an action word but it is a problem word nonetheless. The self is often referred to as the forth 'state' of consciousness. Or the thought-free state is said to be enlightenment. Is the self a 'state?' If a state is subject to change then the self is not a state because the self is unchanging awareness. Although it is not a verb the word 'state' becomes a problem when I try to relate it to myself. Am I a 'state?' I am not. I am the awareness of any and all states. I, awareness, am a fact. I can only be known. Or not.

Most Exotic Symbol

The prize for the most exotic, artistic and fascinating spiritual symbol goes to the *Kundalini Shakti*.

As it is conceived there is a 'serpent power' a latent energy 'coiled' at the base of the spine. This power must be 'awakened' so that it can begin its journey back to Shiva, back to the self, the 'thousand petaled lotus.' Its journey is long and arduous, fraught with peril. It needs to pass through several '*chakras*' and have certain experiences on its way to enlightenment. Once it has 'pierced all the *chakras*' it leaves the body and 'merges' with consciousness, the self.

This metaphor raises several questions. Why does a latent potential 'energy' need to journey through and out of the body to mate with consciousness? How will it be benefited by this 'union' if it is consciousness already?

If it awakened on its own, Kundalini Yoga would not have evolved. Kundalini yoga is a lengthy arduous program of physical and mental practices that are meant to awaken the *kundalini*. These practices must work or they would not have survived for several thousand years. In fact I practiced this yoga in India under the tutelage of a yogi while living in a cave on the Ganges banks. I also experienced 'union with Shiva' as a result of them. Unfortunately, a few days later I experienced separation from Shiva.

Kundalini Yoga is obviously an experiential concept of enlightenment tailor made for doers. Its practices are so difficult and complex that only one in a million can master them even if one could find a qualified teacher. And, at the end of the day it does not get rid of the doer, since any practice requires a doer. On the contrary it builds ego if the practice is successful or ruins one's self confidence if it isn't. It presumes that an epiphany will permanently solve the problem of limitation...which is patently untrue. It does not take into account that

experience does not permanently remove self ignorance. There is no need to repeat the arguments why enlightenment is not an experience.

A Final, Entertaining and Complex Pauranic Story

Vishnu is a peaceful, compassionate, intelligent deity because the self is peace, intelligence and non-dual wisdom. Non-dual wisdom is a synonym for compassion because a wise person sees everything as his or her own self and only expresses good will to others. Vishnu is a protector and savior of human beings and comes to their aid whenever the need arises. By hearing his story, visiting his temple at Tirupathi and having the experience of his form, the devotee is promised liberation. Since life in this changing world is fraught with insecurity, liberation is considered the highest goal of life.

When there is a decline in righteousness in the world and living a holy life becomes difficult, Vishnu, the all-pervading impersonal formless self, takes a form and appears on earth to re-establish Dharma. The story of his incarnation begins when Narada, a celestial devotee of Vishnu and son of the Creator, Brahma, goes to his father and informs him that the earth is suffering a period of materialism and lawlessness.

Narada represents the enlightened mind, one that rests permanently in the self. His father said, "You will always be going around the universe. There is nothing unknown to you. Merely by thinking you can create a problem and solve it too. I don't need to teach you anything or do anything for you. Do what is necessary to rectify the situation. I wish you all success."

So Narada took leave and went to earth chanting the name of Vishnu. When he reached the Ganges banks he came upon a group of sages performing a sacrificial ritual, a *yagna*, for the universal good. The *yagna* was the fundamental spiritual practice of Vedic times. Sages, enlightened people, do not worship for personal gain but for the spiritual welfare of the world by honoring the deities proscribed in the Vedas. The deities are the positive spiritual forces in the total mind that keep individuals on the path of Dharma. They are the link between the formless self, the source of everything, and life on earth. These gods 'feed' on the oblations offered into the sacrificial fires, meaning that the cosmos functions because of the principle of sacrifice, each part offering what it has for the good of the total. For example, trees receive carbon dioxide from various sources and produce life giving oxygen that is useful to other life forms. Human beings who hoard and accumulate things only for themselves disturb the natural sacrificial order of the cosmos, Dharma. Everything animate and inanimate follows the

program imprinted on it by the divine non-dual consciousness from which it comes. Plants and animals automatically follow their dharma but human beings, because they have lost their connection to the self and exercise free will can choose to contravene it; they behave selfishly. Selfish behavior disturbs the cosmic order. To rectify this situation spiritual people (sages) make offerings for the good of the world.

The ritual lasted many days and during a break Narada, who had a reputation for making trouble, asked the sages which of the Trimurtis¹⁸ (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) would receive the *yagna* effect.¹⁹ His provocative question set them to thinking. Each felt that the good karma of the Yagna should go to his personal deity and eventually the *yagna* turned into a heated debate.

When he saw that he had provoked them enough, Narada suggested that Brighu, a great sage who had acquired exceptional powers from long and arduous penance, test the three gods to determine who was worthy of the *yagna* benefits. Not only was Brighu the most powerful sage, he possessed a gargantuan spiritual ego and Narada had in mind to give him an assignment that would cut him down to size.

Flattered, Brighu left the *yagna* and went to *satya loka*, the 'realm of truth,' where Brahma and his consort, Saraswati, the Divine Mother, were seated near their throne conversing with some celestial denizens. Brighu strode haughtily into the room and sat on Brahma's throne without acknowledging the Creator's presence. Brahma felt inclined to lecture Brighu and said, "A person who acquires such great power through yoga should also be humble and well-mannered. But you think you are superior to everyone, including me, the Creator. Who do you think you are? "

Brighu got off the throne and thought, "Owing to an excess of *rajoguna*²⁰ Brahma is exceptionally proud and does not deserve the *yagna* effect." Before he strode off in a huff he said to Brahma. "You, not me, are lacking in manners. You made no attempt to understand why I had come but continued your conversation with these exalted

¹⁸ Tri means three. Murti means form. The 'three forms' are Brahma, the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva, the Destroyer. In Vedanta, the three forms are considered to be the self, formless consciousness, functioning as the universal forces that create, preserve and destroy.

¹⁹ Since this is a self conscious universe every action has an effect. Religious rituals are a specific kind of action that have a subtle effect on the minds of those who perform them and on those for whom the ritual is performed.

²⁰ Three subtle energies make up the universe of names and forms, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Sattva* is responsible for preservation, *tamas* for destruction, and *rajas* for creation. *Rajas* is a projecting energy that makes a person very passionate. Religious ritual has very little long term effect on persons who are burdened with this temperament because their minds are so disturbed by its greedy grasping energy that they are not suitable recipients of its beneficial effects.

celestials when I arrived. Not only that, you had the temerity to rebuke me. Therefore I curse you. You will not have any temples on earth and will not be worshipped.” (Because of this story there is only one temple dedicated to Brahma in all of India. Temples are as ubiquitous in India as supermarkets, gas stations and fast food joints are in America.)

Next Brighu approached Kailas, the holy mountain where Lord Shiva lives. The whole Himalayan range echoed with the sound of Shiva’s disciples chanting his holy name. At the time Shiva happened to be in his bedroom making love with his wife, the Divine Mother Parvati. (lovemaking symbolizes the union of the two fundamental cosmic principles, spirit (pure consciousness) and matter (energy). Brighu strode proudly in without knocking. Parvati covered herself and Shiva aimed his Trishool²¹ at Brighu and said. “You belong to the same race as the Creator. You are a very learned and powerful man who knows the Vedas and has done extreme penance, yet you are completely lacking in manners. Leave immediately or I will destroy you.”

Brighu was unbowed and said, “You may be a big god but you are the one lacking in manners. You ignored me and continued to make love with your wife without even inquiring why I had come. Now you point your Trishool at me and insult me. Had you shown some culture, you might have been the recipient of the *yagna* effect, but now you will receive my curse. You will be worshipped on earth only in the form of a *linga* (idol) and not in your real shape.”²²

When Brighu arrived at Vaikunta he saw Vishnu reclining on the infinite coils of the cosmic serpent Sesha who was floating on an endless ocean of milk. Vishnu was surrounded by worshipful gods and goddesses and his wife Laxmi, the goddess of wealth, was hidden in his heart. Vishnu, who is omniscient, saw Brighu coming and divined his purpose but pretended to be unaware of the sage. Remembering his treatment at the hands of Brahma and Shiva Brighu became furious, rushed up to Vishnu and kicked him violently in the chest, the abode of Laxmi.

Vishnu, who is never perturbed, took the insult without batting an eye. In fact he got up from his royal seat, took Brighu by the hand, led him to Sesha’s coils, sat him down and proceeded to massage his right foot which had sustained a terrible injury since it struck a huge jewel that

²¹ A trident, the self as weapon. The trident is the self manifesting as the three energies. This action is equivalent to threatening someone with a firearm.

²² The self cannot be objectified into a form in reality but, for the purpose of gaining an abiding mind, it can be worshipped through symbols. The word ‘linga’ means a sign or symbol. The Shiva lingam, mistakenly thought to be a phallic symbol, is a symbol of formless consciousness, the self. It is always embedded in a yoni, a womb, which symbolizes the world of forms: Energy and Matter. The union of the lingam and the yoni is a symbol of the perfect union of Spirit and Energy or Matter. The ‘union of spirit and matter’ means that they are not inherently two different things, although they appear to have contradictory natures.

he wore on his chest. As he was massaging the foot he surreptitiously opened Brighu's third eye which lay in his foot and said, "Oh, great and learned man, forgive my negligence. I didn't see you. This injury you received is due to me. But we need not worry as it is part of the divine plan and we are only instruments."

This incident is rife with many layers of symbolism. The ocean of milk symbolizes the divine mind; the cosmic snake with infinite coils the infinite spiritual potential of the cosmos. Vishnu represents the self. In this story he stands for *sattva*, the mind that is calm and peaceful, the mind that knows the truth, one that does not react to events. The wound Brighu receives as karmic retribution for his arrogant behavior softens him up so he can hear the truth. The opening of his 'third eye' means that Vishnu gave Brighu self knowledge. Self knowledge is the only cure for egoism. The 'right' foot symbolizes the humility that comes from living a righteous life. Brighu was ready for self knowledge owing to his long and arduous spiritual work. The only obstacle to his enlightenment was his ego, which Vishnu deflated by his compassionate non-attachment. When the mind is pure, *sattvic*, it is dispassionate, non-reactive. Brighu, by his aggression, expected Vishnu to react, but when he did not, he became aware of his own anger and was forced to let it go, setting himself up for the opening of his third eye which was accomplished by the Upanishadic teaching, "*Tat tvam asi*" a Sanskrit statement indicating one's identity with the self.

Brighu realized that Vishnu, an embodiment of *sattvaguna*,²³ was the only god qualified to receive the blessings of the sacrifice, so he returned to the Ganges and informed the sages who were very happy. The *yagna* continued for forty days and on the last day Vishnu appeared to receive its effects. He then returned to his heavenly abode.

He arrived to find his wife Laxmi in a terrible state. She had taken Brighu's kick as an insult and was furious that her husband had treated the proud sage with such kindness. She said, "You are the head of the whole cosmos, you command the respect of millions of gods and billions of creatures, yet you loved and served that vain Marharshi who dared to kick you in the chest where I live.²⁴ I cannot tolerate your behavior."

"Calm down, my dear," said Vishnu. "Don't you realize that Brighu is my devotee and it is my duty to save devotees? Will parents get angry and punish their children when they are kicked?²⁵ He came here with a purpose, not to dishonor me. His actions were part of the divine plan. Why worry about it?"

²³ The quality of luminous clarity, conducive to understanding.

²⁴ Laxmi is the goddess of wealth. Wealth is a symbol of bhakti, devotion to God, our greatest asset. When the pride strikes the self in the heart, it drives out love.

²⁵ A fine bit of pedagogical advice. Don't punish children for selfish behavior. Understand the limitation of their understanding and give them love and wisdom.

“Since you are the intelligence that runs the entire cosmos, you are exceptionally clever at justifying your actions, but I will not swallow your lame arguments. I am leaving you once and for all. And I will not leave that arrogant Brahmin unpunished!”

So she cursed that the entire Brahmin community would be deprived of wealth and would only subsist by selling their knowledge.²⁶ She then prostrated to her husband and went to a lonely place on earth where she sat in meditation.

When Laxmi left Heaven lost its festive appearance. Because she was the goddess of wealth all the money went with her and the citizens began to suffer poverty. They did not enjoy their new status so they went to Vishnu and requested him to persuade his wife to return. Feeling their distress he went to earth in search of his beloved. Tired and exhausted after searching many days he eventually arrived at the Tirupathi hills and took shelter in an ant hill under a tamarind tree where he sat in meditation praying for the return of his wife.²⁷

During his stay on earth Vishnu suffered all the problems that befall human beings and ended up falling in love and marrying another woman. The marriage caused him a big problem because he was a pauper since his wife, the Goddess of Wealth, deserted him. As he was thinking about the problem Narada appeared and suggested that he take a loan from Kubera, the cosmic treasurer. Kubera agreed. Vishnu promised to pay interest until the end of the Kali Yuga and return the principal immediately thereafter.

The wedding was a festive affair attended by beings from all the fourteen worlds, subtle and gross. When it was over the bride and bridegroom spent six months enjoying the beauty of the Tirupathi hills. The Lord so enjoyed himself that he decided to reside there until the end of the Kali Yuga. To that end he asked two kings to build him a temple on the hill above Tirupathi at a place now called Tirumala.²⁸ At the inauguration of the temple the Lord entered and lit two lamps that will burn until the end of the present Yuga.

While all these events were taking place Laxmi was still deep in meditation, unaware of what was happening and the whereabouts of her husband. She saw Narada walking by chanting the name of Vishnu and called him over. After expressing her concern about her husband’s fate Narada said, “Why worry? He is quite happy with his new wife,

²⁶ A ‘Brahmin’ is a person with a pure mind, one that is responsible for keeping the idea of truth alive in the culture. The idea is that wealth and spiritual knowledge do not mix.

²⁷ When you lose your love, you lose your composure and need to turn within to find it. The anthill is a common Vedic symbol of the cave of the heart where the mind can meditate on the self.

²⁸ The temple at Tirumala is the most spiritually powerful temple in India. It is visited by tens of thousands of devotees on a daily basis. Because of the generosity of the devotees it is second only to the Vatican in terms of material wealth.

Padmavati. Isn't it strange that he married a new woman without your knowledge?"

The news so upset her that she rushed to Tirupathi and confronted Vishnu and his new bride. The women immediately began quarreling. Vishnu couldn't stand the racket, silently stepped back and converted himself into a stone idol. Realizing they had lost their beloved the women began to weep.²⁹

Then Vishnu said to Laxmi. "I have borrowed a lot of money from the cosmic treasurer for my wedding and am deeply in debt. I don't like this situation and am always thinking how to pay the steep rate of interest. I request that you give my devotees very much wealth so they will be tempted to sin more and pray to me for relief. I will appear in dreams and visions and advise them to fill my coffers in the form of offerings to facilitate the fulfillment of their vows."³⁰

Laxmi agreed.

Then he said, "My chest, which was polluted when Brighu kicked me has since been purified through all the trials and tribulations I have gone through while on earth looking for you. You may therefore occupy your original place."³¹ Laxmi was pleased with the Lord's words and occupied her place on the right side of his chest while Padmavati occupied the place on the left.

The symbolism of the descent of Vishnu and his installation as the diety at Triupathi is profound and complex. The following is a brief summary. The sage Brighu (the spiritual ego) kicks the God Vishnu, (the self), in the chest (the spiritual Heart) where his wife the Divine Mother Laxmi, the Goddess of wealth (read love or wisdom) lives. Angered by this blow she leaves heaven (the state of union with God) and goes to earth (the place where people suffer owing to lack of self love) where she undertakes rigorous penance (meditation) to regain her peace of mind. The self is not happy without love so Vishnu comes down to earth to find his wife. Unlike the Biblical variant, which condemns the divine couple and their offspring to endless suffering, the Vedic Adam and Eve are reunited after a series of trials and tribulations.

²⁹ Bad thoughts and anger turn love to stone.

³⁰ While they contain deep spiritual and psychological truths, the Puranas do not take themselves too seriously. This extraordinary idea is to be taken as a joke, although an important truth is contained in it: when you're too materially comfortable you tend to make trouble for yourself and may be attracted to religion as a way out. The worldwide resurgence of spirituality in the last twenty years might be caused in large part by the incredible material success of the Western world.

³¹ Brighu's kick was an act of unrestrained egoism. Such tendencies can only be purified by acts of penance.