

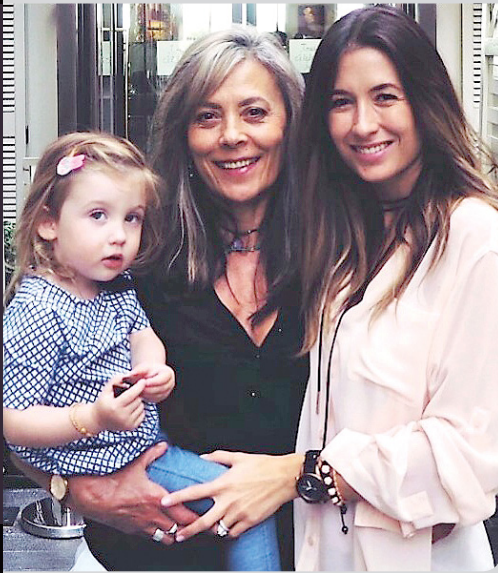
SHININGWORLD

NEWSLETTER

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2017

HELLO, EVERYONE

from Sundari



WE HOPE YOU enjoyed a happy start to another “new” year and that the coming months bring the peace of self-knowledge to all. Ramji and I left South Africa in early December, he heading off to India and me spending a few weeks in Dubai, where I had a wonderful time with my family, celebrating my 60th birthday with my beloved daughter and granddaughter. ☺

Sundari celebrating her birthday with her daughter and granddaughter in Dubai.

INDIA IN FULL SWING!

THE 2017 SEMINAR in Tiruvannamalai, India, is well under way after a tremendous amount of work to get the venue revamped and prepared. Ramji arrived in Tiru several weeks before the seminar started to find a huge and expensive job ahead of him. Fortunately, *Isvara* sent a few wonderful souls to



Arunachala, the mystical mountain, at dawn.



Before, at left: The Old Rice Mill in Tiruvannamalai.

After, below: The Old Rice Mill + *Isvara* = our event venue and the first days of teaching.



assist him, and dealing with the vagaries and frustrations of getting anything done in India, spared no effort or expense in transforming a very bland rice mill into a gorgeous event venue.

James' friend Gregory Lent, a well-known artist who lives in Tiruvannamalai, has been and continues to be a great help with every detail. Thank you, Greg, we would be in a bind without your practical and artistic input. Of invaluable assistance to us and to our attendees is Ramji's good friend Partheeban, who also lives in Tiru. Thank you, Partheeban, you are a champ! And thanks also to dear

Anja and Helga, who so generously help with the flowers every day.

Poor Ramji worked too hard, and just as I arrived in Tiru, three days before the teaching started, came down with a bad chest infection, which took a while to shake and was promptly passed on to me! Nonetheless, he rose to the occasion like the phoenix from the ashes. After a



Ramji, Anja and Gregory.



Ramji with Partheeban.



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Ramji outside the venue, with
rangolis on the ground.

shaky start to the teachings, he soon found his stride and is “back in the saddle,” doing what he does best: teaching Vedanta as the *mahatma* that he is. Not everyone had arrived at the time the photo above was taken, but we have a good crowd here, with a steady flow of people arriving. The new venue is beautiful, airy and cool; we got the sound system perfect (which was a big problem), and we have Indian ladies paint beautiful *rangolis* at the entrance of the venue every day. As this is the longest and biggest seminar Ramji teaches, we look forward to the build-up of *shakti* in the coming weeks as the teachings unfold.

India, as usual, has her way of testing everyone’s likes and dislikes – and, as uncomfortable as it may be, it is a pity if she does not manage to

do this! Coming to India is not only a priceless opportunity to experience the spiritual and devotional power of this place, but to observe our gratuitous “luxury” needs and expectations, to see how spoiled and entitled we are, to be taken completely out of our comfort zones. Here we can see clearly how much or how little we put self-knowledge into practice. Unless one has the means to stay at the top hotels where one experiences India *à la* the comforts of home, invariably India will try one’s patience and forbearance in unexpected (and expected) ways. We were no exception, as usual! Apart from the many exhausting details that had to be taken care of to get the venue up to scratch and getting sick on top of that, our accommodation was too small, it ran out of water and we had to move. We moved to a very nice new apartment, which just happens to have a temple right opposite which blasted us with devotional music at decibel levels hard for any non-Indian to endure! Needless to say, neither of us got much sleep while this was going on. Ah well, it would not be India if we could not love and hate it in equal measure! ☼

CULTURE, THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE GUNAS

INDIA ALWAYS EVOKES powerful feelings, which is why it is a very good place to observe how the *gunas* work, not only on a personal level, but in the environment. Arriving in India from Dubai was an interesting experience, as a greater contrast is not likely, due to the polar opposite nature of these two places. It gave me pause to consider how the *gunas* influence culture, the environment and our response to it, as a teaching. What is very notable is that all environments are very much like a person, with definite *vasanas* and an overarching identity, or *svadharma*. Whether native or outsider, we must adapt to it, not the other way around. As Krishna says, “All beings follow their nature, what use is control?” Well, that could also read, “All environments follow their nature, what use is control?” Nowhere is that advice more pertinent than in India!

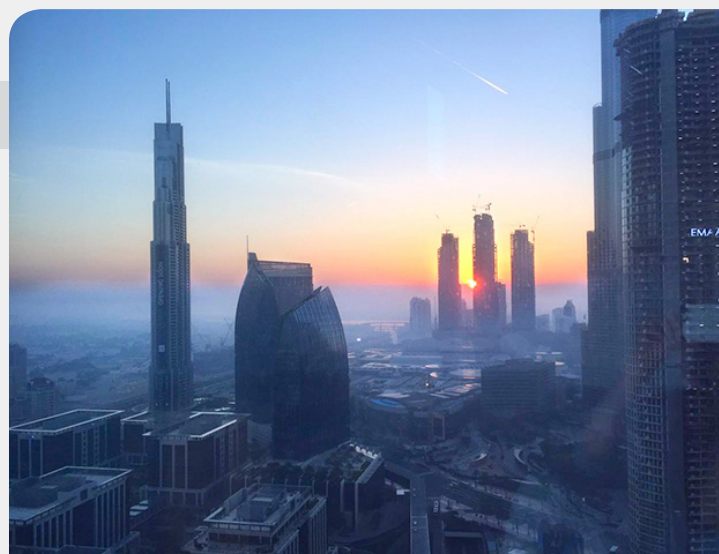
The essential point is, no matter where we are, we had better surrender to *Isvara* or suffer because the *gunas* control the environment – they are the environment and everything in it. *Isvara* will not bend to our petty likes and dislikes nor pay attention to our projections of how things “should be.” So it behoves us to consider where we live or visit from this perspective – take an environmental “*guna/vasana* assessment” and construct a profile as you would of a person. It also serves us to observe how the environment impacts on the kinds of thoughts and emotions that appear in the mind because it does influence both. In fact, if you do some inquiry, you will notice that different places bring up different states of mind. It is clear then that our thoughts and emotions do not come from us, but from *Isvara*. We do not make ourselves think or feel anything. The question is, do we identify with our thoughts and feelings and the *gunas* that give rise to them or do we identify with the knower of the *gunas* and of our thoughts and feelings? ☸

DUBAI AND INDIA

I COULD NOT resist doing a *guna* comparison of Dubai and India – it was just too obvious and juicy. Speaking as a *jiva*, it was so clear to both Ram and me the effect that Dubai had, comparing it with the effect India has on our state of mind, even though we do not identify with our state of mind, ever. So, hear me out, this is not a travelogue, but an insight into human nature and the *gunas*.

Dubai, part of the United Arab Emirates, possibly among the richest and certainly one of the youngest emerging cities in the world, gives us a little more than humongous shopping malls and oil. Both Ram and I felt distinctly depressed there, not alive and vital. The effect that Dubai has (unless your main orientation in life is as a desirer/enjoyer, chasing objects) is an oppressive emptiness, like it leeches on *shakti*. It takes, it does not give. The overriding feeling of manic sense-fulfilment, the need to gain objects, is unmistakable. Here the prevailing energy is desire, me first, mine.

India – arguably the oldest culture and for many the poorest in the world – gives us a legacy of the most ancient and sophisticated scriptural teachings, the *Vedas*. Although India is undeniably toxic environmentally (especially in the cities), and as Westerners it requires our adjusting likes and dislikes quite radically, the overriding feeling here is of giving, of accommodation. Yet *Isvara* in the form of the environment is unemotional. Despite the deep and unmistakable undercurrent of *bhakti* that is impossible to



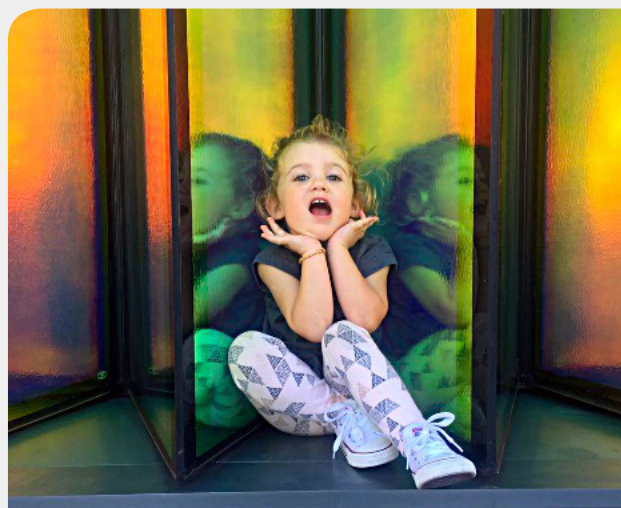
Dawn in the concrete jungle of Dubai.

ignore, in India the prevailing energy is dispassion. All the same, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are on display in huge neon signs in different ways, for both cultures.

RAJAS ON STEROIDS

DUBAI IS *RAJAS* on steroids. Money, distraction, entertainment and sense-fulfilment is the prevailing ethos, devotion to objects and worship at the altar of desire: I WANT! It is like a movie set – a desiccated land of sand transformed and manipulated through sheer willpower and money to go against its *svadharma* and be something it is not, with strange results – as is true whenever we try to be something we are not or conform to things that are against our nature. The environment feels alien, more than usually unreal, where a forced fecundity has manufactured a facsimile of picture-perfect trees, grass and whatever else you may wish to experience. Anyone for snow and skiing (replete with penguins) in the desert? It is a place where obscenely wealthy people have fantasized into existence their idea of utopia, with an ever-growing number of high-rise buildings, each competing to outdo each other in ingenuity and architectural extravagance. The largest shopping malls in the world lure one with a cornucopia of useless stuff, glittering behemoths, monuments of monstrosity to Mammon. Gross symbols of the insatiability of *rajasic* desire, designed to force satisfaction like a painful, frantic orgasm, leaving one ever more depleted and desolate, *tamasic*. It is a hall of mirrors, where life often seems bizarre and surreal – but, like any place, the self is there too. We must just adjust our vision!

Trying so hard to shine, Dubai is instead a strange, dead world. An obsessively “clean” city, the strict rule of law and Islam is intertwined and unquestionable, though secretly flaunted by many of the outwardly pious Emiratis. (Though not obvious, there is more prostitution in Dubai than most places – *rajas* and *tamas* of course!) It wears a jewelled mask intended to dazzle, to seduce, to hide with *tamasic* zeal the ravages of excess (*rajas*), of poverty, disease, death and dirt (*tamas*), producing a world of surgical banality under the veneer of polite civility – more *tamas*. Although in both Dubai and India religion is the most powerfully controlling force, the Islamic God is autocratic, severe, beyond reach and invisible. Their God cannot be depicted, as this is considered idolatry. The only outward sign of culture or spirituality in Dubai is the mournful cry of the *muezzin* several times a day, the Islamic architectural influences and the faint flavour of Arabic tribal history (turned into a tourist attraction – camel rides and 4x4 trips into the desert).



Dubai is a hall of mirrors.

The Arab world is a world of its own, apart, cut off and off-limits to outsiders, producing a tangible current of rigid control with a definite undertone of threat – menace and control being sure signs indicating the presence of *rajas*. You had better obey the rules here!

THE THREE GUNAS AT THEIR BEST AND WORST

INDIA, ON THE other hand, is the poster child for the maximum expression of all three *gunas* on steroids – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* – at their very best and very worst, where the brightest, purest minds, the transcendental, the kitsch and the hardship of poverty, disease, dirt and despair all mingle, seemingly without contradiction, where nothing is hidden or tries to be anything other than it is, neither life nor death – the latter either left rotting alone on the pavement or paraded in the streets among much fanfare and flowers. Life is lived amid relentless chaos and noise, in all its glory, madness, simplicity and decay.



India: the glory and the madness.

Indian spirituality is intricately and indelibly one with every part of life – God here is as visible, available and as far-out as you can imagine! The ever-present homage and devotion to the sacred, with a sign or temple honouring any of the multitudinous symbols of God everywhere you look. The profound and the profane blend effortlessly, no apologies, no subterfuges. In whatever fashion you like to see your God, no problem. Everything goes here. Find one you like if you don't have one! Here all symbols, no matter whose or how weird, point to the source, *Brahman*. A wildly exotic world of spirituality and accommodation alongside a cacophonous, desperate materialism, with very little regard for any law as we understand it, a world where you can always make a deal, but you had better bend or you will break.

These two contrasting cultures are both eye-openers for Westerners, and good testing grounds for how much progress one has made in dispassion and discrimination. Arriving in India from Dubai



India, where simplicity exists seemingly without contradiction with death and decay.

made me smile. It was a relief, to tell the truth – even though I knew I would not be spared the usual testing! *Ishvara* did not disappoint on that score, but also neither with the joy of being here. What is so clear though is that, despite the deep devotional and spiritual history of India, with *shakti* oozing from every pore, for the most part, Indians (or expatriated Westerners) are no happier or better for it, despite the never-ending tide of spiritual hopefuls who migrate here seeking *nirvana*. What many of the diehards living in India find it hard to admit to is that India does not confer some special spiritual status nor is it capable of giving us what we think will complete us, make us happy or remove what we are running away from, just as no person or experience can do this for us.

Even though I would throw my lot in with India over Dubai any day, overall, whether in Dubai or anywhere else in the world, people are people. We are all basically the same and experience more or less the same thoughts and feelings because the *gunas* are all basically the same everywhere, no matter the cultural flavour we experience them. Apart from providing many opportunities to reflect on our likes and dislikes, travelling away from our comfort zone brings home the zero-sum nature of life in the world. The glaring truth that there is nothing to gain anywhere, and nothing to lose either. No place is essentially better or worse; it all depends on how well we manage our *vasanas* and adapt to the environment (*Ishvara/gunas*) with *karma yoga*. Certainly you will not find a different you in a different environment – only the same you, with or without self-knowledge, either managing the *gunas* and unperturbed or pushed around by them and suffering. The only possible freedom is in understanding how this reality works, which means understanding the *gunas* and managing them through knowledge – and embracing it all as the self, knowing it is all perfect! ☸

PROGRESS ON THE GUNA BOOK PROJECT

I HAVE BEEN making very good (albeit slow) progress on my *guna* book, writing whenever I have the time. Ramji is further along with his version of the same book, and – without making any prom-

ises – we hope to deliver both of our books in the first part of this year. They will complement each other, covering the big topic of lifestyle and the doctrine of the *gunas* comprehensively. It has been a mammoth undertaking, as it has never been done before – and, as always, we must fit in writing with our travelling, teaching and ShiningWorld duties – so we go at the pace *Ishvara* makes possible. It will be worth the wait, hopefully! ☸

WHAT'S NEW AT SHININGWORLD

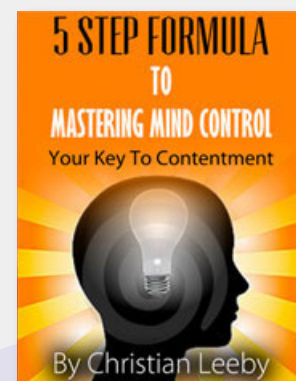
PUBLICATIONS

THE BOOK OF CHARTS: James has been busy with another project, a beautiful, unique book of charts. I have added one of his charts at the end of this newsletter. He has been thrashing out ideas to translate the ancient teachings of Vedanta into a visual roadmap, as it were, for many years. This has never been done before in the entire history of the *sampradaya*. Along with a book on the *gunas*, it is another first. These charts are not only teaching aids in that they present the teachings of Vedanta in an entirely new and powerful way, they are the genius of Vedanta combined with art, a tribute to James as an artist, as a teacher and lineage-holder. They will be hugely helpful to many inquirers and, I have no doubt, also to many teachers of Vedanta, for time untold. *Ishvara* finally provided the opportunity and the assistance to bring the book into manifestation. Christian Paaske, the organizer of our Norway seminar last year, stepped up to the plate,

providing his considerable technical, artistic assistance and IT design skills. Thank you, Christian, we are very grateful for your valuable input. Although James has been gestating the ideas for the charts for years, and ultimately they belong to the *sampradaya*, this book could not have come into existence without your help. The book is available in the ShiningWorld [shop online](#). ☸

CHRISTIAN LEEBY'S MIND CONTROL COURSE

CHRISTIAN HAS adapted his brilliant course on mind control to offer a free version to all ShiningWorld inquirers. Please see the link on our home page for more details or click this [link](#). ☸



NEW SATSANGS

WE HAVE POSTED a new batch of e-satsangs on the website, not as many as usual due to our travels and the India venue preparations, but some very good ones, as usual. ☸

SHUTTING DOWN SOCIAL MEDIA

AFTER SOME CONSIDERATION, we have decided to shut down the forum and our ShiningWorld Facebook pages. The forum has been valiantly and faithfully run by our dear friend Stan Kublicki, an invaluable supporter of ShiningWorld, who always gives of his very best. Although there are a group of dedicated people on the forum, by and large it has not taken off as we hoped it would, not the least because we do not have the time to assist Stan in running it. And as with Facebook, there are several people who make it their business to cause mayhem on both the forum and

our Facebook sites with their personal attacks on us and our teachers, as well as the teachings. While these are few, and we understand where this comes from, it is not our place, nor the aim of Vedanta, to do battle with unqualified people, as much as the ignorant are the self too. So we bid all of you who supported our social media farewell, and remember that ShiningWorld resources are always open to all. ☸

*Please note: For those of you who would like to continue participating in a forum, the Facebook group **Non Doodle**, managed by one of ShiningWorld's endorsed teachers, Daniel Band, offers lighthearted insights into the topic of Vedanta.*

FORTHCOMING 2017 EVENTS

2017 SOUTH AFRICA SEMINAR

▪ South Africa:	March 18 to 21, 2017	Cape Town	The Forge
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Contact Daniel Band: danielbandits@gmail.com or Megan: megan@purpleplums.co.za ☸

2017 EUROPEAN SEMINARS

▪ Germany:	April 16 to 20, 2017	Bad Meinberg	Yoga Vidya Studio
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Contact: gastgruppen@yoga-vidya.de

▪ Germany:	April 20 to 23, 2017	Cologne	Yoga Vidya Studio
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Contact: koeln@yoga-vidya.de

▪ Germany:	April 27 to May 1, 2017	Berlin	See website for details
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Contact Matthias Raetz: ramjiseminar@gmail.com ☸

2017 U.S. TEACHING SCHEDULE



WE HAVE FINALIZED dates for the U.S. seminars for 2017, details of which can be found on the events pages of the website:

■ Georgia:	May 13 and 14, 2017	Atlanta, GA	To be announced
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Contact Dave Hermann: dhermann67@yahoo.com

■ New Mexico:	June 3 and 4, 2017	Santa Fe, NM	2218 Old Arroyo Chamiso
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Contact Paddy Kean: siriuswoman@icloud.com or Spencer McDonald: psmcckean@me.com

■ Colorado:	June 9, 2017*	Carbondale, CO	True Nature Healing Arts
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Contact Eaden Shantay: eaden@truenatureheals.com

*Talk by Christian Leeby, which precedes the weekend seminar by James on Chapters I and II of *Panchadasi*

■ Colorado:	June 10 and 11, 2017	Carbondale, CO	True Nature Healing Arts
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Contact Eaden Shantay: eaden@truenatureheals.com

■ Oregon:	July 6 to 9, 2017	Bend, OR	55457 Big River Drive, Sunriver
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Contact Sundari: sundari.shiningworld@gmail.com

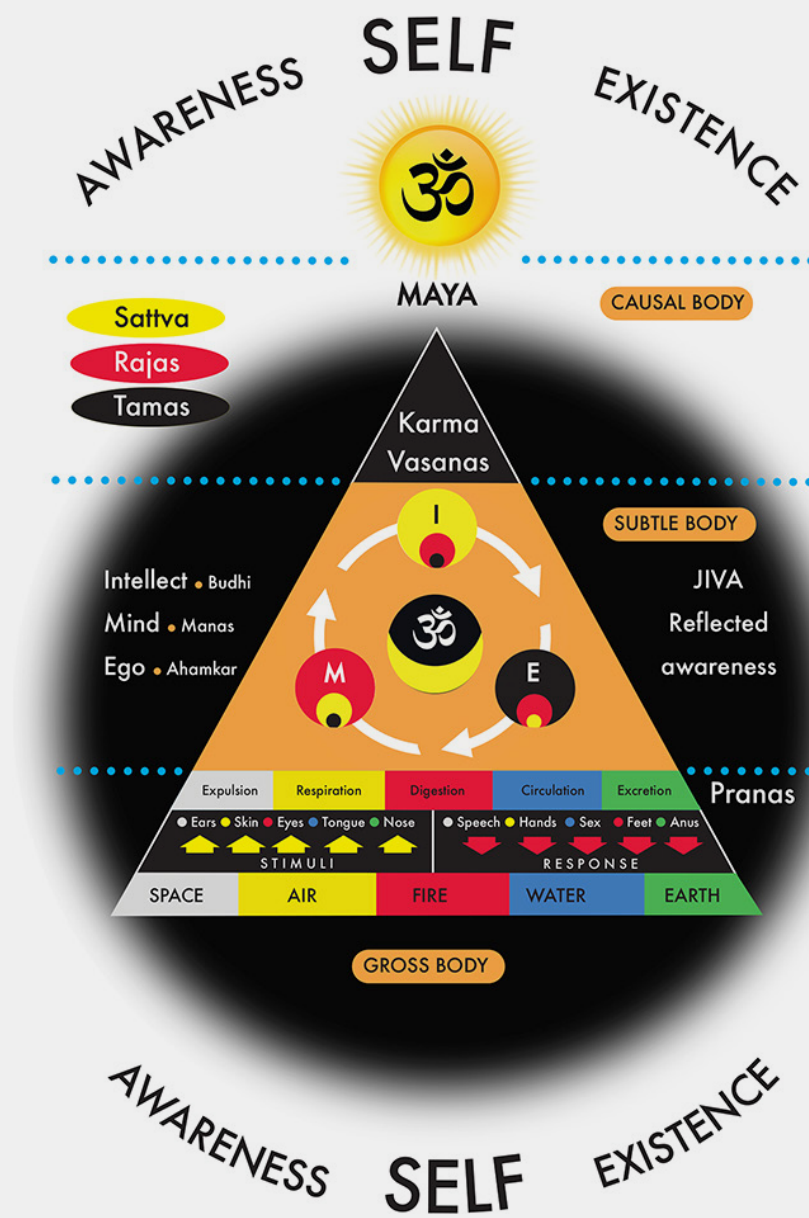
(25-minute drive from Bend, Oregon)

■ California:	July 29 and 30, 2017	Berkeley, CA	Ashtanga Yoga Berkeley
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Contact Vance and Erin Selover: vance@ashtangayogaberkeley.com

■ Washington:	August 13 to 18, 2017	Trout Lake, WA	Guler-Trout Lake Park
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Contact Sundari: sundari.shiningworld@gmail.com ☸



Love to you from all of us,
Sundari and Ram