



Ancient Teachings, Modern Perspectives

Collected Essays by
Sravaniya DiPecoraro

NEWS AND REVIEWS

“Where were we all when the lights went out on our individual and collective spiritual lives? In this gold-nugget wisdom collection, Sravaniya holds up the light of her own years of yoga-teaching experience and deep reading of yoga-related traditional texts to uplift the spirit and nourish the soul. I'm reminded by her writing style of the late and much loved Huston Smith's refreshingly accessible writing on all things to do with the human spirit. Truly, as she writes, "communication is what [she] was made to do...independent thinking is [her] specialty."

— Krishna Kshetra Swami, (Kenneth R. Valpey),
Gaudiya Vaishnava Theologian, ISKCON GBC; PhD,
Oxford University; Faculty, Bhaktivedanta College,
Belgium



“Author and fifty-year bhakti-practitioner, Sravaniya DiPecoraro has been a close and dear friend of mine for the greater part of forty years. Her most recent book, *Ancient Teachings Modern Perspectives*, speaks to humankind's inner craving for authentic spiritual knowledge and unmasked truth. Her “tell it like it is” style, refreshing, eloquent but bold, presents the essence of Vedic thought clearly and concisely. Easily accessible to any sincere seeker of knowledge and truth, one need only

read and apply its teachings to live life to its fullest spiritual potential.”

— Giridhari Swami, Governing Body Commissioner,
ISKCON



“It’s obvious from reading Sravaniya’s latest book, *Ancient Teachings, Modern Perspectives — Collected Essays*, that she has put to good use all she has learned over the years. Her dedication to the practice of these teachings has availed her entry into the heart of the knowledge offered within them. Our guru and spiritual guide, Srila Prabhupada, used to say: “Study of the Vedas is not meant for the recreation of armchair speculators, but for the formation of character.” By her developing this personal, integral spiritual character, Sravaniya has been able to convey to her readers the universal relevance of these principles. Here, in common language, she presents their essence, opening the door to the reader of that which can take many years to unfold. One will benefit greatly by taking time to open this book and see what one can gain by putting this knowledge into practice.

Enjoy your reading!”

— Rtadhvaja Swami, Traveling Monk and Teacher of
Bhakti Yoga Meditation; Board of Directors, North
American Child Protection Office, ISKCON

“I highly recommend *Ancient Teachings, Modern Perspectives*, a collection of articles written by Sravaniya. Her perceptive weaving of the wisdom traditions of the East, particularly the Vedic teachings of ancient India, with modern commentary is both refreshing and enlightening. In doing so, she is not one to shy away from confronting the shallowness that gets passed off as spirituality, or spiritual knowledge, in certain circles of the 21st century. We should expect as much coming from a serious spiritual practitioner. The removal of ignorance is not always meant to be a comfortable, feel good, “you’re alright, I’m alright” affair.”

— Steven Matthews (Chandrasekhar Dasa), Research assistant and instructor for the Professorship of Indian Religions and Culture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Bhakti Yoga practitioner



ANCIENT TEACHINGS, MODERN PERSPECTIVES

COLLECTED ESSAYS

SRAVANIYA DIPECORARO



Copyright © 2018 by Sravaniya DiPecoraro
Barefoot Philosopher Press, Hong Kong

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical without written permission from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International for permission to reprint excerpts from the books of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda.

The following images appear in the public domain: Janus, page 30; Thoreau, page 51 and Lernean Hydra, page 56. “Hong Kong in Smog”, page 132 courtesy Fumi Walsh; “The Banyan Tree”, page 105 courtesy Susan Blumberg-Kason. (The page numbers refer to the paperback edition.)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
DiPecoraro, Sravaniya
Ancient Teachings, Modern Perspectives — Collected Essays
1. New Age 2. Yoga 3. Spirituality and religion

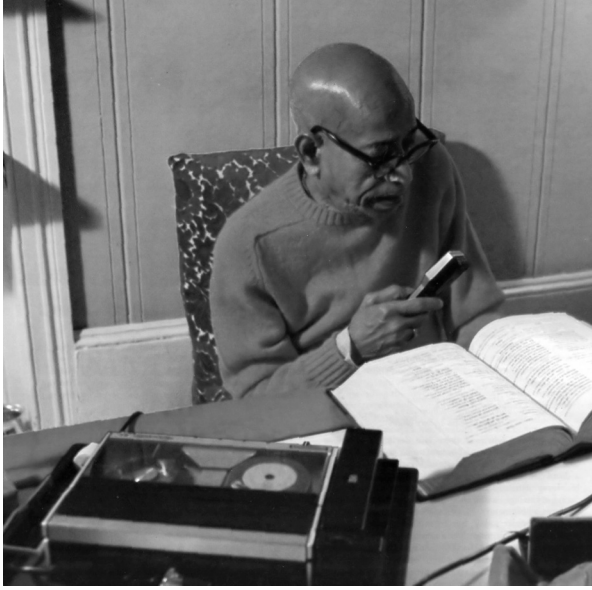
ISBN: 978-988-99111-7-1 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-988-99111-8-8 (ePub)

ISBN: 978-988-99111-9-5 (Kindle)

Barefoot Philosopher Press
P. O. Box 7892
General Post Office
Hong Kong

www.BarefootPhilosopher.Press



DEDICATION

नम ॐ विष्णुपादाय कृष्णप्रेषाय भूतले
श्रीमते भक्तिवेदान्तस्वामिनिति नामिने

*nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhū-tale
śrīmate bhaktivedanta-svāmin iti nāmine*

I offer my humble obeisances
at the lotus feet of my spiritual master

His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

Founder Ācārya of the

International Society for Krishna Consciousness.



INVOCATION

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

om̐ namo bhagavate vāsudevāya

All glories to the Supreme Lord who lives everywhere.

Annuit Coeptis

May He look with favor upon our undertaking.

ABOUT BAREFOOT PHILOSOPHER PRESS

Ancient teachings, modern perspectives ~
timeless wisdom for the eternal now.

Sravaniya DiPecoraro has a knack for simplifying esoteric subjects and making them more accessible to the inquisitive seeker. Whether in the fields of yoga philosophy and the science of self realization, or tarot divination, psychological astrology or related metaphysical disciplines, her writing is based on the practical application of authentic information from reliable sources. Illuminated with anecdotes and examples from decades of work, Sravaniya shares her extensive study and experience with her readers and brings the incomprehensible within reach.

“The sages and great thinkers have our best interests at heart,” says Sravaniya. “My purpose in presenting these books is not to tell anyone what to think. It is to create an experience wherein one can begin to understand what it is *he* thinks, and to either verify or disprove those assumptions based on sacred scriptural evidence. This enables one to expand his understanding based, not on imagination, but on true knowledge.”

CONTENTS

Glossary and Abbreviations	xv
Preface	xxi
PART ONE	
Towards a Science with Reverence	3
The Unique Status of Vedic Science	13
Eastern Pathways, Western Soul	29
Seeing in the Dark	37
A Very Faddish Fever	43
Simplicity ~ Aparigraha	47
Book Review: Walden	53
The Great Lie of Modern Civilization	57
PART TWO	
ON YAMA AND NIYAMA	
Not Very Yogi-like	65
Centering Strategies for Psychic Survival	69
Who Wants to Be Stress Free?	79
On the Yoga Bandwagon	85
PART THREE	
The King is Not Dead	93
Historical Roots of Yoga in Twenty-first Century Hong Kong	97
Surrender and Spiritual Organizations	107
On Levels of Experience	115
Yoga and the Chakras	123
The Game of Life	131
Postcards from the Biohazard	135
On the Importance of Consent	141

Of Band Members and Bhaktas 145

PART FOUR
INTERVIEWS

The Paths to Ultimate Happiness in Grey
Days 153

Jessica Guru 163

Vintage Yogis Team Up 171

Sanskrit Transliteration and Pronunciation 177

References 179

About the Author 181

GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

abhyāsa — constant, regular practice with determination.

ahaṅkāra — false ego.

anartha-nivṛtti — the clearing stage of self-purification.

aparā — inferior.

aparigrahaḥ — non-greediness or not collecting more than is necessary.

ashtanga — “eight limbs”; the eight-fold system of yoga enunciated in the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali.

ātma — a generic term for spirit, self or conscious living being.

avidyā — nescience or ignorance.

bhakti — devotion to the Supreme Person or God, the perfection of the yoga process (jñāna-yoga > ashtanga-yoga > culminating in bhakti).

brāhmaṇa — teacher or educator, priest, scholar.

brahmajyoti — the effulgence emanating from the Supreme Lord’s transcendental form of eternity, knowledge and bliss.

Brahman — spirit; “Aham brahmasmi” means I am spirit.

Bhagavān — the Supreme Personality of Godhead

possessing complete fame, wealth, strength, beauty, knowledge and renunciation.

chakra — energetic regulator within the body; a wheel.

Gunas — material modes of nature:

- Sattva - goodness
- Rajas - passion
- Tamas - ignorance

indriya-prīti — gratification of the senses.

Īśvara — the controller.

jīva — the living entity; that category of spiritual energy manifested as the unlimited, individual sparks of the Deity who are expanded everywhere in both the spiritual and material worlds.

jñāna — understanding the Absolute through the pursuit of knowledge.

karma — the reactions of one's previous actions.

Kevala-advaita-vāda — “not two” or non-dual; the philosophy that the individual self is the same as God and that he should isolate himself from material contact to end repeated birth and death and realize his true nature.

Kṛṣṇa (Krishna) — “the all attractive”; the hallowed name of the Supreme Lord in His original feature.

mahātmā — “great soul” or saintly person.

Māyāvāda — [impersonal] philosophy stressing that all variegated form is illusory and that reality is formless spirit.

parā — superior.

para-prakṛti — superior nature.

Paramātma — the Sanskrit word used to indicate the Great Spirit or Higher Self (the Supersoul or Īśvara).

Parabrahman — the Great Spirit, the Lord Himself.

prakṛti — the energy of the Creative; the controlled.

paramparā — disciplic succession.

pratyāhara — withdrawal of the senses from their objects.

Puruṣa — the enjoyer or controller.

Rāmāyana — the sage Valmiki's epic tale of Lord Rama, the Supreme Lord appearing as a prince, and His struggle to save His wife Sita from being kidnapped by the demon Ravana.

sādhana — one's individual practice of yoga.

samādhi — fixed mind or trance; the continuous flow of loving remembrance of the Supreme Brahman.

sampradāya — disciplic succession; an authorized lineage of teachers.

samsāra — cycle of repeated birth and death.

Śaṅkara — the great proponent of Kevala-advaita philosophy, referred to in scripture as an incarnation of Lord Siva.

summum bonum — (Latin) the highest good; the ultimate goal of values and priorities in an ethical system; the Absolute Truth.

tapasyā — austerity; the inconvenience of doing the right thing.

tat tvam asi — I am that.

vairāgya — renunciation of material pleasure.

Vaiṣṇava — devotee of Lord Viṣṇu.

Veda — knowledge.

Vedānta — the end or goal of all knowledge.

Vedic — of or pertaining to the Vedas.

Yama and Niyama — the ethical practice of self-purification to produce a cultured individual.

Yama — Social Restraints

- Ahimsā - non-violence
- Satya - truthfulness or honesty
- Asteya - non-stealing; respect for others' property
- Brahmacharya - sexual restraint; chastity
- Aparigrahā - minimizing one's possessions

Niyama — Personal Disciplines

- Saucha - purity
- Santoṣa - contentment
- Tapas - ardor or austerity
- Svādhyāya - study of the self
- Īśvara praṇidhāna - dedication to the Lord



Abbreviations

SB — Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam or Bhagavat-Purāṇa, the post graduate study of the Bhagavad-gītā compiled by the author, Śrī Badarāyaṇa Vedavyāsa, in his maturity; Vyāsa's Magnum Opus.

BG — Bhagavad-gītā As It Is (1972 Edition) by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda.

YS — Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali by B. K. S. Iyengar.



PREFACE

“If you want to learn something, read about it. If you want to understand something, write about it. If you want to master something, teach it.”

— Yogi Bhanjan

I cannot seem to shake the tendency of trying to understand the mysteries of life. When I was eleven years old, much to the surprise of my Italian auntie, I avidly read *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Later on Vedic texts became the lens of my magnifying glass — revealed scriptures in the yogic tradition handed down in the lineage through my spiritual master, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda.

Back in 2004 I had a little blog that I’m sure nobody read called *That’s What She Thinks*, where I would write about my rumination regarding whatever caught my attention in the world around me. During years of work in Hong Kong, teaching yoga on the one hand and studying on the other (in between eating-sleeping-and-classes), quite a pile of notes and realizations accumulated. I considered that perhaps some of them may provide insights for other spiritual seekers — those among us who want to understand life and make sense of this world, or who maybe have had enough of the tossing and turning here in the ocean of material existence and want to make their way to ultimate peace and happiness. So it is that I’ve decided to share some of my writings.

A few of these essays mention or explain in detail the concepts of yoga ethics — yama and niyama. The repetition almost seems like I am out there banging a drum. This was my reaction to the fact that in yoga classes, workshops and teacher trainings at that time the facilitators generally avoided discussing these basic tenets. They were more enthusiastic about the circus of gymnastics and less about the inner practice. This is unfortunate but the reason is not difficult to surmise: make it fun and you'll get more followers; make it restrictive and austere and you'll lose more. But now there appears to have been a shift in attitudes and more people are ready to go vegan or vegetarian, to de-clutter their lives by accumulating less and so on, naturally following these disciplines. After winter comes spring. I find it encouraging.

Some of the pieces herein have been published in local Hong Kong magazines, a few are interviews. The websites noted may or may not be currently available. Things have changed a lot since the new age movement first took off here in the 1990s.

Although I am generally polite and courteous, at times the tone of my assertion may seem to require sunglasses and a hazmat suit. Let my reader beware. Communication is what I was made to do and, for better or worse, independent thinking is my specialty.

Yours in the love of knowledge,

Sravaniya DiPecoraro
Hong Kong 2018

PART ONE



TOWARDS A SCIENCE WITH REVERENCE

“It is impossible to create a well-working society on a knowledge base which is fundamentally inadequate, seriously incomplete, and mistaken in basic assumptions. Yet that is precisely what the modern world has been trying to do.”

— Dr. Willis Harman, PhD., Institute of Noetic Sciences

Did the universe in which we live really begin with a big bang? Is consciousness merely the result of the complex combination of neurons in the cerebral cortex of a human being? Is the mind the working function of the brain? Is the inner life of a human being simply a reaction to outer events that enter his or her life? If we think that consciousness comes from matter, then the answer to all these questions must be a resounding yes. This is the

metaphysical worldview that influences our western secular culture.

At this point in time, however, that paradigm is being quietly challenged. Tens of millions of people around the world have had out of body experiences that prove — at least on the subjective level — that they exist beyond the physicality of the temporary gross body. Others have worked with energy healing and distance healing, realizing that consciousness is affected far afield from the body and its senses. Still others have worked extensively with psychological astrology, noting the meaningful “chance” events that occur at specific times when their symbology in the horoscope is activated by transiting and progressed planetary aspects.

More individuals are beginning to believe that what they call the mind influences matter in ways modern science has never imagined and, moreover, cannot know anything about.

Students of occult doctrines have understood that whatever happens on the inner planes (of mind and will) eventually affects the outer planes (of the emotions and the body). Now it seems that a wider section of society is making the same discoveries. But where is the metaphysical science that supports and explains this worldview? Some think it has yet to be developed. Others know that it has always been there.

Many concepts and laws that were once hidden behind the veil of Nature are now available to us and are utilized

daily. Science, according to occult dictum, is to know the laws of Nature and to follow them. Western science in our time has not always emphasized learning Nature's laws with a view to living within them; rather it's techniques have often been aimed at manipulating, controlling or even "conquering" Nature, as if that were actually a possibility.

Bertrand Russell, a British philosopher, mathematician and anti-nuclear power activist wrote in 1946 (*History of Western Philosophy*, Routledge): "Unlike religion, [scientific technique] is ethically neutral; it assures men that they can perform wonders, but does not tell them what wonders to perform. In this way it is incomplete. In practice, the purposes to which scientific skill will be devoted depend largely on chance. The men at the head of the vast organizations that it necessitates can, within limits, turn it this way or that as they please. The power impulse thus has a scope which it never had before. The philosophies that have been inspired by scientific technique are power philosophies, and tend to regard everything non-human as mere raw material. Ends are no longer considered; only the skillfulness of the process is valued. This also is a form of madness. It is, in our day, the most dangerous form, and the one against which a sane philosophy should provide an antidote."

The secular side of capitalism in western industrial society does not ask if something *should* be done, it only asks, "Can be done for a profit?" This is how we wind up with genetic modification, cloning human embryos,

factory farms that breed mad cow or hoof and mouth diseases in an attempt to provide “happy meals” at fast food franchises all over the world. Even medical doctors and lawyers, those professionals to whom we turn when there is crisis in our lives, are driven not by morality but by profit. “Oh yes, we can use this plea,” says the lawyer, and thousands of dollars later we discover that that particular plea has never succeeded in the history of law. “Oh yes, we can perform surgery on your painful knees,” says the doctor, and months of rehabilitation and inconvenience later — not to mention expense — our knees are still deteriorating with no improvement. And so every day insignificant parts of the body are cut off or out and thrown into the rubbish bin, and the operation is considered a success if the patient is still alive to sign and pay the bill. I am not saying that scientific progress is bad or wrong, for there have been times when I myself have benefited from it. I am saying that it is prone to being corrupted and wielded without intelligence and without heart. The proof of this is our current ecological debacle. Surely there are caring and reverent scientists, but wishing and hoping or even voting for what is right and good is merely a feeble expression of desire; it is still doing nothing about it.

“A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority.”

— Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*

ANCIENT PERSPECTIVES IN METAPHYSICAL SCIENCE

Generally considered an esoteric, supernatural (and sometimes downright spooky) treatise of Taoist divination and magic, the *I Ching or Book of Changes* has, over the past half a century, reentered the world's library of wisdom lore and taken an honored seat. This is largely due to the excellent translation of Richard Wilhelm from the Chinese to German, later rendered into English by Carey F. Baynes. The judgements in the original work are attributed to King Wen of Chou (ca. 1150 B.C.) and were used extensively by no less a personage than Confucius (551-479 B.C.) in his teachings.

"Reverence is the basis of all culture" proclaims the I Ching. This attitude is echoed in Hexagram 11, Peace, which gives this formula:

"Heaven and earth unite: the image of Peace.

Thus the ruler divides and completes the course of heaven and earth;

He furthers and regulates the gifts of heaven and earth, and so aids the people."

When heaven and earth come together a time of universal flowering and prosperity is produced, a situation which is meant to be regulated by the ruler of men through a process of division.

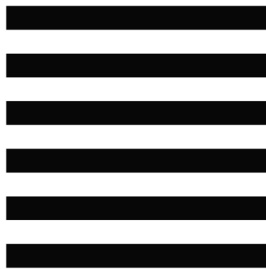
"Thus men divide the uniform flow of time into the seasons, according to the succession of natural phenom-

ena, and mark off infinite space by the points of the compass. In this way nature in its overwhelming profusion of phenomena is bounded and controlled. On the other hand, nature must be furthered in her productivity. This is done by adjusting the products to the right time and the right place, which increases the natural yield. This controlling and furthering activity of man in his relation to nature is the work on nature that rewards him.”

It would be very difficult to invent a better definition of a reverent science than this one that has been handed down to us from more than 3,000 years ago.

DEFINING HEAVEN AND EARTH

The depiction of Heaven and Earth given in the I Ching hexagrams are visually edifying and can be reproduced here:



Hexagram 1. *Ch'ien* the Creative

“Great indeed is the generating power of the Creative; all

beings owe their beginning to it. This power permeates all heaven.”

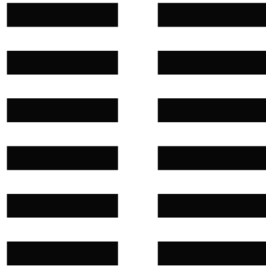
— Confucius

Here we see six firm (yang) lines which stand for complete energy called the Creative. Without addressing the question of whether or not Heaven possesses attributes or personality, the I Ching succinctly describes its influence and creative action. It stands for “primal power, which is light giving, active, strong, and of the spirit... Consistently strong in character, the essence is power and energy. Its image is heaven. Its energy is represented as unrestricted by any fixed conditions in space and is therefore conceived of as motion... In relation to the universe, the hexagram expresses the strong, creative action of the Deity. In relation to the human world, it denotes the creative action of the holy man or sage, of the ruler and leader of men, who through his power awakens and develops their higher nature.”

This presents a fascinating parallel to descriptions in the Purāṇas of the Parabrahman — the Great Spirit — the spider implied by the immense and intricate web of creation. It is also not at all far fetched to equate the Creative with the Self of Jungian depth psychology. This is the force above the laws of Nature and “unrestricted by any fixed conditions in space.”

The beginning of all things lies still in the beyond in the form of ideas that have yet to become real. The Creative has the power to lend form to these archetypes of ideas. Man proposes, God disposes. “The course of the Creative

alters and shapes beings until each attains its true, specific nature, then it keeps them in conformity with the Great Harmony [universe] ... Here it is shown that the way to success lies in apprehending and giving actuality to the way of the universe [tao], which, as a law running through end and beginning, brings about all phenomena in time.”



Hexagram 2. *Kun* the Receptive

This is the complementary image of Nature (yin, prakṛti), the energy of the Creative.

“The attribute of the hexagram is devotion; its image is the earth. it is the perfect complement of the Creative — the complement, not the opposite, for the Receptive does not combat the Creative but completes it. It represents nature in contrast to spirit... Indeed, even in the individual this duality appears in the coexistence of the spiritual world and the world of the senses.”

What is being presented here is not the Gnostic concept of dualism, of the Devil or Demiurge, who challenges or opposes God. There is instead a clearly defined hier-

archic relationship between the Creative and the Receptive. “The Receptive is just as important as the Creative, but the attribute of devotion defines the place occupied by this primal power in relation to the Creative. For the Receptive must be activated and led by the Creative; then it is productive of good. Only when it abandons this position and tries to stand as an equal side by side with the Creative, does it become evil. The result then is opposition to and struggle against the Creative, which is productive of evil to both.”

In other words, the individual — particularly the person in a responsible position — must act in conformity with Heaven or the laws of God in any situation as an assistant of Heaven. To abide by the rules. If he knows how to meet his fate with an attitude of acceptance, he is sure to find the right guidance; he or she does not go ahead blindly, but learns from the situation what is demanded of him and then cooperates, with all the physical, emotional and intellectual resources at his command.

The complexity of the human condition is to be a spirit encased in matter; an eternal, transcendental presence living in a temporary earthly body, like unto the animals; to be at once divine and bestial. What is crucial, however, is the understanding that both the individual spirit and matter are emanations or energies of the Creative, in the subordinate category of the Receptive.

The I Ching does not ascribe personality to the Creative but regards it more as a function. Other holy scriptures

tell us, however, that regarding God as merely a function can definitely lead to undesirable consequences.

A science where not only the laws of earth but also of Heaven are respected. That would indeed be a revolution in consciousness, because it is just this reverence that is missing from positivistic or empirical science.

