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Deva and Gayatri Rajan

LONG PILGRIMAGE: The Life and Teaching of The Shivapuri Baba, By John Bennett, pb., 188 pages, Turnstone Press Limited, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England

Born in Kerala, Shivapuri Baba formally took Sannyas from the Shankara Sringeri mutt of the South and retired immediately to the vast and impregnable jungles of the Narbada Forest, along the Narmada River, where he remained in complete seclusion for nearly 30 years. After his deep spiritual realizations, Shivapuri Baba set out, at the age of 50, on a world pilgrimage that lasted 35 years. Completely circling the planet (mostly by foot), he talked with dozens of crowned monarchs, countless heads of state and spiritual and cultural leaders. His teachings took form in the doctrine of the three disciplines of Right Living: Duty, Morality and Worship, which lead us to the very purpose of our existence, God-Realization. When asked how to come to the knowledge of God, he replied, "Think of God alone. Put every other thought from your mind. When all else disappears, you will see God-in a flash." Taking up his final residence in Nepal, Shivapuri Baba died in 1963 at the age of 137, after approving the notes of this book.

Significantly, John Bennett was the only known disciple who was asked by Shivapuri Baba himself to record his biography and to summarize his teachings. Bennett collaborated with Mr. Thakur Lal Manandhar, a devotee of the Master who had taken notes of his talks over a 30-year period.

Those who knew him see Shivapuri Baba as one of India's greatest saints. Though refusing to formally train disciples or to create spiritual centers, many, including the highly respected Tiruchi Swamigal of Bangalore (photo left), consider Shivapuri Baba their personal Guru. It is always a deep inspiration to read the life-stories of these great, God-Realized souls. -dr

DAUGHTERS OF THE GODDESS, The Women Saints of India, by Linda Johnsen, pb, 128 pages, us\$12.95, Yes International Publishers, 1317 Summit Ave., St. Paul, Minnesota 55105-2602, USA.

Reading Daughters of the Goddess is like being taken on a visit to India's great saints by an appreciative and articulate devotee. We are introduced to six women saints: Sri Ma, Anandamayi Ma, Anandi Ma, Gurumayi, Ma Yoga Shakti, and Ammachi (Amritanandamayi Ma). The author describes scenarios in the presence of these women (all but Anandamayi Ma are living) and conversations with them. By the end of the book, we feel privileged to have met these great souls and their devotees. There follows a nicely written discussion of the Hindu understanding of the Universal Mother and of sainthood. Satisfying reading and full of insight, this is a book to relax with, savor and enjoy.-gr

MOTHER OF THE UNIVERSE, Visions of the Goddess and Tantric Hymns

of Enlightenment, by Lex Hixon, pb., 223 pages, us\$16.00,

The Theosophical Publishing House, P.O. Box 270, Wheaton, Illinois 60189-0270, USA.

A collection of hymns by the 18th century Bengali saint Ramprasad, translated by Jadunath Sinha and rendered into an expanded form by Lex Hixon, these poems were designed to be recited aloud. But quite frankly, perhaps because we were reading rather than hearing them, we found more interest in his introduction, which is a very astute delineation of the Mother, or Wisdom-Goddess, written with scholarship as well as depth of feeling. Hixon's own comment on his work is, "Mother of the Universe presents, through the vivid mode of Goddess worship, the

Mother-Wisdom which is always unitive, never divisive. These pages do not introduce some philosophical or literary alternative but unveil the living force which exists at the very heart of awareness as the upward flowing power of liberation and illumination called Mother Kundalini. These poems are existential inquiry. They are Goddess energy." Mr. Hixon reminds us that, ultimately, it is enlightenment itself that She finally bestows.-gr

THE GREAT SCIENCE AND THE POWER OF GAYATHRI, by Swami Dr. R.K. Murugesu, pb., 74 pages, Sri Gayathri Peetam, 82 Lady McCallums Drive, Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka

It is a rare pleasure to get a book from Sri Lanka. This one, though slender, may be the definitive volume on the Gayatri Mantra. It is packed with information, delivered in the straightforward, unpretentious voice of a yogacharya, and thus saturated with experience rather than theory. Every facet of the Gayatri is discussed: origin, meaning, Gayatri as source of astral and spiritual powers, etc. The swami concludes with a description of what life on earth will be like in the Sat, or Pragy Yuga, which the collective repetition of this mantra will help to manifest. This is good, inspiring reading, especially for anyone doing sadhana.

Swami Murugesu is the spiritual head of the Sri Gayatri Peetham Yogashram of Nuwara Eliya and is the author of numerous volumes.-gr

ISSUES IN VEDIC ASTRONOMY AND ASTROLOGY, Proceedings of Colloquim on Vedic Astronomy and Astrology 26-28 September, 1989 at Nagpur, edited by Haribhai Pandya, Somdutt Dikshit, and N.M. Kansara, pb., 391 pages,

Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd, Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007 India

Five papers in Hindi and seventeen in English discuss Vedic astronomy and astrology. Highly scholastic and technical, this collection of papers will be useful primarily to those who are adept in these fields. Subjects include: Astronomy in Ancient India, Genesis of the Universe from the Nasadiya Sukta, Nakshatras and

Vedic astrology, A Search for the Earliest Vedic Calendar and Vedanga Jyotisha. Several charts and tables are included as annexures. A dense, quality publication.-dr

KASHMIR SAIVISM, The Central Philosophy of Tantrism, by Kamalakar Mishra, pb., 473 pages, us\$26.95 Rudra Press, P.O. Box 13390, Portland, Oregon 97213 USA

Kamalakar Mishra, Ph.D., professor of philosophy and religion at Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi, has created a most thorough exposition of the Tantric system. Not only is it a discussion of the various philosophical increments of Kashmir Saivism, such as the Left-Handed Doctrine (Kaula-marga), Absolute Consciousness (Siva-Sakti), The Theory of Appearance (Abhasavada), The Concept of Pratyabhijna ("Self-recognition"), the problem of evil, and the means of Moksa, but the author includes a full exploration of its history and the special significance of Abhinavagupta (ca 950-1000), whose brilliant and encyclopedic works established Kashmir Saivism as an important philosophical school and secured its Agamic and Upanisadic positions within Vedic traditions. Extensively referenced with notes to the text for source data or detailed elaboration. -dr

LIVING WISDOM, Vedanta in the West, Edited by Pravrajika Vrajaprana, pb., 299 pages, us\$14.95, Vedanta Press, 1946 Vedanta Place, Hollywood, California 90068, USA.

A collection of somewhat intellectual essays, this book includes contributions from thirty-four thinkers spanning several decades, from Swami Vivekananda to Christopher Isherwood and contemporary writers. The essayists are an eclectic group: swamis and female monastics, authors, a psychologist, two Catholic priests and a rabbi. The book is divided into four parts: The section on Philosophy addresses sixteen issues such as The Problem of Evil, Idolatry, Peace, and others. The section on Perspectives gives us six articles on religion and religions in general. Part 3, Practice, investigates fifteen techniques of yoga. Part 4 is Paradigms: The Avatar, Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, the Banyan Tree and The Mother Goddess-altogether a comprehensive, thought-provoking exploration of the various aspects of Vedanta, offered to us by some very competent writers.-gr

A GIFT OF LOVE, The Story of Sudama the Brahmin, by Yogesvara dasa and Jyotirmayi-devi dasi, hb., 30 pages, Bala Books, 39 Dawes Ave., Lynbrook, New York 11563, USA.

Bala Books produces books for children illustrating Hindu culture in the Vaishnava tradition. We won't give the story away, but this is a charming tale of the power of devotion, nicely illustrated in greytone on rich ivory stock.-gr

ANCIENT SECRET OF THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH, by Peter Kelder, pb., 50 pages, us\$11.50, Harbor Press, Inc., P.O. Box 1656, Gig Harbor, Washington 98335, USA

In 1939, Peter Kelder first revealed an incredible story of a retired British colonel who had reversed his physical aging by some 30 years or more through the practice of five ancient Tibetan rites which, according to Kelder, hold the key to lasting youth, health and vitality. The colonel was a tottering, grey-haired old man, shuffling along with a cane when Kelder first met him. Some years pass when a knock on Kelder's door opens to a vigorous young man appearing to be in his mid-30s who is no other than the colonel himself. The purpose of this 1985 revised edition is to bring back this priceless information for all to benefit. The five rites are simple physical exercises, not exactly yoga asanas or calisthenics, but perhaps a blend of the two. Repeated daily 21 times each, they are said to normalize imbalances in the seven energy centers (chakras.) and the corresponding seven endocrine glands that secrete beneficial hormones. Kelder claims that anyone who practices these rites should be easily able to live past 125 years of age or more. The author guarantees that within 30 days of practicing these rites, anyone will experience a marked increase in physical vigor. After two years of faithful practice, signs of aging will have reversed. A sixth rite is also described, apparently the most essential, for only those who are willing to make the commitment of total celibacy.-dr

THE FIVE TIBETANS, by Christopher S. Kilham, pb., us\$9.95, Healing Arts Press, One Park Street, Rochester, Vermont 05767, USA.

Just released in 1994, The Five Tibetans covers the same practices found in Kelder's Fountain of Youth. Comparing the two works, I found the descriptions of how to do the exercises more detailed and easier to follow in Kelder's book. But

Kilham brings to *The Five Tibetans* nicely written chapters about kundalini, the chakras and an especially insightful instruction on the role of breathing (pranayama) while doing each rite. Christopher Kilham has taught yoga, meditation and natural health for more than 20 years and has written extensively. Both works are excellent and recommended.-dr

SANATANA DHARMA SASTHRA, Principles and Practice of Hindu Religion. An Introduction and Overview, by Bala N. Aiyer, booklet, 38 pages, Sri Meenakshi Temple, 17130 McLean Road, [C.R.104], Route 5, Box 5725; Pearland, Texas 77584 USA

Mr. Aiyer has prepared the Hindu Heritage Study Program in response to the need to instruct and uplift devotees, especially those outside of India. A dynamic and committed educator, he points out that, as Hindus have settled in various countries, the joint family system has been broken up. It is his commendable proposal that, "All of us in the Hindu community shall become the core of the extended-joint family. It has become our solemn duty to teach our children as a group in our temples." The study guide covers a comprehensive list of philosophical and practical topics. There is a suggested reading list, and a nice selection of prayers and hymns.-gr

RANDOM KINDNESS & SENSELESS ACTS OF BEAUTY, by Anne Herbert and Margaret M. Pavel, art by Mayumi Oda, hb., us\$14.95, Volcano Press/Kazan Books, Volcano, California, USA.

The message of this dainty tome, almost childlike in its simplicity, has appeared here and there in the US since 1982. The authors' suggestion is that each individual has the power to make positive changes in the world-"Anything you want there to be more of, do it randomly. Don't wait for reasons. It will make itself be more, senselessly." Presented with very lively and charming illustrations in the Japanese style, this book is equally appealing to children and adults.-gr

RABINDRANATH TAGORE. I WON'T LET YOU GO. SELECTED POEMS, translated by Ketaki Kushari Dyson, hb., UBS Publishers' Distributors Ltd., 5 Ansari Road, New Delhi, 110 002, India.

This is a Poetry Book Society (of London) Recommended Translation and it's a very sensitive one. But, of course, no translation can match the original Bengali. An introduction with photographs and a brief history of the illustrious Tagore family gives us insights into the life of this great writer. But it is the poems themselves that inspire and beguile. Replete with the images, the sounds and tastes, the atmosphere of India, Tagore's poetry is an enchanting vehicle for our mental journeys. We used this as a text for a class in Hindu literature, and were gratified to see how appreciative the young people were at hearing the lyrics of the Sanatana Dharma sung in Tagore's tender, resonant voice: "I'm free, I'm translucent, I'm independent. I'm eternity's light; I'm the flowing joy of creation's source..." We could go on and on. It's a joy to read.-gr