EAGLETS IN SPIRIT

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Eagles are beautiful metaphoric symbols of souls aspiring to higher realms of consciousness. King of the birds, the magnificent creatures soar high in splendid skies. The great eagle, called Garuda in Sanskrit, is the Vahana (or vehicle) of Lord Vishnu. All Hindu Gods have their Vahana on which they move. Lord Shiva rides Nandi, the bull. Lord Subramanian rides the Mayil, the peacock and Vishnu travels the universe on his Garuda.

Vishnu is The Preserver, The Deity (Energy Force) which fosters stability and prosperity. His work is possible only with a wide perspective which sees the whole and not just the parts.

Thus flying high in the heavens, astride his Garuda, Lord Vishnu can see far and wide and make decisions which preserve and stabilize all endeavours.

Vishnu is that cosmic power which incarnates in flesh in ten Avatars. From Matsya, The Fish, to Kourma, The Tortoise, to Narasimha, the Half-Lion, Half Man, to Vamana, The Dwarf, to Parasaruma, the fierce Brahmin warrior, to Rama, the perfect King, to Krishna, the Divine Lover, to Balaram, the one who uses The Plough as a weapon (some add Buddha to the list instead of Balaram). Kalki, The Destroyer, who rides a white horse, is yet to come.

Thus the spirit of God becomes manifest in the various stages of the evolutionary development of the human from fish to God-King. In this long journey, Garuda is the faithful companion of the Lord Who Preserves.

Eagles are sharp-eyed. They can see a rabbit running on the ground from their flight hundreds of metres in the sky! They are fierce fighters and are eternal foes of the poisonous snake kingdom.

Swamiji called his students “eaglets”. He wanted them to develop the admirable qualities of the eagle and, as well, the same skills and strength necessary to fly high.

There is another little known fact about Garuda – the eagle’s life style - which is a good metaphor for the difficulties faced when undertaking the Yogic path, the path of conscious evolution.

The eagle has probably the longest lifespan among birds. It can live up to 70 years, but to reach this age, the eagle must make a hard decision in its middle-age. In its 40s, the eagle’s long and flexible talons can no longer grab prey to eat. Moreover, its long and sharp beak becomes blunt. Its aged and heavy wings often stick to its chest and make
it difficult to fly. The eagle is left with only two options: to gradually die this way or go through a painful process of change which lasts roughly 150 days.

This painful process of change requires the eagle to fly to a mountain top and sit on its nest. There the eagle hits its beak against a rock until it plucks the beak out. After the beak is plucked out, the eagle waits for a new beak to grow back. Then it must pluck out its talons and wait for new talons to grow. In the end, the eagle starts plucking its aged features and waits for new feathers to grow.

This entire process is very painful for the eagle, as it bleeds during the process and becomes weak and helpless. But after five months of this ordeal, it is ready for the next 30 years of its life. It is almost like a rebirth for the eagle.

It is a hard but true fact: change, transformation, is painful. Perhaps this is why so many falter on this edge, afraid to make the leap. To endure the torment of confusion, to struggle through the chaos and the pain, to clamber through the slough of despair, requires an inner strength which comes only after lifetimes of striving for the light. Like the eagle, all aspirants come to the point where it becomes “do or die” – suffer or fade away. Somehow it is part of nature’s plan, this Trial by Fire, to protect her soft inner secrets from those too weak to bear the fierce intensity of reality.

The choice is there, somewhere on the path of sadhana to bear the slings and arrows of misfortune bravely and in so doing, rise above them or to give up, give in and settle for the slow decay of spirit, unwilling or unable to sustain the heat of the transformation. Sraddha, firm faith, tenacity to hold to the impossible dream until it becomes possible is necessary.

The mid-point is the hardest.

To give up or go on.

To climb or to fall.

To stride upward or to slide back.

To keep Moksha as the ultimate goal one must endure the torment of transformation. One must fix one’s courage to the sticking point, the one-pointed aim for ultimate freedom if one wishes to soar like a spiritual eagle gliding in the high heavens of exalted consciousness.