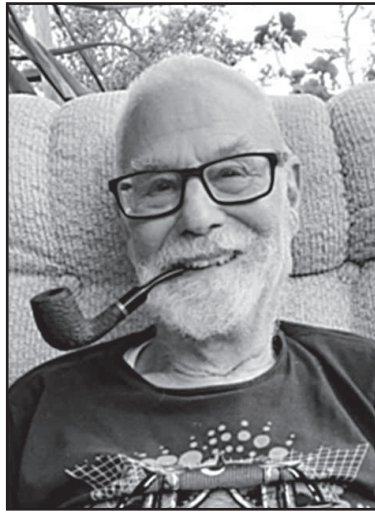


## In Memoriam



*Marty Glass (1938-2022)*

# Loving the Dreamer who is Dreaming Us

*By Samuel Bendeck Sotillos*

**S**ifting among a plethora of titles sprawled over the second floor of Moe's Books on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley over 17 years ago, my attention was drawn to a text called *Yuga: An Anatomy of Our Fate* (2001) by Marty Glass, whose work I was already aware of. Opening its pages, I saw a note in the book, written by the author himself. I recall the response that it elicited in me as I was sitting on a low stool, close to the ground amidst hundreds of books. The note contained a mailing address which I then used to contact him. I remember the sound of his kind and humorous voice on the other side of the phone when he responded to my letter. From that day onwards, we remained regularly in touch.

Marty worked as a college English instructor, a warehouseman, a school janitor and, until his retirement, he was a teacher in an elementary school. He was very open about his spiritual commitment to the Hindu tradition and, at the same time, his embrace of the essential truths found at the heart of all religions. He often cited – from memory – passages in the monumental anthology of Whitall N. Perry (1920–2005), *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (1971), subsequently republished as *The Spiritual Ascent: A Compendium of the World's Wisdom* (2008). He was also an avid reader of 'traditionalist' authors, including René Guénon (1886–1951), Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), Huston Smith (1919–2016), and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Marty's own works include *Emails from The Land* (2013); *The Woodrat Chronicles* (2007); *Heartbeats of Hinduism: Living the Truth of the Immortal Dharma* (2006); *Eastern Light in Western Eyes: A Portrait of the Practice of Devotion* (2003); and *The Sandstone Papers: On the Crisis of Contemporary Life* (1986).

In his presence, one imagined oneself speaking to an Avadhūta or a ‘Fool for Christ,’ given his often puzzling and unexpected responses. He had a tremendous sense of humor and a hearty laugh, but could also be very serious in the very same conversation. At times, he would make somewhat vulgar remarks that naïve or falsely idealistic people might consider unspiritual. But this was simply his way of conveying something important in as direct a manner as possible. He was able to express complex metaphysical teachings from the world’s religions in everyday language because, like most of the rest of us, that is the simple language he used every day. In addition, he had the rare ability to write as he spoke, though he could also write more “academically” when necessary. Time and time again he spoke about loving people regardless of who they were, citing the words “Love one another; as I have loved you” (John 13:34). In correspondence, he wrote: “*Love of God and Love of the World as God!* Heart of the Universe, Heart of my heart!” He placed considerable importance on not seeing ourselves as superior, just because we happened to be on a spiritual path.

In 2009, we met in person at his owner-built home in Southern Humboldt County (Northern California) on an 80-acre plot of land. He lived off the grid and was located two miles up a dirt road beyond the power and water lines. It was here, in this remote locality (which he called “The Land”), that Marty honored me with an interview.<sup>1</sup> This was where he lived with his family for thirty years. When I first learned that Marty was going to leave “The Land” – following his retirement – in order to return to Oakland, I was taken aback. People normally take the opposite approach of living in the city during their working lives, only to seek out a quieter (often rural) place for their retirement. Marty explained that he wanted to live among the people in his twilight years. He compared this process to the famous ‘Ten Ox-Herding Pictures’ of Zen Buddhism. This was the best way for him to fulfill his journey: ‘bringing the ox home’ meant returning to society so that wisdom and compassion could be embodied as an ordinary person living in the everyday world.

I remember receiving emails from Marty in which he describes how he marveled at seeing people from around the world, and from all walks

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<sup>1</sup> See Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, “Tears, Laughter, Compassion and Wisdom in the *Kali-Yuga*: Interview with Marty Glass,” *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 26 (Winter 2010), pp. 179–191.

of life, about whom he wrote haikus which conveyed a deep affection for his subjects. For example, he would describe spending time in a very crowded and noisy Café Trieste watching the World Cup with people he had just met – an example of his joyous embrace of everyday life.

I remember speaking with Marty one time following his move to Oakland. He mentioned that his heart and intellect had opened to the Divine Grace (*kripā*), which allowed him to feel love for humanity in its *samsāric* or fallen condition. Marty was fully present with others in their existential predicament – whether in sorrow or joy – which had to be accepted as an integral facet of life. He once wrote: “And when you can see your whole life as a one-liner, or a snapshot taken in a dream, YOU WILL HAVE ENTERED HEAVEN!”

Marty knew that the temporal world was an illusion (*māyā*) but, at the same time, he met people ‘in the thick of it’ and recognized their suffering without being sentimental or dismissive. He was impressed by the powerful words by Guénon that: “The ‘end of a world’ never is and never can be anything but the end of an illusion.”<sup>2</sup> Yet he felt the importance of being with people in their hour of need, with a full awareness that while human afflictions were ultimately an illusion, suffering beings were always embraced by the Divine Mercy.

When I visited Marty during the coronavirus pandemic, he spoke about Guénon’s *magnum opus* – *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* (1945) – and how important this book was because it chronicled precisely (and presciently) what was becoming apparent before our very eyes. The Divine Play (*līlā*) of existence creates an illusory impression of separateness, but the seeker learns that Unity hides behind the veil of duality. People were often drawn to him and found comfort in his presence for reasons they themselves did not understand. For Marty it was quite simple: he saw the Divine in others and used humor to unshackle them from the grips of their ego, so that they could experience some measure of relief from the tyranny of the world.

Marty spent his final years seated in a large armchair in the backyard that was his “peaceful harbor.” He was surrounded by sunshine and a beautiful garden; a true refuge from the oppressive bustle of the city. He regularly received family and friends here, in the midst of a special

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<sup>2</sup> René Guénon, “The End of a World,” in *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), p. 279.

ambience where he found the required leisure time to contemplate the liberating wisdom found in the Hindu tradition to which he had attached himself.

It was in the context of *satsang*, or an association with truth, that Marty wished to meet people, yet they often had no idea of this. On many occasions, he discussed his practice of “Resignation to the divine Will”<sup>3</sup> and how this was central to traversing the spiritual path. Marty saw his life divided into distinct phases (akin to the Hindu idea of *ā rama*, known as the four life stages through which each person is expected to pass), and said that they had all been completed. He never looked back with nostalgia on the ‘good old days,’ as he was tenaciously rooted in the here-and-now or the ‘eternal present’ that is tantamount to the ‘True and Real.’

In our final meetings, Marty often spoke of the need to be childlike and how important this was in the spiritual life. “Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein” (Mark 10:15). I distinctly remember, as he repeated this verse from the New Testament, that his eyes became watery as if tears were about to run down his face. He stressed the importance of family, and always emphasized that children must come first; we needed to do everything possible to nurture and support them. Marty described himself as a “family man” and was proud that he had five children and thirteen grandchildren.

He knew that the life of “Marty” as such-and-such a person was but a story and thus ultimately unreal – a byproduct of illusion (*māyā*). He concurred with the great Ananda K. Coomaraswamy that true human identity is transpersonal in nature: “Blessed is the man on whose tomb can be written, *Hic jacet nemo* [Here lies no one].”<sup>4</sup> Marty was apt to relate such truths with a contagious laughter that I still vividly recall. He regarded each manifest life as a theophany and once wrote: “Existence is clearly a gift. We have done nothing to earn or deserve it, so we have no right to complain if it is withdrawn.”<sup>5</sup> We never know when our time

<sup>3</sup> Frithjof Schuon, “Enigma and Message of Islamic Esoterism,” in *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, trans. Gustavo Polit (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1986), p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, “The Social Order,” in *Hinduism and Buddhism* (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1943), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Marty Glass, “Facing a Few of the Facts,” in *The Sandstone Papers: On the Crisis of Contemporary Life* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2005), p. 103.

will come; therefore, we need to be ready to depart at any time. In the words of Hamlet: “If it be now, ’tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all.”<sup>6</sup> He was a gifted wordsmith and loved writing meditative haikus that spoke of his return to the Beloved:

A great peace found me  
This morning. Expressionless.  
Complete indifference.

And:

There is a sorrow  
So profound that it is peace.  
I’m finally there.

When directly asked if he was afraid of death, he replied – with a prolonged smile – that the thought of dying was “bliss.” He hastened to add that this was not because he wanted to die but, rather, because he felt ready to encounter that which is unconditioned and eternal – the Supreme Self (*Paramātmā*). He often spoke of the divine Dream that is dreaming us, and that we are confused if we think that we are dreaming it. He wrote haikus until his death. I received the following one just days before being made aware of his passing, which gives testament to both his holy resignation before God and of the universality found in all spiritual traditions, something he discerned so clearly:

Paralyzed in the  
Grip of my subservience,  
A slave of Allah!

On November 17th at eighty-four years of age, Martin David Glass, whom everyone simply knew as ‘Marty,’ took his last breath, and his heart its last beat as he returned to the Lord. You will be dearly missed my friend – my profound gratitude for all that you have taught me. *Om, Shānti, Shānti, Shānti.*

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<sup>6</sup> Shakespeare, Act 5, Scene 2, *Hamlet*, ed. Horace Howard Furness (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1877), p. 439.