An Appreciation of Gerald (Gerry) James Larson

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It is with both sadness and appreciation that I write this short note about the late Gerry Larson. Sadness, because he was a good friend and intellectual sparring partner for over forty years. Appreciation, because there was no one who did more in recent times in the USA to promote and nurture Dharmic Studies.

I first met him in 1975 at a meeting of the Association of Asian Studies when he gave a characteristically spirited lecture on Samkhya on which he was an acknowledged expert. Our relationship deepened when I was a visiting professor at the Department of Religious Studies at UC Santa Barbara in the early 1980s. We remained friends until his sudden death in April of this year. Thanks to his warmth and hospitality, I got to meet Claire his wife and some of his many friends.

We did not agree on much either philosophically or politically, and I was always astonished how someone so smart and well-read could be so consistently wrong-headed—for so long! But if he was wrong-headed, he was brilliantly so. He was a wonderful and scintillating dialogue-partner, well-informed, pugnacious, feisty, and sharp in argument. There were few people with whom it was so much fun to argue, and I can still remember with great pleasure discussions in Hawaii and elsewhere which would begin at 10 or 11 at night and continue into the early hours of the morning.

But beyond our sparring sessions, I admired Gerry for his integrity, his dedication to his work, and his commitment to the many students whom he mentored over a career spanning over fifty years. He led a full and fruitful life as a scholar, teacher, mentor, husband, father, and friend to many, a life whose impact will extend into the future.

He is best known for his pioneering contributions in the fields of Indian philosophy and religion, particularly in the philosophical areas of classical Yoga and Samkhya in which he was a world-renowned expert. He had studied the sources carefully and was therefore able to present a solid exposition of these philosophies both in their origins and in their subsequent development. Yoga in particular has undergone remarkable transformations as it has travelled both in time and in space and become a familiar form of practice both in India and the West, and it is in significant part thanks to Gerry that we can trace those transformations. The crowning achievement of his long career was

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the publication in 2018 of *Classical Yoga Philosophy and the Legacy of Samkhya*, a work of over 1000 pages, which serves as a book-end to his *Classical Samkhya: An Interpretation of Its History and Meaning*, published in 1969.

In addition to these philosophical works, Gerry also made notable contributions to our understanding of modern Indian religion, law, politics, and art. It was partly for these significant contributions that he was invited after retirement from UC Santa Barbara to be the first Rabindranath Tagore professor of Indian Cultures and Civilizations and the director of the India Studies Program at Indiana University, Bloomington, from 1995 to 2003 and after that he served part-time as a visiting research professor in the Program in Religious Studies at UC Irvine until his death. He served with distinction as well in the Society of Asian and Comparative Philosophy, where he was vice president from 1976 to 1977 and then president from 1982 to 1985.

In one of the many papers that Gerry wrote over the years, he expressed the hope that his life might “have profound implications in the lives which come after me in countless generations to come.” It is, I believe, a justified hope.

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