

The Bending of Spoons

An essay meant to be read aloud

RENAY OSHOP

after the teaching of Maureen Caudill



A fork, curled over until its tines nearly meet its handle. Autumn 2011.

*karāgre vartate lakṣmīḥ kara-madhye sarasvatī |
kara-mūle sthitā gaurī maṅgalam kara-darśanam ||*

*At the tips of the hands dwells Lakshmi; in the middle of the hands, Saraswati;
at the base of the hands abides Gauri – auspicious is the very sight of the hands.*

Somewhere in your kitchen there is a drawer, and in that drawer there is a spoon, and that spoon is about to become the strangest souvenir you own. Not a souvenir of a place, but of a capacity — a small, quiet proof of the power of your own energy field, sitting among the teaspoons. This essay is a walkthrough. If you follow it all the way, with a sturdy spoon and an empty mind, there is a real chance that by the end of an hour the spoon will have folded over like taffy in your hands. There is also a real chance it will not. I will be plain with you about the odds as we go, because this practice deserves honesty more than it deserves salesmanship.

Let me say first what this is not. I am not a psychic — at least not any more than the general public, more or less. I do not own this ability, and I have never wanted fame or money from it. It was given to me, essentially for free, and the only thing I have ever wanted to do with it is give it away again, as many times as I can, because it is so empowering. If you learn it, my hope is that you will do the same.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

I learned the bending of spoons from an official psychic named Maureen Caudill. Before she was a psychic she was a computer scientist — more than twenty years in the field, fifteen of them as a researcher in artificial intelligence and neural networks, a program manager on serious defense research projects. She was, in other words, exactly the kind of person you would not expect to end up teaching people to soften metal with their attention. Her book about that turn in her life is called *Suddenly Psychic: A Skeptic's Journey*, and in the spring of two thousand seven she spent a night on the radio program *Coast to Coast AM*, telling George Noory how she forged her link between the world of science and the world she had wandered into. If you want her account in her own voice, that recording is worth finding; the details are in the notes that accompany this essay.

What she gave me, I practiced. For three years or so I bent spoons for the delight of private audiences — friends, guests, the curious. Then I began to teach, first privately, and then in an unusual classroom: a virtual world, where strangers from different continents sat in their separate kitchens, each holding a spoon, while my voice held the room together. Teaching that way stripped the practice down to what it really is. I could not touch anyone's spoon. I could not pass anything to anyone except words and, I believe, a shared field of intention. And still, people bent metal. The photographs that accompany this essay are of my own work from

that season of teaching — a fork whose tines turned and splayed like a flower before the fork itself busted in two, a butterknife that was once regular and flat and now has a wave in it, a fork curled all the way over until its tines nearly touch its handle.



The fork busted, the tines turned; the knife was once a regular flat butterknife. September 17, 2011.

Here are the honest numbers. Only about ten percent of first-time students succeed. That figure held in person and it held online. Even I succeed maybe half the time that I try. So before you begin, decide that you are doing the whole thing all the way through, and be at peace with the possibility that your first attempt ends with an unbent spoon and a warm feeling in your hands. Results are not guaranteed. The practice is worth doing anyway, and the second attempt stands on the shoulders of the first.

PREPARING THE DAY

The preparation begins the day before, and none of it is difficult.

Do not exercise on the day of your attempt — nothing strenuous in the eight to twelve hours beforehand. You want your body's energy gathered, not spent.

Eat some chocolate one to three hours before, if you can tolerate it, and not so much that you feel sick. I will not pretend to give you the physics of this; I can only tell you it helps.

Meditate for a while, one to two hours before you begin. Any quiet sitting you already know how to do is fine. You are not trying to achieve anything yet; you are lowering the noise floor.

And leave alcohol out of it entirely. Nothing against alcohol in general — I drink on occasion myself — but for this kind of work, the kind that lives in the same neighborhood as chi gong, alcohol inhibits the process. Even sitting nearby as a witness, it is better to come sober or not at all.

Then there is the spoon itself. Procure it at least a day ahead: a good, solid piece of stainless steel or silver flatware. Not an heirloom — you are going to change its shape, and anyway it is better if the piece is new and has not absorbed many people's energy yet. And not one of those flimsy modern spoons that anyone could bend with two thumbs and a bad mood. Test it now. It should feel like it would be impossible to bend by hand. That matters, so that when it does bend, you know it was really you, and you know it was really something. A spoon is easiest, so start there. If you want a real challenge someday, try a butterknife. Mine was once perfectly flat.

PREPARING THE ROOM

Choose a quiet hour and a chair where you can sit with both feet on the floor. If a screen is involved — if you are listening to this, say — get as far from the device as the sound will let you, and if you can, play the voice through open speakers rather than headphones. I have found that the electromagnetic fields close to a computer inhibit the coherent field we are trying to generate; you can measure those fields with a cheap meter if you are curious, so this is less mystical than it sounds. Loosen anything tight that you are wearing. Tell the people you live with that you will be silent for most of an hour.

And if you can, do not do this alone. My teacher said, and my experience confirms, that the more people who participate at once, the easier it becomes. The collective field does some of the lifting. This is one reason the practice moved me to record a voice for strangers: everyone who attempts this while these words are playing is, in a sense, in the room. If someone is nearby while you try — even a skeptical someone, even a bored someone — invite them to grab a spoon from the kitchen and join in rather than watch. Witnesses are welcome, but they should be prepared to be bored. From the outside, this looks like nothing at all: people sitting still, saying nothing, holding flatware. The interesting part is invisible.

THE HANDS

Before we begin, look at your hands. There is an old Sanskrit verse, a prayer said upon waking, that places three goddesses in the open hand: at the fingertips lives Lakshmi, abundance; in the middle of the palm lives Saraswati, wisdom and art; at the base of the hand lives Gauri, the power of the mountain. Auspicious, the verse says, is the very sight of one's own hands. Whatever you believe, take the point: everything this practice uses, you are already holding. Place your palms together, bow to them if you like, and let us take inventory of what they are attached to.

Feel your balance. Not the idea of it — the fact of it, in your chair, right now. Imagine that someone kind could come inside the home of your body as a guest. Where would you show them your balance lives? In your back? Your hips? Your chest? Find the place. Now the same for your awareness: if that guest wanted to feel your awareness, where would you take them? And your focus — where does your focus sit? Balance, awareness, and focus. Those three are the whole apparatus. The spoon is just where they leave a mark.

One more thing while your hands are together. Imagine your spoon as you would like it to be. See which way it will bend, and how much. You are not forcing anything yet; you are paving the way for your intention, the way you might walk a path once in the evening so you can walk it in the dark.

THE TECHNIQUE

Now we begin, and from here the instructions are simple enough to hold without thinking, which is the point, because thinking is the one thing that will stop you.

Sit with your feet flat on the floor and ground yourself. Rub your palms together, briskly, and keep going — longer than feels natural — until you feel real heat between them. Do not be surprised at how hot your hands get today; mine run warm, and during this practice the heat goes through the roof.

Now hold your hands in front of you, palms facing each other, about six inches apart, as if you were tossing a small ball from one hand to the other. Picture a blue ball of energy flowing out of one palm and landing in the other. Catch it. Toss it back. Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Quiet your mind while it travels. Think as little as possible. This step is essential — essential. Do not go on until the ball is real to you, until you can feel something palpable passing between your two hands. There is no hurry. The ball is the whole engine.

When the ball is moving on its own, gently pick up your spoon and place it between your hands — I rest mine against the upper palms, where the palms meet the fingers. Hold it lightly. If the metal is digging into your skin at all, you are gripping too tightly; this whole activity should be easy, smooth, gentle, fluid, but certain. And now let the blue ball become an x-ray: the same energy, still passing from hand to hand, but now passing straight through the metal on its way. Feel it leave one palm, pass through the spoon, and arrive in the other palm. Make sure you can detect it on the far side. Then send it back. Back and forth, back and forth, through the object, minute after minute. The spoon just goes along for the ride.

This is the long middle of the practice, and I will tell you what it costs: it takes me twenty minutes or so of flowing energy between my hands before anything changes. Some people feel it immediately. Some take the whole hour. Somewhere in there, if it comes, you will notice the strangest sensation of this entire strange practice: the metal begins to feel as if it is melting. Softening. Going slightly warm and plastic between your palms, the way a candle thinks about slumping on a hot day.

When the melting feeling happens, bend the spoon — in one smooth, fluid motion, without thinking. Use gentle, consistent, even pressure, the pressure you would use to bend a plastic spoon without snapping it. Soft, but certain. Do not seize the moment like a thief; the moment is yours already. And if the metal seems to freeze up again in your hands — it happens — do not fight it. Never mind it. Go back to no mind, back to the ball, back and forth, back and forth, and wait for the melt to return.

If frustration comes, or confusion, or the particular despair of minute fifteen, here is something a little advanced. There is a center of energy behind your belly button — the traditions I trust see it glowing orange-red, and it is active in almost everyone. Bring your hands, spoon and all, in front of your belly, or in front of the point between your eyebrows if that center is lively for you, and let the practice continue there, in front of the place where your fire already is. And remember the one thing I carried away from a lecture by a swami years ago, the only sentence of that evening I still own: thoughts are thieves. Thoughts are thieves. Thoughts are thieves. Every thought — including the thrilled one that says it's working — picks the pocket of the work. Go to no mind. Go to innocent mind. Don't think; just do. Don't think; just do.

A F T E R W A R D

Suppose it happens. Suppose the neck of the spoon lolls over in your fingers with no more drama than warm wax, and you sit there holding the evidence, laughing or crying or both. People imagine that the feeling afterward is triumph. It is not, quite. There is a wonderful plainness to it, almost a dullness — the feeling of having done something that turned out to be easy, a weird totem of relaxing, and in that way no big deal at all. Chances are you will not want fame or money from it either. It is too simple for that. What it changes is quieter and much larger. You will find yourself wondering what we are all doing when we touch each other — how much is transmitted through the holding of a hand. You will never again consider the petting of an animal to be the small thing you thought it was. In fact, you will never quite consider anything to be the same thing again.

And in time — three months, a year — as you keep walking in balance, awareness, and focus, the bending of spoons will come to seem like the least interesting of the new things you can do and see and relate to. It is not the destination. It is the boarding pass. As my guru memorably said: at least you got on the plane.



October 29, 2011.

So: my hopes for you are three. That you succeed — if not today, then the day you stop trying so hard. That you keep your bent spoon somewhere you will see it, and appreciate and enjoy it as a memento of the power of your own energy field. And that you share what you learn, freely, the way it was shared with me.

The spoon is in the drawer. The hands are at the ends of your arms, and auspicious is the very sight of them. Rub them together. Toss the blue ball, back and forth, back and forth. Thoughts are thieves. Don't think; just do.

Keep going. Keep going. Keep going.

Renay Oshop

*The bending of spoons was taught to me by Maureen Caudill,
who asked nothing for it. I pass it on the same way.*

Notes, References & Further Listening

Provenance. This essay is woven, with a light hand, from the author's own "Preparatory Remarks" and teaching script for a spoon-bending class taught in the autumn of 2011 — a class that met, unusually, inside the virtual world Second Life (the Village International, 2 pm Pacific, Saturday, October 8, 2011). The voice of those notes has been kept wherever possible, including the counsel that results are not guaranteed.

The original teacher, with gratitude. Every technique described in this essay came to the author from Maureen Caudill, who gave it away freely and asked nothing in return. Nothing here is claimed as an invention; it is a lineage, passed along on the terms it was received. Maureen Caudill: a physics degree summa cum laude from the University of Connecticut and a master's from Cornell; more than twenty years a computer scientist, fifteen of them as a researcher in artificial intelligence and neural networks on advanced defense projects; later accredited by The Monroe Institute as an Outreach trainer. Her account of the turn in her life is *Suddenly Psychic: A Skeptic's Journey* (Hampton Roads, 2006).

Further listening — referenced here, not included. Coast to Coast AM, "Awakening to the Psychic," broadcast April 17, 2007: Maureen Caudill in conversation with host George Noory on forging a link between the worlds of science and the paranormal. The broadcast is preserved beside this essay's source materials as three hour-long recordings — `Coast_07_04_17_-_Hour_2_G_Noory_Suddnly_Psy.mp3`, `Coast_07_04_17_-_Hour_3_G_Noory_Suddnly_Psy.mp3`, and `Coast_07_04_17_-_Hour_4_G_Noory_Suddnly_Psy.mp3` — which accompany the archive and are deliberately not bundled with this document.

Also recommended in the original notes: forkbend.com, for videos of the practice.

The verse. The Sanskrit lines on the title page are a traditional morning prayer — recited upon waking, while looking at one's own hands — given here exactly as it appears in the class notes.

The photographs. All flatware shown was bent by the author, September 17 through October 29, 2011: a dinner knife once regular and flat; a fork whose tines turned before it busted; a second fork curled fully over; a third folded back upon itself.