

LISTENING TO FIRE

THE POETRY AND SCIENCE OF MEDITATION

By Leah Lucas

This presentation is divided into three sections: Oneness: the emptiness of all forms that is absolute fullness.

Immortality: The paradoxical dynamic of our living/dying existence without beginning, end or history.

Breath: the use of mantra to calm the mind and regulate breath so that the praan energy can be distributed throughout the nervous system to support stillness and silent contemplation.

I would like to begin with Oneness. You cannot talk about Oneness without discussing duality. When you consider the human brain, we know that it is divided equally into two parts. The left hemisphere of the brain dominates our thinking function that deal with details and facts, locates us in time and space, keeps us focused and aware of daily duties to manage life in the external world. The right hemisphere of the brain is creative, intuitive, prone to fantasy, wide-open visions of the imagination, a far reaching, expansive and global perspective. So the cosmic vision of Oneness and the earthly particularity of matter reside within our very brain structure. This dual perspective on reality gives rise to a central conflict of human existence. We know that we live in a body that is constantly changing; growing older and will eventually die. Yet, we have an awareness that some consciousness within us never fundamentally changes, in fact we don't tend to believe that part of us could ever die. The core of all mystical traditions is the fully realized experience of the unconditioned. It is the seeing into our deepest nature as human beings and the realizing of

oneness of all life. But this is not an awareness that we hold most of the time. We have knowledge of the waking state; the dreaming state and the deep sleep state. Behind these three states of normal consciousness lies a fourth state; in the Vedant philosophy it is called Turiya. This fourth state can be reached through meditation or immersion in a creative act or intense focus and concentration on something in the present moment. There is no sense of time in this state, and no sense of separation from self or other, or from self and the external world. A kind of fusion occurs leading to a sense of Oneness, completeness, and profound internal peace.

Buddhists call this insight kensho, which means seeing into the nature of the world. In the experience of kensho, or Turiya, all the objects perceived by the senses are not objects at all. Rather, they are one with the self. In the book, Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit, Jesuit priest and Zen practitioner, Robert E. Kennedy articulates the nature of reality: "There is no objective world independent of the self. All forms are empty. The subject perceiving self is equally empty. This empty oneness of subject and object is nothing more than the constantly changing phenomenal world of form, colours and sensations, which constantly rise and fall according to the laws of causation. There is no emptiness existing by itself.

The emptiness exists only as Form. Only in form can we view emptiness. The Absolute, God or Brahm cannot be seen, described or talked about. To experience the Reality of Emptiness is to experience the universe, as we know it in collapse. This emptiness is the living, dynamic, formless source of all existence. It exists beyond individuality or personality; it is unimaginable, inconceivable and capable of endless transformation. All the

forms of the world are illusory in that they have no abiding substance; the root substance of all reality is emptiness.”¹.

It is our conditioning, our mental concepts, dogmas and language that cover our direct experience and blind us to the true nature of Reality.

*Meditation is the path to realizing our true nature through liberating the mind from concepts and images. In *The Golden Age of Zen*, John Wu writes:*

“When all things return to the One, even gold loses its value. But when the One returns to all things, even the pebbles sparkle.”

The emptiness of all forms is absolute fullness. When the One returns to all things, even the pebbles sparkle for the Absolute is contained whole and entire in each fragment of the relative.

Lao Tzu the ancient Chinese sage who was born in 604 B.C. expresses this theme in the following poem:

Existence is beyond the power of words to define

Terms may be used

But none of them absolute

In the beginning of heaven and earth there were no words

Words came out of the womb of matter;

And whether a man dispassionately sees to the core of life

Or passionately sees the surface

The core and the surface are essentially the same

Words making them seem different

Only to express appearance,

If name be needed, wonder names them both;

From wonder to wonder existence opens.

What we look for beyond seeing and call the unseen

*Listen for beyond hearing and call the unheard
Grasp for beyond reaching and call the withheld
Merge beyond understanding
In a Oneness
Which does not merely rise and fall and give light,
Does not merely set and leave darkness,
But forever sends forth a succession of living things
As mysterious as the unbegotten existence to which they return
And that is why men have called them empty phenomena
Meaningless images in a mirage with no face to meet,
No back to follow.
Yet one who is anciently aware of existence is a master of every moment
Feels no break since time beyond time in the way life flows.²*

When I was in India study at the IMI, Swami Shyam spoke to us about how the Space of Oneness is a superfine state of awareness. “The Reality, which is formless, cannot ever be known without a form. The human form has the best nervous system among all sentient beings for unfolding Self-Realization. The very body of man appearing on earth with the bondage of skin, bones, senses, thinking and knowing has an “I” that asks, “where is freedom?” Man thinks his “I” is in the body, so there is a relationship between “I” and Body that is a mixture of the two. But “I” has never become a body. As long as this mixture remains there must be something that mixes. The mixing is the waking state. As soon as the waking state comes, man says, “I got up”. So this I of the waking state – the moment you begin to see the waking state, and the seer says “I see the waking state”. The I become drishta, which means the seer, and the waking state becomes

drishya, the scene. In the same way, in the dream, I become dreamer and all things become the drishya - the scene or objects.

Jarh is the insentient, the body which I doesn't make. There must be some conscious being who is able to know that "I got up, I dreamed, I slept."

That I must always be Chaytan, Being, Pure Consciousness. If that is always, then that being must not be bound by time and space or by the forms.

Thus the I, which is forever pure and free, is not born so it is not bound, and it is not living so it is not bound, and it is not dying, so it is not bound.

And we see that it is forever. Man's mind has made that eternal reality a temporary changing reality. Man does not know what that is which makes him a body. When body is there you have to pass the time. We are given the gift of Time and Space to unfold our awareness of our true nature.

Intellect functions as a kind of imagination. Man does not know that he has never been a body."3.

Sitting in meditation is a way of training the nervous system and mind into a sense of stillness. You could understand it as placing the attention in the right hemisphere of the brain. The formless cosmic wide open freedom space of awareness never wants to be confined and limited in the physical body of form. It doesn't care about tedious details of daily life. Its nature is freedom and such a consciousness always wants to fly, expand, create and explore. It has no fear of death because it knows it cannot die since it is pure energy. Back in the left hemisphere of the brain the consciousness of relative existence, of form, definition, limitation, particularity, survival, never wants to dissolve into formlessness. It never wants to lose its safe, secure, solid and concrete form. This rational aspect of left-brain consciousness perceives dissolution into formlessness as death. It does not

think, oh wonderful, a whole new free eternal life. No, that is not its construct, neither is that its purpose. It is here to hold us in life, this present existence for as long as it possibly can. You could understand it as the mechanism of the ego, a mental construct designed to take care of the human body and the human emotions with as much stability as possible. So once again, there is a very big conflict. Whether we understand it as ego verses Self, Spirit and Matter, Sacred and Profane, Instinct and Intuition, an inherent and seemingly irresolvable tension is the outcome of two such opposing dimensions. The resolution of this paradoxical dilemma lies in Turiya, the fourth state of consciousness, which unfolds into Knowingness or Knower. The Knower is distinguished from the mind – intellect kind of knowledge which depends upon a separate subject – I.

In meditation thoughts are never a problem. Rather, they are a chance to realize I am the knower of thoughts. This makes the meditator immediately realize that this “I” existence (the watcher of thoughts) is entirely different in nature from thoughts. I is unchanging, and ultimately not material form while thoughts are always changing and disappearing. “I” is existence – pure, eternal, unchanging, free reality, and thoughts are its manifestations, but not the same as “I” – pure reality. When the dream-like appearance of forms appears, they cover the essence of the eternal self. The mind is the power of Reality itself, so it has infinite power to re-constitute itself again and again.

The inspiration for naming this presentation Listening To Fire came from a letter my yogini friend Turiya wrote to me from her Himalayan home in the Kullu Ashram. Studying with her Guru Swami Shyam, she writes of his own enlightenment experience where: “Divine Energy is pure Fire, the fire of pure consciousness. But the untrained nervous system cannot take it.

*The path of meditation and study of consciousness and how it functions is a truly esoteric path to Higher Awareness. Its purpose is to create the strength to open one's vision and power to directly see and realize that pure fire of consciousness. When you actually do the practice there is a total transformation on every level of what one knows and calls "true". Whatever is seen to be solid is pure consciousness, never, ever still. Whatever I know as a solid world with solid people is a raging fire of pure energy; an energy that is invisible to the eye of the waking state, the dream and deep sleep states, which are our only modes of experience. As long as meditation goes on, daily transformation is automatic. Even when it seems quiet and hidden, the Divine Fire burns by itself, pushing one to keep digging, keep practicing. Keep digging for the Truth. The fire burns away the dross of human understanding. Meditation is the subtle experience of consciousness getting finer and further refined. The covering of the Self is burnt off by the fire of pure knowledge. Our real life- force, the essence, usually remains folded up like a flower bud. But when the right amount of sun, rain, temperature and soil are present, the flower just naturally blooms like it was meant to do. All we can do is prepare the vessel. The rest is Grace."*⁴.

*This esoteric description of the kind of consciousness experienced during meditative states is uncannily similar to what physicists are discovering about the quantum world of the material universe. In *The Dancing Wu-Li Masters* there is a chapter entitled *The Particle Zoo* where author Gary Zukav writes: "The ultimate stuff of the universe is pure energy. But subatomic particles are not 'made of' energy, they are energy. This is what Albert Einstein theorized in 1905. Subatomic interactions, therefore, are*

interactions of energy with energy. What we have been calling matter (particles) constantly is being created, annihilated, and created again. Brahmin, Vishnu and Shiva, the Creator, Destroyer and Preserving Force all intercollide. The Great Harmonizer seeks to preserve and balance the tension of the opposing powers. There is no distinction between empty, as in “empty space” and not-empty, or between something and not-something. The world of particle physics is a world of sparkling energy forever dancing with itself in the form. Its particles as they twinkle in and out of existence, collide, transmute, and disappear again.”⁵

Swami Shyam describes our perception of the material world as:

“Consciousness slowly solidifies to where things appear before they eyes. Then that same consciousness is called the material world. Your body is nothing but consciousness, but you see it with the limited capacity of visualizing things. So you see the gross worlds manifested as material and you do not reach the idea that it is the finest state of existence, the consciousness that has appeared in the world. The state of dream is nothing but your own creation as this gross material world is nothing but your own creation. The mind in Whole of the Universe is One. The highest consciousness awareness encompassed the whole.”

Consciousness as soon as it becomes manifest cannot escape its conditioning. We are conditioned to believe we are limited to a body and will die. When creativity bursts through, the ego gets an opportunity to remember that there is something beyond the conditioned self. The discipline of meditation is the practical attempt to achieve self-identity beyond the ego. The ego is only an operational, temporary identity of the

Self. This always involves patiently being aware of the immediate present. The knowledge of Pure Being is not the knowledge of the mind. The intellect never knows the source of its own knowing.

To maximize access to the quantum self, to maximize creativity and free will, we must be committed to a radical transformation of the psyche. The culmination of the adult developmental process is reconnecting with what we originally are – the primary process of our brain – mind, the non-individual self. This direct experiential contact with the unitive state of Oneness is possible through consistently directing the attention to one’s own right brain consciousness. This allows the constant chatter of left-brain arising thoughts to gradually fall into silence. Distractions subside and an entirely new world opens before the gaze of mind.

IMMORTALITY

Continuing further from Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit, theologian Kennedy’s elucidation of eternal life is a fusion of Zen Meditation and Christian mysticism:

“Immortality is not an endless life after death. Life and death are not two separate things. We are not moving from life to death to perpetual life; instead we are living and at the same time dying. At every moment we are all life and all death. Our life is not a movement towards death but a continual process of living and dying. It is a paradoxical and dynamic oneness of life and death.

This living-dying is neither process nor continuity. If we realize that we are living and dying at every moment, then we will understand that this existence itself is death. It is not death as opposed to life, but death in an

absolute sense. It is called the Great Death. And at the very moment one dies the Great Death, Great Life manifests itself and one can live one's living-dying existence without becoming shackled by it.

Our living-dying existence is without beginning, end, or history. This existence has no single centre. Accordingly, every point in history is a centre. If one is alert and lives Great Life through Great Death at every moment, one is always in the centre.

Immortality of the soul or eternal life is not to be sought in any Heaven or Pure Land. The salvation to be acquired in this life is where the living/dying concept is completely abolished. Today does not bring us closer to eternity; because today, at this moment, eternity is completely manifesting itself. We are experiencing eternity now, in this one present moment, if we only have the inner unfoldment to be aware of this Truth.”7.

The moment you meditate, you have become the witness are no longer completely involved with the mind and the senses. Mantric meditation is a way of transcending the surface of the mind into the depths where the sacred mystery is found, beyond and behind world of the senses.

Awareness arises when the senses are no longer engaged in the outside world. In the secret place of the heart one can reconcile the opposites. The dualistic mind is reconciled. This goes far beyond the rational mind.

Humanity is one organism. Spirit is where we go beyond ego, the separate self and meet the Divine.

The paradox is that you are all that is and nothing that is. The Holy Spirit is closer to you and more intimate than your breath. It is All That Is, Thou

Art That. The fall of man is the problem of duality. Sin is the consciousness breaking away and separating from the Absolute Oneness. It is a forgetting of one's True Nature, Reality. It is the spirit we must surrender to, allow it to transform us. The ego cannot do it. The intellect cannot know it. Ego is required to surrender. Yet we must use the tool of intellect to take us into this very transformation.

BREATH

When my friend Turiya, living in The Himalayas, who has been meditating for over thirty years and I discuss the esoteric aspects of meditation, we invariably want to understand the invisible energies that are sustaining the practice. We always begin with Breath because that is the closest we come to the element one can tune into. When you close the eyes and still the thoughts, watching the breath naturally leads to a concentrated focus of the mind. In one of our many letters Turiya writes about further energies in the human nervous system:

“Kundalini is the name for the energy that sits at the base of the spine. By food, activity, sleep and indulging in the senses constantly, the Kundalini is kept sleeping. But in meditation there is no sense activity to keep it down. The Kundalini is like a force, a force of pure consciousness - existence, that actually wants to return to its home, the infinite sky. It is not bound by gravity. So it is waiting for a chance to rise. Meditation allows it to rise in a balanced, gradual way.

Praan is a material power that is unmanifest. It can be realized and perceived. It is not breath. It is the power by which the inhalation or exhalation is moved. The power of desire and the power of mind act side by side and are correlated. If your mind is weak your praan will be weak. Existing beings take form from the material world that is called Aakaash, the ethereal substance, but they take the power of movement from this Praan. Praanic energy supplies the power to remain alive and in existence. When the time of dissolution comes, the Praanic power is withdrawn and the whole setup is shattered. That becomes annihilation.”8.

Swami Shyam has this to say about Praan energy:

“When in meditation this Praan is withdrawn from the senses and the body to be gathered at one place, it takes flight and goes into the fourth dimension. The senses become functionless; the body becomes a no-body, and seems to be numb. Due to concentration, Praan rises beyond the senses but it maintains its existence to the extent that the body remains alive. The highest awareness depends upon this Praanic rising. The concentration of the power of the mind is this Praanic energy concentration. The Yogi who keeps the Praana’s under control gains control of the body, the senses, and the mind. This is called Praanayam.

Renunciation means that power of understanding and force with which you can renounce and give up the idea of the world as a separate body, as a separate soul, as separate from the Self.

One attains the knowledge on the basis of increasing and purifying and developing the nervous system as a whole. A Yog becomes a Yogi from the first day when the desire is expressed in his mind.”9.

In his book, Mastermind, Swami Shyam describes how: “There is a nerve in the body that is known as the central canal or central nerve. It passes through the spinal column and reaches the head; there it touches the brain. The knowledge appears in the brain through the opening of that nerve. When that nerve is opened, the wisdom or the Spirit reveals itself. That person who has been meditating directly experiences it. But he cannot communicate it to any unripe mind because the unripe mind cannot grasp it.”¹⁰.

There are five bodies that comprise the human being:

- 1. The material body, visible to the outer eye.*
- 2. Mind body – inner covering.*
- 3. Intellect body – knowledge wrapped inside mind body*
- 4. Ego body*
- 5. Blissful body – Divine Flame.¹¹*

These five covers of the body all have their own function and constantly interact with one another. Wherever you place your attention that is what you become. Thus, thoughts are everything. We place ourselves in various dimensions according to our thought, will, intelligence and desire. These are the aspects that determine our perception of Reality and inform our consciousness.

We can create the conditions for timelessness by stilling the thoughts of the mind. Eternity arises because it is actually always shining. Our thoughts and conditions are the obscuration to the ground of luminosity. When we purposefully direct our awareness to the knower of thoughts, rather than the actual thoughts, a clearing opens. It is like when the clouds in the sky dissipate, the vast blueness of empty space appears. The blue sky was

always there, it never disappeared. Only our mind was distracted and unable to perceive what is, what has always been and what will forever be.

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NOTES

- 1. Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit, By Robert E. Kennedy*
- 2. The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu, translated by Wither Bynner, pg.25*
- 3. Swami Shyam, Mastermind pg.79*
- 4. Turiya, Kullu Ashram, India, 2008*
- 5. Gary Zukav, The Dancing Wu Li Masters pg.16*
- 6. Swami Shyam, Research Findings in the Field of Consciousness*
- 7. Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit, Robert E. Kennedy*
- 8. Turiya, Letters From Kullu, India 2008*
- 9. Swami Shyam, Mastermind, pg.32*
- 10. Swami Shyam, Mastermind, pg.19*
- 11. Swami Shyam, Mastermind, pg.24*

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