

Rhythmic Meditations/FWS 03-04

The Spanda Inquiry Group: Spring Composite Syllabus

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Office Hours: Monday 3-5 and by appointment

The mind should be checked until it meets with destruction in the heart. This is gnosis (jnana); this is meditation (dhyana). All else is argumentation, verbiage, diffuse speculation. –Swami Madhavananda and Georg Feuerstein, translators, *Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad*

During my doctoral study in the History of Consciousness Program at UC-Santa Cruz, I watched and listened, hidden behind the library stacks, as Norman O. Brown stood, trance-like among the books. One day, either before or after he told me I should not be using my travel grant to go to Australia, but rather to somewhere I could learn a language-- like Sanskrit, I asked him about the unusual behavior of his I'd observed. Our eyes locked in a gaze that shifted from suspicion to resonance. He then replied, "The books talk to me. I go to the library to listen. They tell me what to read." I share this story because this syllabus has the spirit and form of *Love's Body*, Brown's famous appeal for the return of the body to western social and psychological thought. *Love's Body* is composed of quotations, not unlike what follows.

According to the...*Spanda Karikas*, one of the key texts of Kashmir Shaivism, the spanda is the original impulse of energy that creates all life and all worlds and that keeps them going. When we sense the pulsation inside us, we are sensing our own personal spark of that huge, primordial life force. It is the energy behind the breath, the heartbeat, and the movement of our thoughts and feelings. It is also the source of all our experiences in meditation. When we get deep into meditation, we realize that this throb, this subtle pulsation, is actually meditating us. (Sally Kempton/Swami Durgananda, *The Heart of Meditation*)

What is remarkable throughout the Asian world is that terms designating supremely affectionate qualities carry ultimate cosmo-logical significance. So in the Chinese world, jen, a term translated as love, benevolence, or affection, is not only an emotional-moral term, it is also a cosmic force. This can be said also of the virtue of ch'eng, translated as sincerity or integrity. In India the term bhakti, devotional love, was a cosmological as well as a spiritual force. In Buddhist tradition the term karuna, compassion, is a supreme cosmic power. Thus we find a pervasive intimacy and compassionate quality in the very structure of the universe and of the earth itself.

A sense of the earth and its meaning is particularly urgent just now, for the different sciences have developed an immense volume of information about the natural world in its physical aspects, and a corresponding power to control it. Yet the earth is still seen as so much quantified matter. Life and consciousness as integral and pervasive dimensions of the earth have until recently found little appreciation.... (Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*)

There is something bigger than fact: the underlying spirit, all it stands for, the mood, the vastness, the Western breath of go-to-the-devil-if-you-don't-

like it, the eternal big spaceness of it. Oh the West! I'm of it and I love it.
(Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands*)

She had been to San Francisco and found it cramped, to London and found it stifling. She had ridden the Canadian Pacific Railway across the Rockies, breathless at their jagged power, and had galloped bareback across a ranch in the Western Cariboo, swinging her hat and whooping to the broad sky. She'd gone home to the starched and doiled parlor of the yellow, two-story bird cage of a house in Victoria, British Columbia, where she'd been born, and found only hypocrisy and criticism there.

But this, oh this, the west coast of Vancouver Island, wave-lashed and smelling of salt spray and seaweed, the teeming, looming forest alive with raven talk and other secrets, the cedar bighouses scoured by storms to a lovely silver sheen, the whole place juicy with life, was more wild, more free, more enticing than she remembered it when she'd come here eight years earlier. Or was it she, that was different? (Susan Vreeland, *The Forest Lover*)

He says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her. That the dead sing through her mouth and the cries of infants are clear to her. But for him this dialogue is over. He says he is not part of this world, that he was set on this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from woman and nature.

And so it is Goldilocks who goes to the home of the three bears, Little Red Riding Hood who converses with the wolf, Dorothy who befriends a lion, Snow White who talks to the birds, Cinderella with mice as her allies, the Mermaid who is half fish, Thumbelina courted by a mole. (And when we hear in the Navaho chant of the mountain that a grown man sits and smokes with bears and follows directions given to him by squirrels, we are surprised. We had thought only little girls spoke with animals.)

We are the bird's eggs. Bird's eggs, flowers, butterflies, rabbits, cows, sheep; we are caterpillars; we are leaves of ivy and sprigs of wallflower. We are women. We rise from the wave. We're gazelle and doe, elephant and whale, lilies and roses and peach, we are air, we are flame, we are oyster and pearl, we are girls. We are woman and nature. And he says he cannot hear us speak.

But we hear. (Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature*)

Enter the center of spontaneous sound which resonates on its own like the uninterrupted sound of a waterfall. Or, sticking your fingers in your ears, hear the sound of sounds and reach Brahman, the immensity.

The inner channel is the Goddess, like a lotus stem, red inside, blue outside. It runs across your body.

O gazelle-eyed one, let ether pervade your body, merge in the indescribable spatiality of your own mind.

Feel your substance: bone, flesh and blood, saturated with cosmic essence, and know supreme bliss.

O Goddess! O God, I have now grasped the heart of the teachings and the quintessence of tantra. This life will have to be left behind, but why renounce

the heart of the Shakti? As space is recognized when lit by sun rays, so is Shiva told through the energy of Shakti which is the essence of the Self. (Daniel Odier, translator, Jeanric Meller, translator from Odier's French, *Vijnanabhairava*)

In the modern period, we have grown accustomed to the notion that sound and light are vibratory phenomena, and that indeed all of physical reality is composed of the solidification of vibrational energies. Long before the discoveries of modern physics, the Shaivite concept of spanda intimates a view of reality as composed of a vibratory web of infinite complexity. (Paul Muller-Ortega, Foreword to Jaideva Singh's translation of the *Spanda Karika, The Yoga of Vibration and Divine Pulsation*)

Throughout the year I will source my own teaching and learning for you through the words of these quotations, the lives and inspirations of their authors, and the complex web of meaning and inquiry they represent. That is, my approach to teaching is to model learning.

Winter Quarter

The entire world is the play of the universal Consciousness. One who sees it in this way becomes liberated while in the body. *Spanda Karikas*

The unique quality of the Shaiva system is its radical nondualism. Rejecting the Vedantic view that the material world is illusory, an empty dream, the sages of Kashmir Shaivism saw all forms of the universe as manifestations of divine creative energy, of Shakti, the dynamic female principle. They worshiped Shakti in themselves, in the earth, and in every substantial and insubstantial thing, and they looked for the pulsing heart of divine bliss within all domains of experience. Sally Kempton, *The Heart of Meditation* (90)

"The whole purpose of yoga," Gurumayi Chidvilasananda writes, "is to erase the small 'I' and expand one's awareness until it is capable of attaining *purno'ham*, the pure 'I,' the perfect "I." This purified sense of self is...perfect oneness with all things, and its nature, its *svarupa*, is *prema*, pure love."

The sages of Vedanta tell us that the Self has three basic qualities. It is *sat*, or ever existent and permanently real. It is *chit*, or aware of itself and everything else. And it is *ananda*, or joyful. (ibid. 33)

Like oil in sesame seeds, like ghee in butter,
the Self lies within the mind.
The Self is that which makes the mind think,
but cannot be thought by the mind.
That which shines through all the senses,
yet is without senses. (ibid. 31)

'Who is it who knows when the mind is filled with anger or with love? Who is it that is awake when we are sleeping? Who knows that we slept and reports to us our dream? We have to meditate on that One who is the witness of everything.' Swami Muktananda (ibid. 34)

This is one of the most important secrets about meditation. In fact, it is a fundamental law of Consciousness. If you just sit quietly with the intention to

turn your mind within, and if you keep pulling your attention away from thoughts and focusing it on your chosen practice, the mind will eventually resolve into pure energy. (ibid. 108)

Our winter quarter *Rhythmic Meditations* program theme--Resonance: Scale and Frequency—invites us into a deeper exploration of spanda. If reality is the vibration of consciousness, as the Spanda School of ninth century India proposes, then resonance finds its ultimate expression in the relationship between big “I” and little “I.” As suggested by the quotes above, resonance is a reflection of our capacity to experience the relationship between self and Self. The work we’ve planned for winter quarter will serve well as a testing ground for exploring the ways in which this relationship can be understood in terms of scale and frequency.

Spring Quarter

What follow are excerpts from the eulogies for Norman O. Brown.

Nobby did his thinking in public, in his later years waving a 3-by-5 card and talking from the brief note on it, which might have been two words in Arabic: “bahut” and “lasut” or “zahier” and “batin,” or a phrase in Goethe’s German: “eine Sprache die fur sich dictete und denket/ a speech that through itself makes poetry and things.”

When that speech began to leave him, he knew it had not failed—only that he was no longer to be its servant. (Rev. Dr. Tom Marshall)

It was about revolution for Nobby. Transformation, metamorphosis, ending, apocalypse. In the demonstrations after the bombing in Cambodia, he was there, intoning with glee, “western civilization is over.” It was one of his deepest hopes.

He had instructions to protest marchers... But peace and love was not his slogan. He often told a story about how Chapter Ten of Love’s Body came to be written. He had gone to an anti-nuclear rally, listened to the speeches, and had seen that this was not his way. He went home and wrote the chapter FIRE.

“To bring this world to an end, in a final conflagration, or explosion, bursting the boundaries.

The final conflagration, or apocalypse. The unity of life and death as fire.

A fiery consummation. Not suspense, but end-pleasure, not partial sacrifice (castration) but total holocaust.

Not peace but a sword. Peace lies in finding the true war. The reconciliation of opposites, the making of friendship, takes place on the battlefield.

The think then, is not to abolish war, but to find the true war. Open the hidden Heart in Wars of Mutual Benevolence, Wars of Love.”

His turn to Islam was the search for the true war. There will be no more secular revolutions. (Chris Connery)

I have a friend who works on presence, more particularly the difference between presence and meaning. He points out that we moderns have tended to over value meaning at the expense of presence. We are not content to be, we must also mean.

But a poem does not mean. It is. It is presence.

I think that this can be said of Norman O. Brown. Nobby was pure presence. And remains so.

Jerry Neu remarked the other day on Nobby's power, even after he had lost his memory and most of his ability to speak, to give the gift of presencing as when, for an instant, the last time we saw him, he fixed you in a glance of fierce joy and smiled and touched you and said, as he said to us, a number of times that day: "again, again, again."

I like being in Nobby's presence. It always seemed an honor and a privilege. You knew that he was working—working at being there—and I for one, when I had the honor of being with him—always felt that I was intruding upon a very sacred labor—the all but impossible labor of being there. (Hayden White)

"And be not conformed to this world [be nonconformists]' but be ye transformed [metamorphose yourselves] by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). While Nobby was always on the edge with his thought, his wife Beth (who is here with us today) kept him stable in his daily life, and we, as much as Nobby and for Nobby, owe her an immense debt of gratitude. Because Nobby was always developing, I fear that whatever I might say about the content of his thought would be partial and incomplete, and so we would have to conclude, as Nobby himself once did, speaking of each of the stages of his own development, "but that's not it."

As one of Nobby's poets, Wm Blake, said: "Energy is the only life and is from the body...Energy is eternal delight."

He was not conventionally "nice." Nobby was unsettling. Sometimes he pronounced, but most often (in one-on-one encounters) he questioned and he probed, making many feel less comfortable and less secure, but all the same generously bringing and getting the best out of those he engaged. He also learned from others. He sought to understand the world from radically different philosophical, political, and religious perspectives. He didn't simply read, absorb, and critique—as professors do—those he referred to as 'my authorities, my authors,' that is the 'great company' that appeared in his many quotations. [Love's Body Acknowledgements] He *inhabited* (truly inhabited) different systems of thought from Marxism to Freudianism, from Maoism to Islam. He constantly changed, constantly developed, and constantly renewed his mind. I remember the occasion when he announced to his old friend Herbert Marcuse that this year he was a Jew. (Marcuse responded with, "I won't come to the bar mitzvah, but I will come to the bris.") In Nobby's last years of thinking, like his friend John Cage, he was gripped by chance. But it was not by chance that his attachments to individuals and his commitment to love and to unity (the notion that "we are all members of one body") never faltered. (Jerry Neu)

Our friendship was intensely intellectual. He liked Augustine's phrase, "Amor intellectualis," and that is what we had. (Carl Schorske)

The unexpected, unaccountable fall into darkness. The unanticipated explosion of light.

It seemed that Nobby was a man of just such contrasts and contradictions: a personality remote and intensely present, a mystic and a scholar, an intellectual renegade who respected structures (if not figures) of authority. ... [From] his Phi Beta Kappa Address of May 1960: "APOCALYPSE: The Place of Mystery in the Life of the Mind."

"And so there comes a time—I believe we are in such a time—when civilization has to be renewed by the discovery of new mysteries, by the undemocratic but sovereign power of the imagination, by the undemocratic power which makes poets the unacknowledged legislators of mankind, the power which makes all things new.

He feared—above all—the hardening of thought, the paralysis of dogma, the fetishization of the book.

[H]e welcomed and quoted ... Emerson's Phi Beta Kappa Address in "The American Scholar:" "The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, is transferred to the record. Instantly the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, having once received this book stands upon it and makes an outcry if it is destroyed. Colleges are built upon it. Meek young men grow up in libraries. Here, instead of Man Thinking we have the bookworm. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and make a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world of value is the active soul. (Helene Moglen).

Our program's spring quarter theme of "Reciprocity: Recognition and Engagement" invites a conversation between self and other, between the individual and community, between the imaginative and the democratic. Because I'm deeply suspicious of what is contained in the contemporary meaning and utility of these words, I've selected quotations (above) about a scholar who made suspicion into a mode of scholarship and scholarship into an expression of beauty. Like the teaching of the Kashmir Shaivist texts we've explored, the central concern of Brown's work was the soul, not the symbolic economies of its literal or human solidification. Our fall was into words. Resurrection is our spring quarter work. As outlined below, one of your assignments is to borrow Nobby's method and set language ablaze. In the words of Hazrat Khan, your task is to express harmony through sourcing your work to the soul.

Description

The spanda inquiry group takes its name from a Sanskrit word that means vibration or pulsation. We'll see how Kashmir Shaivist texts of the tenth century describe reality and consciousness in relation to this subtle energetic field in terms remarkably similar to contemporary quantum physicists, medical researchers, and ecofeminists. We'll explore the techniques and practices for aligning the individual with this cosmic pulse that form the core of the Yoga tradition as well as other

spiritual traditions (including Christianity). In the language of applied research regarding stress reduction in fields such as music therapy, integrative medicine, and holistic education, it is the entrainment of the interconnected rhythms of breath, heart, and thought that will be the focus of our inquiry.

Much of our work will be experiential. Students must be present and engaged to receive credit for this inquiry group. During the spring quarter our seminar work will continue to explore *lectio divina* as a way to understand the historical context of western scholarship and to re-embodiment reading, thinking, speaking, and writing as rhythmic meditations. Students in this inquiry group will be encouraged to participate in yoga during weekly open space education sessions in order to study and practice key elements of classical yoga: yamas and niyamas (ethical precepts), asanas (postures), pranayama (breathwork), pratyahara (sense withdrawal), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), and samadhi (enlightened stillness). Students choosing not to practice yoga must propose to the faculty an alternate activity with appropriate justification before Friday of week two.

Students will be supported to develop individual research projects in relation to our group work. In the quarter that a student joins this inquiry group s/he will be required to answer the following questions.

- 1) a. What do you want to know? b. Who else has wanted to know this?
- 2) a. How do you want to learn this? b. How have others learned this?
- 3) a. How will you know when you've learned it and you're done? b. How have others known when they learned it and they were done?
- 4) a. How will you demonstrate to faculty and our learning community what you've learned? b. How have others demonstrated what they've learned?
- 5) a. So what? What difference does your learning make to you? b. What difference does your learning make to others?

Your answer to the second part of each question must include a bibliography of at least five sources, including one but not more than two program texts. The same texts may be used for more than one question.

The nature of the project and the passion of the student will determine how far each student pursues answers to her/his research project. For example, a project might be completed in a single quarter and consist primarily of articulating an individual research project. Or, a project might be completed spring quarter after nine months of sustained inquiry. If appropriate for your project and temperament, consider building into your research periods of field study, travel, and retreat. All projects, regardless of their duration, must be brought to completion by Tuesday of week nine of spring quarter. While it is up to each student to determine what completion means, some aspect of the completed work must be presented, performed, posted to the listserv, or in some way made available to the entire inquiry group by 4 pm, Tuesday, week nine.

Assignments

- 1) Complete and submit the Spanda Inquiry Group Study Plan. Due:
- 2) Complete and submit a one-page, in-program version of TESC's Individual Learning Contract (available online); Due:
- 3) Document through logs and journals your individual research progress and compile this work in your program portfolio;

- 4) Participate actively in Inquiry Group activities;
- 5) Reflect on your participation in this Inquiry Group and what you've learned from our spanda school--both through scholarship as well as your meditative practices--by putting 5-7 quotations from Inquiry Group texts and 3-5 quotes from all-program texts into conversation with each other. Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body* is the model for this work of the soul's education. Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature* is another model. Herman Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* is another model: find valuable quotations and string them together like precious beads. Due: First Draft: Tuesday, 10 AM, week 5; Final Draft: Tuesday, 10AM, week 9. Note: 800 word maximum.

Required Reading: *Woman and Nature* (Griffin); *The Tao of Natural Breathing* (Lewis); *Yoga, Mind, Body and Spirit* (Farhi); and selections from *Spandakarika*, *Vijnanabhairava*, and *Pratyabhijnahridayam*. Additional text for spring quarter include "Resurrection," from *Love's Body* (Brown); *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth* (Joscelyn Godwin); *Echoes of Silence* (Robert Rabbin).

Schedule

Tuesday: 1-2 COM 210: Meditative practices guided by students and discussion of response and text.
 2-3 COM 210: Meditative practices guided by faculty
 3-4 COM 320: Research cluster sessions and individual consultations

Participation in this inquiry group assumes the student's active compliance with *Rhythmic Meditations* syllabus and covenant.