

FOUR

THE POWER OF LOVE

Meditation 04: Passion

'Passion is energy. Feel the power that comes from focusing on what excites you.'

Oprah Winfrey

'Faith is the highest passion in a human being. Many in every generation may not come that far, but none comes further.'

Soren Kierkegaard

'What Reason weaves, by Passion is undone.'

Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man and Other Poems*

*'Feel your emotions,
Live true your passions,
Keep still your mind.'*

Geoffrey M. Gluckman

Everyone knows passion. It's the term of choice, much favoured by advertising and marketing people talking about car rentals, or coffee, or buses, or software, or anything at all; by creative artists explaining their difficult and often dangerous behaviour; and of course by the lover, songwriter, author or poet describing intense and turbulent romantic love. Etymologically, the word has as much root in the idea of suffering as it does joy – more, in fact. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary gives three main areas of meaning, of which the first is suffering or affliction, the second is 'being passive' and the third is 'an affection of the mind', including... 'Any vehement, commanding or overpowering emotion; in psychology or art, any mode in which the mind is affected or acted upon, as ambition, avarice, desire, hope, fear, love, hatred, joy, grief, anger, revenge.'... and finally 'An overmastering zeal or enthusiasm for some object.'

As far as people's common understanding of passion is concerned, there is no doubt that in general it is held to be an uplift, a driving force, and in the case of romantic love, a route to extreme pleasure, to bliss. But passion carries an inbuilt duality. It is both creative and destructive. It is upward and downward looking. It can be heaven – or it can be hell.

The intellectual challenge – as distinct from the experiential one – is that passion suggests the opposite of peace. It's more about turbulence, disturbance, emotions out of control, running away with you, leading to actions that you may regret. Things that we associate with the familiar, unruly, chit-chatter, flim-flammy mind. But the mind harbours and nurtures the desire for enlightenment, the energy of 'up' as well as downward-looking flim-flam. Hence passion, dispassion, compassion, passivity and patience (even being a patient) are all part of the same thing. It's a defining principle of being human, a human being; 'human' looks down to the more earthly chakras below the heart, 'being' looks upward to the transcendental ones above it. The heart feels both sorrow and joy, right?

Passion, notionally a force of imbalance, based in the mind, leads the Soul from uncontrolled emotion to a pure, powerful, blissful state of being. A balanced Ecology of the Soul has room for emotion. Your average saddhu, guru or other species of holy man (why are they mostly men?) will tell you that the activity of the mind is a trap, a diversion, an illusion to be conquered, and indeed, in our own meditations we aim to get behind, beyond, over or under the trivial mental chit-chat. But make no mistake, the mind and emotions, thoughts and feelings, are a massively powerful part of our consciousness and should be understood as our driving force on the upward path. Far better harness that power and turn it upwards than fight a losing battle.

Let's concentrate on one of the last sub-sections of the SOED's Definition Three: 'An overmastering zeal or enthusiasm for some object.' ('Object' meaning in this case a goal, aim or intention rather than yet another piece of consumer trivia.) Your passion to move or improve yourself, to explore

spiritual ways of making sense of yourself and the inner and outer worlds you inhabit, to read this book and books like it, to do yoga or sit in meditation and put new and uplifting thought patterns into practice, is all you need. In fact it's crucial, because it's a hard path and without passion you'll lose the impetus. If your passion is truly there, you will truly get what you're aiming at.

The more you sit in meditation, the more blissful and beneficial experience comes to you, the more your passion for it will drive you to do it. You'll become jittery, jumpy and a little grumpy if you haven't done it for a couple of days; your passion, your zeal for the goal – which may or may not yet have made itself absolutely clear to you – is driving you. It's uncomfortable, it won't leave you alone, often you don't want to do it: you'd rather stay in bed. It's passion that gets you up, stands over you while you put your spiritual running shoes on and gets you going. Never say that isn't a good thing.