

FOUR

THE POWER OF LOVE

Meditation 05: Spirit

“If you want to accomplish the goals of your life, you have to begin with the spirit.”

Oprah Winfrey

“In my definition of consciousness, consciousness is the same thing as life. What wisdom traditions also call spirit.”

Deepak Chopra

‘Spirit’ is a word or an idea full of resonance, and not just for the spiritual seeker. It is here in this chapter because it refers to the incorporeal, to a non-physical force which is separate and distinct from, but very much related to, the Soul. It is also very much related to the ‘spirit’ of other meditations in this chapter, specifically Passion and Energy, and it is best understood through consciousness of the breath.

‘Spirit’, as opposed to ‘Soul’, is both an ingredient of love and a way of expressing it. Unlike the Soul, it is not an individual and specific entity. It is a conscious force, a principle of life, but a subtle one, not to be confused with Pran or Ch’i, the physical energy of life that flows through your body and indeed all physical matter. It is not consciousness itself, but the mode or mood in which it operates.

We have to be careful with conscious forces or principles of life though, however subtle. The Ecology of the Soul does not admit of a divine omnipresence, either a God that is or is in everything, or a universal consciousness that encompasses all souls, all living beings and probably all the material universe as well. (As I say in the introduction, where does this omnipresence idea draw the line? Are we supposed to believe that God also exists in oil refineries or radioactive waste?) ‘Spirit’ is not a general, boundless miasma of consciousness. It is outside the individual Soul, separate and

distinct, but guiding, colouring, flavouring – defining the mode or mood of your mental and spiritual activity. Spirit is a bridge, in this chapter of dualities, between physical and spiritual love – physical love meaning the life energy, Pran or Ch'i, not the romantic or sexual kind. Like no other attribute, it reveals how physical and spiritual relate to and act on each other.

A bit of etymology, always a help. And very interesting in this particular context. In both Latin and Greek the word goes back to 'breath'. The Latin 'spiritus' means breath, but also courage or vigour. Hence 'inspire' and 'inspiration', the giving or absorbing of creative or uplifting energy. It is distinguished from 'anima', the Latin for mind (conscious or unconscious) or soul, but that word too can be traced back to an Indo-European root (where Sanskrit's influence on our modern English can be seen) meaning 'to breathe'. A similar duality – or perhaps we should call it confusion – exists in Greek where pneuma (πνευμα) means 'breath', 'spirit' or 'moving air', and psyche (ψυχη) means 'soul' – yet ψυχη is also from an Indo-European root meaning 'to breathe'.

No surprise, then, that we should pay such attention to our breath and breathing. And illuminating too for our understanding of 'spirit', because it leads us precisely to that bridge, to the physical door which opens into the spiritual domain. Breathing is physical, but also very far from it. Here we have the incomprehensible connection, the flow between the outer world and the inner, where energies intermingle and the spiritual seeker can switch from one to the other, like movie cowboys jumping between fast-moving horses – animals. Animal, get it? A being with a vital spark, a non-physical energy. As in 'anima', or even 'animus', the Latin version of psyche (ψυχη), which refers more directly to the mind and its states of being, of intent.

Truth is, both 'psyche' and 'anima' have traditionally been used as interchangeable with 'Soul', which confuses things, because Plato and Aristotle had their own theories. Aristotle's hugely influential treatise on the psyche, called in Greek *Περὶ Ψυχῆς* (Peri Psūchês), in Latin *De Anima* and in English *On the Soul*, proposes three souls or psyches – vegetal, animal, and

rational. The concepts formed the basis of psychology until the 19th century, but they aren't much help in distinguishing the difference, and the beautiful (or dangerous) interaction between physical and spiritual. For that we have to go to meditation, to the experience of and through another part of our consciousness than the rational or intellectual.

Spirit is essence, 'Atman', a word which derives from the Sanskrit 'et-men', which means – guess what – 'breath' (compare with the more recent Hindi, 'atma', meaning 'soul'). Spirit is courage, the spark of vitality, an attitude, a way of looking at life, the core truth of an idea or a person. We say 'In the spirit of brotherly love', 'In the spirit of Abraham Lincoln', meaning following their essential nature. The way it connects the spiritual and physical worlds makes 'spirit' an essential ingredient of Love, which as we know is another word for conscious energy. 100% proof distilled Love, if you will.

The heart is the seat of love, the centre of our emotional being which also carries courage, intent and conscience. We speak of 'not having the heart' to do something, of 'finding it in your heart' to do something else. Spirit is 'outer' heart, still non physical but not specific to an individual consciousness. A force you can tap into and use. In silence, focus on and listen to your breathing; and feel the Spirit.