

Fifteen Meditations on Masculinist Physico-Spiritual Experience

by Tucker Lieberman, '02

I am not my body, I am not my mind, I am not my soul. I am the breath of life, I am the breath of God.

A golden retriever was once abused by a man and rescued by a woman who had a daughter in an all-girls Catholic high school. I paid them a visit one day. The dog stood behind the clear plastic door, wagging her tail, but as I ascended the steps she suddenly soured, and by the time the door opened and I was inside, she was cowering under the dining room table where she stayed for the duration of my visit with intermittent miserable howls. "She won't have anything to do with men," my friend explained. Even the scent of testosterone has its spiritual message.

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

The founder of modern philosophy had a number of disciples who applied the master's theoretical teachings in the practical field of dog-torturing. They felt these experiments demonstrated the superiority of man as a spiritual creature.

Rene Descartes wanted to rewrite the philosophical canon by asserting only what he knew to be true or could logically derive. Sequestered in a stove-heated room, he realized he could doubt that his body, or even the whole world, existed, but he could not doubt what he was *thinking*. I think, therefore I am. Descartes is a spiritual, immaterial, thinking thing; the rest is mere body, a separate substance.

Continuing in this vein, he determined that human beings are the only animals who have souls. Therefore humans are the only animals who can think, feel, experience, or matter to God.

I am going to drive nails through this dog's paws. I am going to vivisection its chest and show you its beating heart-such awesome machinery, praise the Architect on high! Its howls, this deafening din of a universe shattering-a purely mechanistic response! I am taking over this operation. If you cringe, you may leave, and don't come back. The serious student of philosophy thinks with his mind, not his body; his soul, not his flesh.

Air my breath and fire my spirit, earth my body, water my blood.

Tertullian, who lived in the Roman city of Carthage in the third century, was a sensual man who loved spectacles. After seeing how bravely Christian prisoners endured public torture, humiliation, and death, he became intrigued with the persecuted religion and eventually converted. He argued that the body had to be resurrected in the afterlife because without our physical senses we would have no way of experiencing heaven.

The militant Hamas movement promises that martyrs for Islam will enjoy unlimited sex in heaven. In June 2001, USA Today quoted a 16-year-old Palestinian boy involved with Hamas as saying "most boys can't stop thinking about the virgins."

My body will decay, but wisdom is eternal.

Incarnation is what makes art, especially architecture. A three-dimensional experience incarnates you inside the art, which is itself an incarnation of an idea. Stepping into a landscaped environment is like stepping into a thought, a word made flesh. This is one thing a computer cannot do: it can manage your stock portfolio but it cannot be your bedpost window. Perhaps someday virtual reality will blur the boundaries of flesh. For now, it remains as an illustration of the distinction between intelligence and body.

Most of the time we incarnate nothing-in-particular. Waste of a good starlit carbon chunk. Walking around making nuisances of ourselves or maybe just blank pages. If you're going to have a body, stand on a body, want a body, extended space worshiped consistently, can you make it mean something? What's your art?

Knowledge is his heart, the word is his lips. His soul is air, his heart is fire, he is Horus of the double horizon who is in the sky.

In the early summer of 2000 I drove alone to central Vermont to participate in the Rainbow Gathering. Five hundred hippies, neo- and well-preserved, came to lie under the trees, eat communally, and shit directly into the earth. On the first day, still driven by the momentum I'd brought with me from the city, I decided to slice a wheel off a firewood log and see if it would spin in the stream; I had grand visions of hooking it up to a generator so I could read Lovecraft mythos at night and heat tofu dogs by hydro power. The exercise ended abruptly when I smashed my thumb with the handle of the handsaw. It throbbed the entire week.

A boy my age took an interest in my ailment and explained to me that the throbbing sensation was healing *chi* energy. I suddenly recalled something I had read several years previously by Alan Watts who said that pain is merely a tension that we judge negatively. When I labeled the tension in my thumbnail as "chi", and did not judge it as "wanted" or "unwanted" but simply observed its activity, it no longer kept me awake at night in my tent.

You are the strength that flows through my right hand; I'll never forget thee, Jerusalem.

Albert Einstein said that the fixed speed of light in a vacuum was the best assurance that "God does not play dice." Not

everything is variable. Some things are just 186,000 miles per second.

While I was at the Rainbow Gathering, physicist Lijun Wang was breaking the ceiling by a factor of 300. The pulse went so fast that it actually traveled backwards in time. His beam of light was brought back to a time before it ever was. Other scientists are "unsure."

The evening and the morning were the first day; let there be light; darkness was upon the face of the deep.

Perception is reality, but sometimes nature is just an enemy. Hurricanes and floods. Nicotine addiction. The cramp in the center of your chest that teethes on your innocent green heart energy. The sheer weight of it all, a surefire indicator that this world is a basket for fallen angels. The wetness of the water revealing its degradation, God's excuse for not visiting more often. The myriad regrettable desires of the flesh. Our souls' incontinent wishes to forget who they truly are. The body's threats to do something crazy to permanently stain the pure flame of the mind. The heavy stone of shame.

The body, the body, the body. Pierce the nucleus of any male seed, and what do you find? Augustine says: the sins of the father passed down from generation to generation. Our sins are bound to catch up with us. Smell, the most neurologically ancient of our senses, is disappearing. Many people smell little or nothing. If you want to smell the difference between the sexes, you will have to ask a dog. Then what can we experience of our own bodies? Are we invisible to ourselves, forgotten? After emission, open up one of the seeds- But oh, don't look too deeply-

mysterium tremendum et fascinans

Isaac called Jacob and blessed him
"God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you"
Isaac sent Jacob away and he went to Paddan-aram
taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep
he dreamed there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven
Jacob awoke from his sleep: "surely God is in this place and I did not know it"
"how awesome is this place! this is none other than the house of God"
Jacob took the stone from under his head
and set it up for a pillar
and poured oil on the top of it
Jacob made a vow: "if God will be with me-"
"this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house"
from Genesis 28

frightfully fascinating mystery

The young man had magnificent trips. He learned to maneuver through the colors and the sweet songs-then, all at once, he broke through the knowledge barrier and everything was different. For a few minutes he knew, he understood, and there were no existential questions. There was only love and an urgent ecstasy. He was never able to remember what thrilled him in those trips. It was something critically important, something that could save the world, something lost, again. One day he swept all the extraneous matter off his desk, went out and bought a single clean piece of paper and a capless smooth-running pen, and laid them in the middle. He sat down, turned on the tiny desklight, and waited. Slowly the familiar dreams crept in again. When the purifying fever seized him, he forced himself to touch the ground so he could write and remember. Pushing through the swirling forces, weeping with the effort, his fingers tightened around the pen, and the voices steadily grew until he collapsed into sleep. When he awoke the only thing that mattered was that piece of paper. His fingers tripped over each other as he tried to unfold it. The uneven letters spelled: "A smell of petroleum pervades throughout."

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to my palate.

In high school I read Alan Watts' *Nature, Man, and Woman*. Watts popularized Zen, Tantra, and Eastern thought in America during the time of the beat poets. He was a drug enthusiast. He died at age 58.

One small statement from that book has remained with me: that Americans are unfairly called "materialists." If only we were materialists, and loved matter! But we cannot be praised in such a way. Our buildings are ugly, cramped, and dark, and our cities are crowded. Our ecosystems are slashed and burned. Our landfills stink to high heaven. As soon as the car hiccups or the music player skips, we junk it rather than repair it. We care more about the fashion label and its market price than the beauty of the actual product. We binge on sugar and fat and somehow forget to exercise. We dominate and we waste.

Is this the deep, erotic desire for a meaningful connection with our material nature? Is this awe? Is this reverence? Or is it only the stunted appreciation of a man who vivisects a dog, peers inside, grunts, and throws away the still-screaming corpse?

Purify your hearts and cease to kill. That is true religion.

When I had my chakras read with a Kirlian camera, the green energy coming out of my chest was quadruple the size of all other emanations. The heart center is interpersonal, compassionate energy, halfway between the primal drives at the base of the torso and the ecstatic mysticism at the crown. I attribute the magnitude of heart energy in large part to my vegetarianism, and also to the normal character developments of post-adolescence. But there are blockages there, too. It's the place where I bury my grief instead of feeling it. It's the place that gets knotted up whenever I receive a compliment or assurance, which I discovered in an exercise with my yoga teacher. It's the place of constriction when I

feel detached from my body and often simply forget to breathe.

Perhaps it is such inner conflict that, rather than netting zero, yields the colorful intensity. Is this how spirituality works? The logical mind short-circuits and the spiritual body gets a jump-start? If so, why are we always trying to avoid contradictions in our God-talk? We should seek them out.

Rene Descartes thought the immaterial soul might be located in the pea-sized pineal gland in the center of the brain. If he had ever seen a full-body photograph of his aura, his story would have been quite different. The exact size and location of the structure was not, however, what philosophers and scientists criticized. Their question was how a nonphysical soul could be associated with or influence the physical body at all. Mind-body interaction remains an unbridged gap in Cartesian theory. If paradox and uncertainty intensifies chakra activity, the pineal glands of Cartesian dualists must be vibrating hard enough to cause measurable geological tremors inside their skulls.

The body lights up from one end of the spectrum to the other. God, are you watching? You just hit the jackpot on my theistic wrestling arena, on my patient yogic seminary, on my fitful agnostic body.

All acts of love and pleasure are my rituals.

When I was in kindergarten I had a book called *The Human Body*, filled with colorful diagrams that compared, for example, the eye with a camera. It wasn't for scientific purists, but at my age I didn't care about the line between truth and fiction, and anyway I could only read the captions.

From this book, I learned that babies were formed by the combination of sperm and egg. What got my attention was that these cells are *microscopic*. As a backyard bug enthusiast from the very beginning, with parents who were concerned about the sorts of germs I might be picking up under bug bellies, I knew what "microscopic" meant. Matter was divisible beyond the limits of my vision. Much of it was airborne. It seemed, then, that a man's *microscopic* reproductive cells could, like Casper the Friendly Ghost, break skin and clothing barriers like yesterday's rules and fly directly into a woman's navel. Catching a unicellular embryo was rather like catching a cold. (A solution Augustine would have liked, even cleaner than his own proposal of lustless procreative intercourse.) I asked my mother, then, if it wasn't possible that children could make babies, or how were such accidents prevented? She assured me that only married women got pregnant. I wasn't sure how a marriage ceremony was supposed to control biohazardous outbreaks of flying sperm, but when you need an answer, any one will do.

And what was it that I delighted in, but to love, and be loved? But, the muddy concupiscence of the flesh ♦ My life being such, was it life, O my God?

The presentation of a perfect façade is an important feature of gay culture's unspoken moral code. Gay men often feel that they have to represent their entire community. As cultural ambassadors, it's all about the presentation. Hecklers, whoever they may be, can seize on any shortcoming as evidence of a peculiarly homosexual mental debility, and therefore, gay men worry that revelations of their shortcomings would be a disservice to the gay community and a setback to the liberation movement.

This invulnerable superhero role generates its own sense of inadequacy and set of concerns. Do I have to love those who persecute me? Can I admit that I was ever abused, depressed, drug-addicted, sex-addicted, lonely, scared? Do I have to say I was "born gay" because that's the party line, even if that's an unacceptable reduction of my life story? Do I have to be cheerful even when I feel cranky? Must I intellectually respect people who think the greatest cultural contribution to the history of humanity was the book of Leviticus? Do I have to prove I can catch a ball? Should I dress up in multicolored fabric and parade the streets of Boston? If I don't have a lover, should I get one immediately? If I'm ugly, should I shoot myself? Will people sympathize if I expose the disintegration of my life, or would they rather see me in a power suit? Will God like me if I organize a community or does He prefer that I suffer in silence? What if I never learned how to dance? When they come to take away my children, how can I fight back with dignity? Is it okay to attempt to love someone less than a year after you've lost everyone? Will my boyfriend think I'm less of a man if I wear a condom? Is it okay to cry?

How lovely are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel! My soul seeks and longs for your presence.

Animus (Latin, masculine) mind, spirit

Anima (Latin, feminine) mind, spirit

Animal (English) living creature that thinks and feels

cf. *Rene Descartes*

cf. *my great-aunt whose first question about my transition from female to male was "Does the dog still recognize you?"*

Animoosh (Ojibwe) dog

Enema (Greek) insertion

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Nefesh (Hebrew) breath, soul

Jism (Arabic) in Islamic metaphysics, the resurrected body; in American slang, semen

there is neither male nor female in heaven but most boys can't stop

Neurologist Oliver Sacks wrote about his childhood interest in his uncle's industrial metals: "There was something about heaviness, density-I could not say why-which gave me a thrill, and an immense sense of security and comfort." Cinnabar, samarskite, platinum, osmiridium: so many different essences, all blending into the unknown, weightless

sense of self. The gravity of the word "nitrous oxide" is forgotten upon inhaling it.

The Pyramids at Gizeh have pointed towards the constellation Orion for four thousand years. The Egyptians preserved the corpse's vital organs, especially the heart, considered the seat of intellect and emotion, while the brain was discarded as mucus. During the soul's journey to the underworld, the heart would be weighed against a feather to determine if its conscience were clear.

A western doctor once tried to calculate the weight of the soul by placing his dying patients on a scale and recording the exact moment of death. The results were inconclusive but suggested that the soul weighed about as much as a person's last escaping breath.

I am the breath of life
I am the breath of God