

Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
the Only Being, United with All the Illuminated Souls
Who Form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.

Gatha with Commentary

Series I: Number 6

The Rhythm of Breath

GATHA: Rhythm is the principal thing to be considered in breath, as it is on the rhythm of the breath that the working of the whole mechanism depends, and the chief reason of irregularity of the beats of the heart or head is lack of rhythm in the breath.

TASAWWUF: A great deal of attention has been paid to numbers and their value. In the Western world, while music has developed in the direction of melodic and harmonic complexity, little attention has been paid to the rhythms. Many people value two, three, four, six, eight, as well as other numbers. In other cultures there has been a more complex use of these and other simple numbers developing effective emotional art. Many people feel this and respond to it. It has also resulted in some obstacles as to mutual understanding because there is not always a common basis for the application of rhythms, counter-rhythms and synthesized rhythms in music, art and life.

GATHA: As man generally neglects to think of his breath he overlooks the fact that his health entirely depends upon rhythmic breath. Rhythm is the central theme of the whole creation.

TASAWWUF: Perhaps it can be said that all the occult sciences and arts depend upon this. In various religious ceremonies found in all parts of the world at some time or other the simple numbers have been emphasized. We see this in the hours of the day, in the days of the week, and in other patterns. Both the ancient Romans and Greeks on the one hand, and the Indian peoples on the other, both knew it and applied it. It has been called "ancient wisdom" but the phrase "ancient wisdom" has no value without content. And one of the great obstacles to Western people studying Indian music is that they are faced with a world quite unknown to them.

The stories of Creation (myths) all indicate numbers and symbols which presuppose rhythm. The statement is made "By the Word of God were all things in heaven and earth made." This also presumes the rhythms of God. The Indian people especially have a complex cosmology based on it, and the terms pralaya and manvantara all are associated with rhythmical breath as if of God Himself. It suggests that if God did not breathe rhythmically there would be chaos. And by analogy also if man, created in God's image did not breathe rhythmically there would be chaos within him.

The central theme of rhythmical breath, very simple and elementary, because of its very nature has not always impressed complex people. People who love complexities fail to study the laws of nature, the rhythms of nature and the rhythms of life.

GATHA: Therefore the infant moves his hands and legs by turns, forming a rhythm. This shows that nobody teaches anybody rhythm, it is natural to all beings.

TASAWWUF: God's breath is associated with Divine rhythm. This subject is discussed in *The Mysticism of Sound*. There has been no culture which has not accepted the existence of rhythm and some form of laws of numbers. Astrology, numerology, etc. are based on the existence of these rhythms

and the numbers involved. We also see this reflected in children's games to which there has not always been serious thought paid. This was also the beginning of all dance patterns throughout the world. These arise out of our very instincts.

GATHA: It is rhythmical movement which enables the fish to swim and the serpent to climb trees. If rhythm were not an instinct the animal would never have known how to walk nor the bird how to fly.

TASAWWUF: There is a popular song, "When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano." This is a demonstration of a natural rhythm in one form. The tides, the seasons, the various mating periods of different animals, etc. all demonstrate the existence of rhythms. Indeed, some of these matters are discussed in the Gathas on "Superstitions, Customs and Beliefs," and their commentaries. And, of course, in *The Mysticism of Sound*, etc.

GATHA: The life of man is so pulled from all sides, so divided, that he often neglects things that are most essential to his life, which the lower creatures seem to keep more correctly in their lives.

TASAWWUF: Besides the emphasis on breath being life, we can see that to bring the breath and the life into the body, heart and soul, it is necessary to establish and maintain rhythm. If one turned from the consideration of human bodies to various mechanisms, e.g. the bicycle or any pedaled instrument, one will readily realize the importance of rhythm. If this were not so one could never see demonstrated at the same time increased complexity in factories, and increased beauty in their construction.

We can see in the art and science of architecture which was highly developed since ancient times, that nearly all construction depended upon rhythm. Such simple mechanisms as the pulley and the lever depend on it. The laws of harmony demonstrate it. And if this is so for the world without, one may ask how about the world within? And an immediate example may be found in the treadmill where rhythm, both of the operator (which may be an animal) and the instrument itself are necessary.

Now we turn to the human body. Physiologists know that certain rhythms are necessary for health. The question arises whether such rhythms or other types of rhythms may not apply to the mind as well as to the body. Order is necessary for organization, and order is impossible without rhythm and balance.

GATHA: Neatness in man's work and balance in man's actions show rhythm in him. When man shows lack of balance in his life and when his life is disturbed and all things seem to go wrong, it is most often that the rhythm of his breath has become wrong. Irregularity of activity and repose in the habits of life causes disorder of rhythm in the breath.

TASAWWUF: Many of the ancient and perhaps all of the original arts arose out of man's observations of nature. In one sense the birds taught him both music and architecture, and many animals taught him dance patterns.

Indeed, if man were to watch the construction of bird's nests he would find already examples of neatness. In the construction of the spider's web and other engineering achievements of the so-called

lower forms of life we find all the principles demonstrated. In fact God's Sifat are found everywhere underlying all aspects of His creation.

If we accept astrology or the sciences of the Tattvas of the Hindus we find a Universe based on rhythmical activity. The very law of cause-and-effect leaves no alternative between rhythmical activities and chaos. It is not surprising that in the life of man most virulent diseases arise out of the abandonment of rhythm. Therefore Sufis interpose the counter-movement of the restoration of rhythmical patterns first, and then develop them afterwards to increase the potentialities of magnetism for body, mind and heart.

All esotericism is based on rhythm or Cyclic Law. The whole Universe seems to be based on it, both the universe without and the cosmos within. Sufis teach both how to develop the breath and how to respond to it to learn more of themselves and the worlds within and without.

GATHA: Very often the Eastern mystical exercises are wrongly understood by many. When a teacher gives a breathing exercise to his pupil often he does not mean the breathing itself but rhythm.

TASAWWUF: Sufism was first introduced by Hazrat Inayat Khan in connection with music. It is now being developed in the West by means of dancing. Both of these are based on applied rhythmic. The rhythms are used as a means to elevate the state of consciousness of the devotees, along with the use of proper sacred phrases mostly in outward expression, but sometimes in and with Fikr (Thought).

The more advanced rhythms are not necessarily more complex. The power may come by increased momentum due to assiduity in performance. It is also true as in Newton's Laws of motion that effects are felt and experienced, but also in and from the Unseen as well as the seen. All esoteric practices are based in some way on rhythms. It is not surprising however that rhythms as long as twenty-eight years and forty years may be effective, and others as short as a few refined breaths.

GATHA: Thought given to the breath becomes a weight upon it and naturally holds it longer in its movement, altering it from what it would otherwise naturally be. It is the following of the rhythm of breath, and the keeping of the rhythm regular which brings about the best results.

TASAWWUF: It can easily be demonstrated that thought affects breath and breath affects thought. As Buddha taught it, pure meditation consists of breathing without carrying any thought excepting attention to the breath itself. The Zen method of trying not to think often fails because the very principle of trying not to think is itself a thought, itself involves neural and mental activities, and so impedes the pure state of Mind which is desired.

Sufis teach that all the esoteric schools make use of both breath and rhythm. This is often found in Scriptures. The abandonment of the study of some Scriptures has led to the abandonment of much knowledge. Calling it "Ancient Wisdom" is of no help. Wisdom is not ancient, it is Eternal. We must bear in mind that all literature and commentaries thereon are essentially intellectual. By themselves alone they correct nothing. What corrects is the application of esotericism in all its facets. Therefore we must pay more attention to practices which will free us and also help the external universe. Indeed from the Bodhisattvic point of view, by every esoteric practice and meditation the devotee assists not only himself, but the whole world.

Goodness as such is usually vanity. It always produces karma. Good karma may bring about more enjoyment and less illness, but it still leaves man attached to the Wheel of Life, subject to cause-and-effect. The breath is from Heaven. The breath is the hi-way to God. It is also the hi-way of God to man and through man. The mystics of all ages seem to have known and practiced this. As we realize that God is breath we can perform the devotional exercises easily, and so help elevate ourselves and all mankind.

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