

# *Vairagya, Ataraxia, Dispassion* *Medicine of the Mind*



Nagarjuna receiving texts from Nagas

## Contents

Opening thoughts	2
Occult Philosophy is the Universal Medicina Mentis	3
Cicero on the Medicine of the Soul	7



What, and to the other perturbations of mind, as fears, lusts, anger? For these are pretty much like what the Greeks call πάθη. I might call them diseases, and that would be a literal translation, but it is not agreeable to our way of speaking. For envy, delight, and pleasure are all called by the Greeks diseases, being affections of the mind not in subordination to reason; but we, I think, are right in calling the same motions of a disturbed soul perturbations, and in very seldom using the term diseases; though, perhaps, it appears otherwise to you.

— Marcus Tullius Cicero<sup>1</sup>

Plotinus says this conformably to what is asserted by Plato in the *Timæus* [85b], viz. that “the disease of the soul is folly, which is of two kinds, madness and ignorance.” (νοσον μεν δη ψυχης ανοιαν συχωρητιον. δυο δ’ ανοιας γενη. το μεν μανιαν. το δ’ αμαθιαν.)

— Thomas Taylor<sup>2</sup>

## Opening thoughts

The Sanskrit term Vairagya is commonly translated into English as apathy or indifference. Vairagya implies dispassion, i.e., freedom from passion, aversion, distaste or even disgust for worldliness — feelings that are associated with spiritual awakening and which coincide with dissatisfaction with the world as it is. Vairagya is equivalent to Stoic *ataraxia*.

Vairagya is the dispassion which arises on account of the perception of the defects inherent in things, such perception being its *cause*. The *nature* of Vairagya is a feeling of “enough” with all things, and a discontent with the satisfaction that is derived from the world. The *result* of Vairagya is non-dependence on objects and states as previously, and a feeling of higher independence within.<sup>3</sup>

What is left to live? It is not worth living in a void. But Vairagya is not indifference. It is awareness and sensitivity without affecting and sensitising. Like twinkling stars in a dark night, the pleasures of life pale into insignificance when compared with the joy of the sunrise. We should not lose heart when life seems desolate because it is only when personal life has completely ebbed away that we are nearest to the fullness of the One.

EDITORS

---

<sup>1</sup> Cicero: *Tusculan Disputations*, III iv; (tr. Yonge)

<sup>2</sup> Taylor T. (Tr. & Annot.). *Collected Writings of Plotinus*. (Vol. III of The Thomas Taylor Series) Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 2000; [Taylor on his tr. of Plotinus *On Suicide*, p. 418 fn.]

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Swami Krishnananda’s *The Philosophy of the Panchadasi*. | <http://www.swami-krishnananda.org>



## Occult Philosophy is the Universal Medicina Mentis

Once when my heart was passion-free  
To learn of things divine,  
The soul of nature suddenly  
Outpoured itself in mine.

.....  
To one in all, to all in one —  
Since Love the work began —  
Life's ever widening circles run,  
Revealing God and man.

— John Banister Tabb<sup>4</sup>

What you seek at Ulubrae you' ll find,  
If to the quest you bring a balanced mind.

— Quintus Horatius Flaccus<sup>5</sup>

**Frustration is the end point of  
all outwardly-looking desires,**

Yama said: The self-existent Supreme Lord inflicted an injury upon the sense-organs in creating them without outgoing tendencies; therefore a man perceives only outer objects with them, and not the inner Self. But a calm person, wishing for Immortality, beholds the inner Self with his eyes closed.<sup>6</sup>

**And every frustration nurtures  
Vairagya.**

For, hidden away in the heart of each member of the human race, is the seed of *vairāgya*. And there is no mystery in this. Desire is in the human heart. And desire carries with it its own frustration, and in the frustration is *vairāgya*.<sup>7</sup>

**Preliminary Vairagya is a  
mental U-turn, an infolding  
of consciousness.**

. . . *Vairāgya* is of great importance in Samskrit philosophy. Like the periodic crises in the life of the physical body, when it adjusts itself anew to its environments, this mood marks the critical turning-point in the life of the inner *jīva*, when it adjusts itself anew to the world-process and alters and renews its outlook upon it. There is not yet any adequate English word for it. "Pessimism," "cynicism," "the world is hollow," "all is vanity," "life is not worth living," "there is nothing good," etc, and "aloofness," "detachment," "weariness," "indifference," etc, are shades of its first and second, or *rājasa* and *tāmasa*, stages or forms. The *sāttvika* aspect appears and develops *if we add* the very important element of un-remitting search for the real explanation of the

---

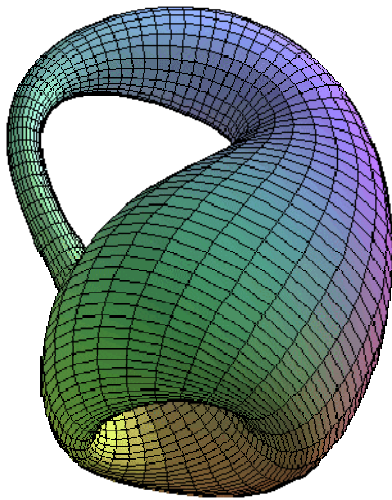
<sup>4</sup> J.B. Tabb: *Communion*

<sup>5</sup> Horace: *Epistolæ* 1, 11, 28; (Quod petis hic est, est Ulubris, | Animus si te non deficit æquus.) — *King's quotation* 4780.

<sup>6</sup> *Katha Upanishad*, II, i, 1; (tr. Nikhilananda)

<sup>7</sup> *Science of the Emotions*, p. 483





**Final Vairagya is the actualisation that all is One.**

**Veiling the eyes to external vision is the first initiation,**



The Window by René Magritte

world-process and for the real significance of, and element of truth in, the mood itself. . . . For an *illustrative* description see *Yoga Vāsishtha* I. In one of its later forms it appears as “the night of the soul” which is spoken of by Christian mystics. In its *perfection* and its final or *sāttvika* form, when it distinguishes between the individualised and separative life and the Universal Self (*viveka-khyāti* of Yoga), it is the highest knowledge also (*Yoga Sūtra* and *Vyāsa-Bhāshya*, I, 15, 16) and expresses itself as renunciation, self-denial, self-sacrifice, universal love, compassion, devotion and service. Thus, indeed, it is the alpha and the omega of philosophy, the first world, and also the last, of Wisdom, *Ved-ānta* (*Bhagavad-Gītā*, ii, 59).<sup>8</sup>

. . . there is a preliminary *vai-rāgya*, disgust, accompanied by incipient knowledge of the Final Truth of the Oneness of all Life and all things, and there is the final *vai-rāgya*, which is the same thing as Full Knowledge and is indistinguishable from the realisation of Unity, *Kaivalya*.<sup>9</sup>

The instant that we attempt to analyze, the sensible, palpable facts upon which so many try to build, disappear beneath the surface, like a foundation laid upon quicksand. “In the deepest reflection,” says a distinguished writer, “all that we call external is only the material basis upon which our dreams are built; and the sleep that surrounds life swallows up life, — all but a dim wreck of matter, floating this way and that, and forever evanishing from sight. Complete the analysis, and we lose even the shadow of the external Present, and only the Past and the Future are left us as our sure inheritance. This is the first initiation, — the veiling (*muesis*) of the eyes to the external. But as *epoptae*, by the synthesis of this Past and Future in a living nature, we obtain a higher, and ideal Present, comprehending within itself all that can be real for us within or without. This is the second initiation in which is unveiled to us the Present as a new birth from our own life. Thus the great problem of Idealism is symbolically solved in the Eleusinia.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Science of the Emotions*, p. xxviii

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 479 fn.

<sup>10</sup> Unknown author from *Atlantic Monthly*, (Vol. iv, September 1859), quoted by A. Wilder in his Introduction of



**The first step on the  
Renunciant Path.**

“ . . . the transformations through which man passed on the descending arc — which is centrifugal for spirit and centripetal for matter — and those he prepares to go through, henceforward, on his ascending path, which will reverse the direction of the two forces — viz., matter will become centrifugal and spirit centripetal — that all such transformations *are next in store for the anthropoid ape also*, all those, at any rate, who have reached the remove next to man in this Round — and these will all be men in the Fifth Round, as present men inhabited ape-like forms in the Third, the preceding Round.”<sup>11</sup>

**Happiness ever alternating  
with Sadness soften us up,**

[ . . . the necessity of alternate action upon natural Bodies . . . they must be . . . prospered and saddened, in order to be made pliable and yielding . . . all of which must be done with one Fire . . . ] Man rises to glory through suffering in order to be made “pliable and yielding,” or impervious to the emotions and feelings of his physical senses.

This “Fire” is that of *Alaya*, the “World-Soul,” the essence of which is LOVE, *i.e.*, homogenous Sympathy, which is Harmony, or the “Music of the Spheres.”<sup>12</sup>

**Motivate us to conquer our  
internal enemies,**

. . . six “waves,” “surges,”<sup>13</sup> . . . six “internal enemies,” . . . which have to be conquered before the attainment of the Self and of Liberation is possible. . . . *i.e.*, *kāma*, *krōdha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, and *matsara*, literally love-lust, anger, greed, infatuated perplexity, pride and jealousy.<sup>14</sup>

**And gives us the confidence to  
persevere, and a foretaste  
of true love.**

“To be able to stand [in the presence of the Masters] is to have confidence”; and to have confidence means that the disciple is sure of himself, that he has surrendered his emotions, his very self, even his humanity; that he is incapable of fear and unconscious of pain; that his whole consciousness is centred in the Divine Life, which is expressed symbolically by the term “the Masters.”<sup>15</sup>

---

T. Taylor’s *The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*; republished by Wizards Bookshelf, San Diego 1997 (*Secret Doctrine* Reference Series); pp. vi-vii

<sup>11</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, II pp. 261-62

<sup>12</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (FOOTNOTES TO “THE ALCHEMISTS”) XII p. 55; “Vide *The Voice of the Silence*, III<sup>rd</sup> Treatise, page 69.” [responding to Bridge’s defence of Mediaeval Alchemists.]

<sup>13</sup> Sometime the six “surges” are explained as, hunger, thirst, joy, sorrow, old age, and death.

<sup>14</sup> *Science of the Emotions*, p. 95

<sup>15</sup> *Light on the Path*, com. V, p. 92



**“These evils seemed to have arisen from the fact that all happiness or unhappiness was placed in the quality of the object to which we cling with love.”**

**Occult Philosophy is the remedy of every disease of the mind.**

. . . For strife will never arise on account of what is not loved, nor will there be sadness if it perishes, nor envy if it is possessed by another, nor fear, nor hatred — in a word, no disturbances of the mind. Indeed, all these happen only in the love of those things that can perish, as all the things we have just spoken of can do.<sup>16</sup>

In what the disease of this spirit consists, by what means it languishes and is dulled, and how it becomes purified and defecated, and restored to its natural simplicity and perfection, must be learned from the arcana of philosophy; from which being purified by the lustrations of mysteries it passes into a divine condition of being.<sup>17</sup>



---

<sup>16</sup> Curley E. (Ed. & Tr.). *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Vol. I, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985: 9. (*The Emendation of the Intellect, etc.*, 20)

<sup>17</sup> Taylor T. (Tr. & Comm.). *Oracles and Mysteries*. (Vol. VII of the Thomas Taylor Series); Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 2001; [THE HISTORY OF THE RESTORATION OF THE PLATONIC THEOLOGY BY THE LATTER PLATONISTS II, “On the Regress or Re-ascent of the Soul,” p. 194, quoting Platonic Synesius’ *De Insomniis* before he embraced Christianity.]



## Cicero on the Medicine of the Soul

After *Tusculan Disputations* translated by C.D. Yonge. Full text in our Down to Earth Series.

Wisdom is oft conceal'd in mean attire.  
— Cæcilius<sup>18</sup>

**Wisdom is acquaintance with all divine and human affairs, and knowledge of the cause of everything.**

Do we look, then, on the libidinous, the angry, the anxious, and the timid man, as persons of wisdom, of excellence? of which I could speak very copiously and diffusely, but I wish to be as concise as possible. And so I will merely say that wisdom is an acquaintance with all divine and human affairs, and a knowledge of the cause of everything. Hence it is that it imitates what is divine, and looks upon all human concerns as inferior to virtue.<sup>19</sup>

For it is the peculiar quality of a wise man to do nothing that he may repent of, nothing against his inclination, but always to act nobly, with constancy, gravity, and honesty; to depend on nothing as certainty; to wonder at nothing, when it falls out, as if it appeared strange and unexpected to him; to be independent of every one, and abide by his own opinion.<sup>20</sup>

**Virtue is the good of the mind: it follows, therefore, that a happy life depends on virtue.**

Now imagine a Democritus, a Pythagoras, and an Anaxagoras; what kingdom, what riches, would you prefer to their studies and amusements? For you must necessarily look for that excellence which we are seeking for in that which is the most perfect part of man; but what is there better in man than a sagacious and good mind? The enjoyment, therefore, of that good which proceeds from that sagacious mind can alone make us happy; but virtue is the good of the mind: it follows, therefore, that a happy life depends on virtue. Hence proceed all things that are beautiful, honourable, and excellent . . . and they are well stored with joys. For, as it is clear that a happy life consists in perpetual and unexhausted pleasures, it follows, too, that a happy life must arise from honesty.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> *Tusc. Disp.*, III xxiii; [quoting Cæcilius of Calacte?]

<sup>19</sup> *Tusc. Disp.*, IV xxvi

<sup>20</sup> *Tusc. Disp.*, V xxviii

<sup>21</sup> *Tusc. Disp.*, V xxiii



- Pain is virtue's sharpest adversary.** Shall a wise man be afraid of pain? which is, indeed, the greatest enemy to our opinion. For I am persuaded that we are prepared and fortified sufficiently, by the disputations of the foregoing days, against our own death or that of our friends, against grief, and the other perturbations of the mind. But pain seems to be the sharpest adversary of virtue; that it is which menaces us with burning torches; that it is which threatens to crush our fortitude, and greatness of mind, and patience. Shall virtue, then, yield to this? Shall the happy life of a wise and consistent man succumb to this? Good Gods! how base would this be!<sup>22</sup>
- Pain and pleasure are trifling and effeminate sentiments peculiar to the lower self.** There is in the soul of every man something naturally soft, low, enervated in a manner, and languid. Were there nothing besides this, men would be the greatest of monsters; but there is present to every man reason, which presides over and gives laws to all; which, by improving itself, and making continual advances, becomes perfect virtue. It behooves a man, then, to take care that reason shall have the command over that part which is bound to practise obedience. In what manner? you will say. Why, as a master has over his slave, a general over his army, a father over his son. If that part of the soul which I have called soft behaves disgracefully, if it gives itself up to lamentations and womanish tears, then let it be restrained, and committed to the care of friends and relations, for we often see those persons brought to order by shame whom no reasons can influence. Therefore, we should confine those feelings, like our servants, in safe custody, and almost with chains. But those who have more resolution, and yet are not utterly immovable, we should encourage with our exhortations, as we would good soldiers, to recollect themselves, and maintain their honour. That wisest man of all Greece, in the Niptræ, does not lament too much over his wounds, or, rather, he is moderate in his grief:

Move slow, my friends; your hasty speed refrain,  
Lest by your motion you increase my pain.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> *Tusc. Disp.*, V xxvii

<sup>23</sup> *Tusc. Disp.*, II xxi



**Fortitude is fearless obedience to reason. Examine the definitions of courage:**

. . . you will find it does not require the assistance of passion. Courage is, then, an affection of mind that endures all things, being itself in proper subjection to the highest of all laws; or it may be called a firm maintenance of judgment in supporting or repelling everything that has a formidable appearance, or a knowledge of what is formidable or otherwise, and maintaining invariably a stable judgment of all such things, so as to bear them or despise them; or, in fewer words, according to Chrysippus (for the above definitions are Sphærus's, a man of the first ability as a layer-down of definitions, as the Stoics think. But they are all pretty much alike: they give us only common notions, some one way, and some another). But what is Chrysippus's definition? Fortitude, says he, is the knowledge of all things that are bearable, or an affection of the mind which bears and supports everything in obedience to the chief law of reason without fear.<sup>24</sup>

**To her followers, Prudence teaches a good life and secures a happy one.**

Should Pythagoras, Socrates, or Plato say to me, Why are you dejected or sad? Why do you faint, and yield to fortune, which, perhaps, may have power to harass and disturb you, but should not quite unman you? There is great power in the virtues; rouse them, if they chance to droop. Take fortitude for your guide, which will give you such spirits that you will despise everything that can befall man, and look on it as a trifle. Add to this temperance, which is moderation, and which was just now called frugality, which will not suffer you to do anything base or bad — for what is worse or baser than an effeminate man? Not even justice will suffer you to act in this manner, though she seems to have the least weight in this affair; but still, notwithstanding, even she will inform you that you are doubly unjust when you both require what does not belong to you, inasmuch as though you who have been born mortal demand to be placed in the condition of the immortals, and at the same time you take it much to heart that you are to restore what was lent you. What answer will you make to prudence, who informs you that she is a virtue sufficient of herself both to teach you a good life and also to secure you a happy one?<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> *Tusc. Disp.*, IV xxiv

<sup>25</sup> *Tusc. Disp.*, III xvii



**The aim of life is neither applause nor profit, but to merely experience it on behalf of the silent observer within.**

That the life of man seemed to him to resemble those games which were celebrated with the greatest possible variety of sports and the general concourse of all Greece. For as in those games there were some persons whose object was glory and the honour of a crown, to be attained by the performance of bodily exercises, so others were led thither by the gain of buying and selling, and mere views of profit; but there was likewise one class of persons, and they were by far the best, whose aim was neither applause nor profit, but who came merely as spectators through curiosity, to observe what was done, and to see in what manner things were carried on there. And thus, said he, we come from another life and nature unto this one, just as men come out of some other city, to some much frequented mart; some being slaves to glory, others to money; and there are some few who, taking no account of anything else, earnestly look into the nature of things; and these men call themselves studious of wisdom, that is, philosophers: and as there it is the most reputable occupation of all to be a looker-on without making any acquisition, so in life, the contemplating things, and acquainting one's self with them, greatly exceeds every other pursuit of life."<sup>26</sup>

**By exercising authority over his lower self, the wise man opposes pain as he would an enemy. Armed with contention, encouragement, and discourse with himself, he remains indifferent to honour and dishonour.**

The man, then, in whom absolute wisdom exists (such a man, indeed, we have never as yet seen, but the philosophers have described in their writings what sort of man he will be, if he should exist); such a man, or at least that perfect and absolute reason which exists in him, will have the same authority over the inferior part as a good parent has over his dutiful children: he will bring it to obey his nod without any trouble or difficulty. He will rouse himself, prepare and arm himself, to oppose pain as he would an enemy. If you inquire what arms he will provide himself with, they will be contention, encouragement, discourse with himself. He will say thus to himself: Take care that you are guilty of nothing base, languid, or unmanly. He will turn over in his mind all the different kinds of honour. Zeno of Elea will occur to him, who suffered everything rather than betray his confederates in the design of putting an end to the tyranny. He will reflect on

---

<sup>26</sup> *Tusc. Disp.*, V iii; [quoting Pythagoras.]



Anaxarchus, the pupil of Democritus, who, having fallen into the hands of Nicocreon, King of Cyprus, without the least entreaty for mercy or refusal, submitted to every kind of torture. Calanus the Indian will occur to him, an ignorant man and a barbarian, born at the foot of Mount Caucasus, who committed himself to the flames by his own free, voluntary act. But we, if we have the toothache, or a pain in the foot, or if the body be anyways affected, cannot bear it. For our sentiments of pain as well as pleasure are so trifling and effeminate, we are so enervated and relaxed by luxuries, that we cannot bear the sting of a bee without crying out.<sup>27</sup>

**“I am not at all surprised at that, for it is the effect of philosophy, which is the medicine of our souls”;**

. . . it banishes all groundless apprehensions, frees us from desires, and drives away fears: but it has not the same influence over all men; it is of very great influence when it falls in with a disposition well adapted to it. For not only does Fortune, as the old proverb says, assist the bold, but reason does so in a still greater degree; for it, by certain precepts, as it were, strengthens even courage itself.<sup>28</sup>



---

<sup>27</sup> *Tusc. Disp.*, II xxii

<sup>28</sup> *Tusc. Disp.*, II iv

