

PRIMORDIAL MEDITATION

Excerpts from a forthcoming edition of
Frithjof Schuon's first book,
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Urbesinnung: Das Denken des Eigentlichen,
translated by Gillian Harris and Angela Schwartz.



WHAT IS PRIMORDIAL MEDITATION? It is the quickening of the intelligence from within, from the Spirit. Just as fire returns to ether when it has nothing more to consume, so, too, the intelligence returns to the Spirit when it has consumed the world and itself. This consuming of the world is primordial meditation. Through it man becomes spiritual man.

In his heart man has an ocean in which he could drown the world, if only he knew it.

In his heart man has a fire with which he could burn the world, if only he knew it.



All new learning is fruitless and harmful before the old learning has penetrated man deeply and become dissolved in his knowledge of the world; and all learning which has no sufficient reason with regard to Knowledge is an impediment. He who cannot tread the path of conscious ignorance never reaches the highest learning.



The content of ignorance is that we do not know what we are. Because we do not know, and to the extent that we do not know, we are men, beings, circles of consciousness. And what we do not know is this: I am nothing except myself.



The spiritual man is truly himself in the Spirit; in his soul he is simultaneously child, youth, adult and old man. He is simple and natural like a child, trusting and ardent like a youth, firm and clear like a man, selfless and mild like an old man.



The ordinary man allows his base instinct to speak through his thinking; he is besotted by the enunciation of his thinking and does not ask whence it comes.

The heart of the spiritual man does not lie in the instinctive, nor does he put his trust unconditionally in his thoughts; rather, uncorrupted Knowledge

is his guiding power, and the Ungraspable his sufficient reason. He does not incessantly fall prey to thoughts that rise like bubbles out of the quagmire of ignorance, and justify these contrary to his own knowledge.

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Earlier man did not have extensively elaborated doctrinal books, but he read what the moderns construct with many words, in books that strike the moderns as simple and meaningless. What modern man can only laboriously describe, earlier man read between the lines; what the moderns express in a hundred words, earlier man understood in one. Only a little had to come from outside to awaken his Knowledge, for he had most of his learning within himself. For modern man, almost everything has to come from outside, because he has forgotten the inner science.

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Reason attacks, defends, struggles; but the Spirit is pure assertion, pure affirmation of itself.

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Man is a tree, grown out of his heart and bearing fruit according to the nature of his heart. But in the center of the heart is the Eye of the Divine, that enables the tree to grow by seeing Itself, and enables it to die by not seeing it as man.

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Two things in space are symbolically analogous to Infinitude: the unexpanded, inwardly endless center, and spherically expanded, outwardly endless distance.

Two things in time are symbolically analogous to Eternity: the unexpanded, inwardly endless present moment, and duration expanded into past and future.

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What is the primordial doctrine? It is the knowledge of ultimate relationships, enveloped in forms, manifesting itself in forms, continually returning in fresh shapes throughout human ages and yet remaining eternally the same. This Truth, living in multiple forms, limited by none, always leading back to pure

Spirit, is the primordial doctrine.

It is the product of no human thinking. It belongs to no one. He who knows it, possesses it; but in truth, it embraces him and has absorbed the knower into itself—It, the Eternal, has absorbed him who is ephemeral. Thus does the sea absorb a drop. Its entrance is everywhere and nowhere. It is without origin and without end.



The contradiction of existence lies in the fact that it appears to be the boundary of the Boundless.



God answers our prayers as if without listening to them; for they do not enter Him, because for Him they are nothing; however the answer proceeds from Him, because He is everything to us—all-hearing, all-knowing; He is the eternal answer and fulfillment. The reflection is touched by the archetype, the effect by the cause—not the reverse. God's answer awaited our prayers before we existed.



What are thoughts and actions? They are impotent attempts to realize the Infinite within the finite; they are attempts by the finite to become infinite. The finite wants to become infinite because it does not know that it is ultimately infinite and that its finiteness is based on this ignorance alone. The finite has ears to hear and hears not; eyes to see and sees not; it knows the Divine without knowing it; thus the finite wants to become equal with the Divine and affirm itself, spread, glorify itself, but without giving itself up; the finite wants to be divine as something finite; and because it is actually in one sense divine, it has joy, sovereignty and reality—otherwise it could not even be finite, or be at all; but because it is not the Divine, it has suffering and impotence, it is unreal. Thus what is made manifest is simultaneously a paean to the Divine and a revolt against the Divine.



Enjoyment is an emanation of pleasure; the latter is broader and deeper than all enjoyment. Pleasure is

an emanation of joy; the latter is broader and deeper than all pleasure. Joy is an emanation of life; the latter is broader and deeper than all joy. Life is an emanation of existence; the latter is broader and deeper than all life. Existence is the emanation of Being; the latter is broader and deeper than all existence. Being is the emanation of the Ultimate, Infinite, All-Real, All-Broad and All-Deep.

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The Divine is present in the heart where Knowledge and Love are in harmony.

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The body's pleasure should operate in harmony with the vibration which brings about not only the abstinence of the body but also its spiritualization; the sacred dances of ancient peoples are based upon this knowledge. The breath transmits the vibration realized by the body to the soul. The plenitude of the soul should for its part manifest itself in harmony with the vibration which corresponds to its nature

and, along with equanimity, determines the spiritualization of the soul; the sacred songs of ancient peoples are based upon this knowledge. The vibration realized in the soul is the dance of the soul, as the vibration realized in the body is the song of the body.



He who stands in the phenomenal world with love and hatred, pleasure and suffering, must also turn to the Spirit with love and to appearances with hatred, and find his pleasure in the Spirit. He who grasps appearances in a purely spiritual manner no longer grasps them as appearances, rather, his understanding finds the Spirit everywhere and dissolves everything into Spirit; and nothing leads him astray.

No one can say it is absolutely wrong to approach the Divine other than by a purely spiritual path; for if we ourselves are wrong, how can our means readily be correct? If it is wrong to love the Spirit, it is much more wrong to love something other than the Spirit, or to love something for reasons other than for the

sake of the Spirit. Therefore, may he who loves, love the Spirit even more, and meditate upon the relation of what he loves to the Spirit, and ground his love of phenomena spiritually, and thus transcend the concrete, the symbolical. And if, beyond the concrete and symbolical, he has found again what he loved in the Spirit, and is thus alone with his love for the Spirit, may he dissolve this love, too, in the Spirit, and become poor in Spirit—until he is overcome by love's archetype in ultimate Reality, which can no longer dissolve anything, because there is no longer anything outside it, no longer anything distinct from it, no longer anything purer and more real.



Whereas primordial meditation is a spiritual meeting with the Divine and proceeds from the core of our being in which we ourselves are divine, so that actually the Divine speaks and reason only perceives, prayer is an individually limited meeting with the Divine, which proceeds only from within the "I", in which we are not divine but different from the Divine; so that

we speak to the Divine with our limited capacities, and as ourselves, thus also with our sentiment—not as that which we can be through Knowledge. In meditation man is a stranger to himself, because the Spirit shining through reason is distinct from man, and determines him in order to spiritualize him; in prayer man is a stranger to the Spirit, because prayer has its meaning in man and of course comes from man, so as to create a protective and strengthening climate in which meditation is not exposed to anything hostile and is not distracted.

Before meditation, as before prayer, man must forget all else. After meditation or prayer he must forget them, so that he is not absorbed or possessed by the mere contents of his consciousness; and so that meditation and prayer can act beyond his waking consciousness. For what enters man, as in meditation, and what emerges from him, as in prayer, must pass through form; not in order that he fall prey to form—which as such is always limited and diverse—but in order that he recognize its relativity and overcome it.

The one primordial doctrine shattered, the more

it was given expression and the less men partook in its spirit. The forms in which it continues to live must be diverse—otherwise they would not be forms, but pure Spirit. Now the doctrinal forms which proceeded from meditation remained conscious of their formal state, and also recognized the Spirit in the other forms of the primordial doctrine; but those that proceeded from prayer were confused with their formality, and saw the Spirit in it and thus not in other forms, least of all in those which arose not from prayer but from meditation. There are two sources of doctrinal authority or infallibility: an outer one, which confirms the actual provenance of the primordial doctrine; and an inner one, which is based on the revelation of the Spirit through direct Knowledge. The outer source is, as such, only relatively veracious, but it is incontestably reliable within this relativity. The inner source is, in its essence, Truth itself, and therefore inordinately more important than the outer source, just as a man's own direct participation in the Spirit is more important than that handed down by Tradition—though the former has need of the latter

in order to be effective. The inner source of infallibility can, however, break through the outer source, as Jesus—in the Name of the Spirit and as proclaimer of the primordial doctrine, although within particular but necessary formal preconditions—broke through the outer source: namely, the Jewish tradition. At the same time, because of his concordance with the Envoys of God, he referred to this tradition, and thus confirmed his connection with the primordial doctrine.



Just as the body becomes everything that it consumes, and must return to the earth, because it lives from the earth, so the soul must return to illusion to the extent that it lives from illusion. He whose cognition lives only from the most external and ephemeral will not transcend the limitations of his nature. He who does not respond to one call from Knowledge, will also not respond to a thousand calls, and a time will come for him when there is no further call from Knowledge soliciting an answer; and then the

simple truth the man heard without hearing it, or saw without seeing it, departs and leaves him to fall into his error, for when man no longer participates even in the fragmented reflection of the inner Source, nothing remains to him but himself, as husk and negation. Truth will abandon the doubter and vacillator, as the sun departs from the earth and leaves it behind, mighty and cold.

Man has unlimited power; for he has all the power that exists, and power is unlimited; but he does not know he has it, that it is there and is unlimited; for man's existence is ignorance, and power is the expression of knowledge.



We are in all that we know—and all that we know is in us. There can be no doubt that we know, for even he who claims that we can know nothing, or that we cannot even know nothing, already proceeds from multiple cognitions. Otherwise it would be impossible for him not only to make his erroneous claims, but also even to move, to walk, indeed to

live; for there is no doubter who, for the sake of consistency, would disdain to make use of his knowledge; otherwise he could not distinguish a loaf from a stone. Therefore he must admit that he knows, at least relatively; for, were no knowledge to enter him, no reaction could issue from him, and he could not act; every action is a determination proceeding from a discernment, and every discernment presupposes knowledge and is knowledge. But just as we admit that knowledge, however limited and relative, nonetheless exists, there is no sufficient reason to impose conceptual restrictions on this knowledge, other than the narrowness of those who boast of their ignorance and call themselves doubters in order to evade all knowledge that transcends the human and its needs, and in particular the consequences of such pure knowledge. For nothing is easier than to gainsay what transcends us, the consequences of which can be binding on us. But being bound by the Spirit is true freedom.

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Man should always be twofold: on one hand a warrior and a victor, and on the other hand a priest and a sacrificer. He must despise and fight, yet simultaneously love and bless.

Man must reckon with evil without fearing it, and with good without expecting it.

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In its center, every thing ceases to be what it is; but precisely through this it begins to be.

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All doing is the consequence of a love that is separated from its object. This is why spiritual love engenders no doing, for the Spirit is none other than its Love.

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From the spiritual point of view we are knowledge; from the human, will. Now since we are, if we are

spiritual, nothing but knowledge, neither must we, insofar as we are human, be anything other than will; but will is never an end in itself, rather, it is an emanation of knowledge. Thus the will must flow back into its sufficient reason, by no longer being distinct from it, by no longer being other than knowledge.

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Man does not live from bread alone—whether he knows it or not, whether he wishes it or not. When nourishing himself, he also eats either knowledge or ignorance. All necessary doing is sacred; but one must know what one is doing, and do everything in the Spirit.

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The world is a silken pall, in which lies a king, rigid and deeply enshrouded. He loves the silk in which he is wrapped, without knowing that it is a shroud, his shroud, and that beyond this shroud extends a whole living world with an immeasurable heaven. He does not want to rend the shroud, nor shatter his gilded

sarcophagus, because he loves it.

Every man is this enshrouded, buried king.

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It is the Nameless, Ungraspable; the Hidden-behind-a-thousand-veils. If one seeks to grasp It, It withdraws. If one seeks to think It, It seals the understanding. It shatters him who knows It.

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At sunrise the stars fade away. Thus do all things fade away when the Spirit rises.

In the brightness of day one has no need of a lamp. Therefore the Spirit has no need of reason.

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He who grasps that the pleasures of this world are not of this world, has grasped much.



God has two emanations, one that blesses and one that threatens; one that comes from his Goodness, bringing revelations and bestowing Grace, and another through which His Justice is manifested and His secrets defended. Everything that falls within the realm of dual symbolism can be related to these two emanations.

Two qualities come from God's emanations: on one hand, wisdom and sagacity, and on the other hand, strength or courage. To the first pair correspond contemplation and immobility; to the second, action and rhythm.

Thus the emanations are distinguished from one another by their nature: the first is Goodness inwardly and Beauty outwardly; the second is Power inwardly and Strength outwardly.

It can be said of God that He is Wisdom inwardly and Science outwardly. Wisdom and Science, Goodness and Beauty, Power and Strength: the Divine manifests itself through this trinity. It produces, preserves and transforms—realizes, creates and destroys.



A finite thing cannot exist without Infinity, any more than a speck of dust can exist without limitless space.



We know the world. But we know its ultimate Principle—Principle as such—only as negation in relation to manifested plenitude. We know that we ourselves are necessary components in the equilibrium of the world, that we have to be what we are, that we participate as central, inward points of departure for the world in its relativity, and that the Absolute is in the Spirit alone.



Like ocean waves breaking without cease, this thought should always recur to man: that everything in the world is perfect and infinite in the Divine; that the Divine is the ultimate Cause of the world, and the Cause possesses more reality than its effect; and that the Divine is in us as long as we are in the Divine, and that therefore everything around us that we love

because it is positive, is perfect and infinite in us.

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Nothing moves man as beauty and innocence do; for this reason he loves woman. Nothing fills woman as spirit and strength do; for this reason she loves man.

Masculine and feminine were joined in one being, and this being contemplated itself; then it disintegrated and continued its self-contemplation, now directed outwards; and from these joyous and painful quiverings of two living parts, creatures came into existence, whose quiverings continue in ever-multiplying, ever newly-repeating, never-ending, never-liberating impotence.

Man and woman were one, and this One was immersed in its own inexhaustible ecstasy of love; its fruit was its love without beginning or end, without time or space. When this One split into man and woman, Its love and the fruit thereof broke into becoming and passing away, endless self-repetition, endless self-multiplication, endless belief and disappointment, endless lusting and endless suffering.

The spiritual human being bears within him the perfection of the Spirit and strength, and the perfection of beauty and innocence; thus within himself he closes the ring of masculine and feminine and is like the first human being, before woman was taken out of him and created.

Men are like light when it does not fall on any stars and wanders through the void; and women are like stars on which no light falls, and which remain in darkness. But the spiritual human being is like a star shining with its own light.

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The posture adopted in prayer attests outwardly to understanding and facilitates understanding inwardly.

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Lukewarm faith or mediocrity consists in negotiating, bargaining with imperatives that transcend the human—in treating them, not according to their importance, but as human matters. Higher imperatives

are those which negate the human, such as Abraham's sacrifice or Jesus' suffering. For the higher, the principal, does not justify itself to the subordinate, the accidental: it is justified unto itself, and goes beyond the individual, the relative, the mortal, with eyes closed but clear vision—deriving knowledge, not from factual, but from higher, principal things.



We participate in the Divine in three ways: firstly insofar as we are in the world, and through our relation to it; secondly insofar as we stand before God, and through our relation to Him; thirdly insofar as we are in the Divine, thus through our relation to Ourselves. In the first sense we are a social being; in the second, an individual being; in the third, the universal Being, the Divine. In the Divine we are unmoved, because we are not different from the Divine; as individuals, insofar as we stand apart from the Divine, our movement is uniform, and this uniformity is translated by the changeless rhythm of forms, through which we serve God; as social beings our movements are

many, because the environment and we ourselves are changeable, but this multiplicity of our relationships is again ordered as the outermost transposition and extension of Unity, according to the eternal spiritual determinations.



Everything in the life of the spiritual man is afloat upon his immersion in the Divine, like specks of dust upon deep waters. Life is light, only immersion is heavy; and even its heaviness is made light for the spiritual man.

Days and nights follow one another like breaths; breaths follow one another like days and nights. As life is borne by days and nights, so immersion is borne by breaths; life flows through days and nights, and the Spirit flows through breaths. Breath is the body of immersion, of primordial meditation. Breath dissolves the body and transforms it into spirit. In order for the Spirit to go through breath, breath must go through the Spirit. Breath is the sacred fire that purifies and transforms man.



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