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## **Transcendental Speech and Poetic Expression in John of the Cross**

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### *Abstract*

*Many parallels exist between Maharishi Vedic Science and John of the Cross's poetry and prose commentaries. John of the Cross's commentaries on his poetry afford the most comprehensive description of human development available in the Christian mystical tradition. Maharishi Vedic Science, with its profound model of levels of language, from most expressed to fully transcendent, provides a harmonious, modern correlate to John. Maharishi and John of the Cross are most in agreement on the need for the direct experience of Transcendental Consciousness, which alone provides the most profound experience of language for writers and readers of literary texts.*

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### **Introduction**

Many points of comparison exist between John of the Cross and by extension the tradition of sacred rhetoric in the West and Maharishi Vedic Science<sup>SM</sup>, including parallels between the understanding of language, the experience of transcendence as transcendental speech, and the transmission of knowledge through the experience of Transcendental Consciousness, through spoken language and through written texts. John of the Cross

lived in the last half of the sixteenth century during Spain's Golden Age, a time when Spanish genius produced some of Europe's greatest art, including its greatest mystical literature. Advisor in spiritual matters to Teresa of Jesus, first friar in the reform of the Carmelite Order which she inaugurated, John pursued a spirituality devoted to developing the direct experience of the Divine beyond thought, image, and feeling, which mystical theology calls contemplation.<sup>1</sup> Since the word contemplation generally refers to the activity of thinking, and because Maharishi uses it in this sense to distinguish the active process of contemplation from the effortless process of the Transcendental Meditation® technique, I will, to avoid confusion, henceforth refrain from using John of the Cross's preferred term for the transcendental, direct experience of God.

As this essay progresses, it will become increasingly clear that John of the Cross's approach to literature and language, although belonging to a different tradition, more than just parallels Maharishi's. Both John and Maharishi begin with a fundamental position that is radical in the field of literature, that the direct experience of divine or Transcendental Consciousness should serve as the basis for all writing and reading. Moreover, literature and language that have their roots in a spiritual tradition, Sacred Scripture for John and the Vedic Literature for Maharishi, will have a much more profound impact on readers. For both Maharishi and John of the Cross the depth of understanding is dependent upon the level of consciousness of the reader. Texts have multiple levels of meaning, and only the most profound readers will grasp their deepest level.

In addition to multiple levels of meaning, Maharishi Vedic Science and John of the Cross identify levels of language, especially the deepest level which is transcendental. The reader established on this transcendental level, which John calls Logos, knows wisdom, light, and pure knowledge—the direct knowledge of divine consciousness as opposed to knowledge which derives from a solely rational process. For John, this is the voice of God, where knowledge and language are indistinguishable. For Vedic Science<sup>SM</sup> this is the level from which arise the imperishable hymns of the Veda. Therefore, according to John of the Cross and Maharishi Vedic Science, language and literature are best fathomed by linking them back to their transcendental source.

### **The Direct Experience of Divine Consciousness**

John of the Cross championed the role of the direct experience of God in the development of spiritual life at a time in history when Counter Reformation Catholicism suspected that those who advocated such experiences to be heretics or crypto-Protestants who sought salvation from within rather than by engaging in activity.<sup>2</sup> John's belief in the direct experience of the Divine is his primary spiritual legacy contained in his remarkable literary output.

John of the Cross excelled in two literary arenas: his mystical poetry and his prose commentaries on that poetry. The poetry of John of the Cross illustrates Maharishi's position that a poet's greatness lies in the ability to create poetry only if the poet's consciousness is first established in the profound silence of the transcendent. Maharishi maintains that when poetry arises from the depths of awareness it inspires life by connecting the surface values of life with the most profound (Orme-Johnson, 1987, p. 350). John

of the Cross is arguably one of the greatest poets of the Spanish language;<sup>3</sup> moreover, his prose commentaries on his poetry afford the clearest and most comprehensive description of human development available in the Christian mystical tradition.

John recognized that his poetry flowed from his profound experience of transcendental silence, the divine nature of his own soul. In his introduction to the “Cantico espiritual,” he notes that its verses carry something of the transcendental experience that inspired them because they were written “con algún fervor de amor de Dios, cuya sabiduría y amor es tan inmenso . . . el alma que de él es informada y movida en alguna manera esa misma abundancia e ímpetu lleva en el su decir” (“with a certain burning love of God. The wisdom and charity of God is so vast . . . and the soul informed and moved by it bears in some way this very abundance and impulsiveness in her words.”) (C, Prólogo, 1).<sup>4</sup> In his poetry John offers his readers “dichos de amor en inteligencia mística” (“expressions of love arising from mystical understanding”), verses inspired by his experiences of the Divine in transcendence, whose prose commentaries cannot begin to exhaust their meanings (C, Prólogo, 1).

Let us now examine more closely this direct transcendental experience of the Divine which John acknowledges as giving rise to his poetry and which is central to his understanding of human spiritual development; this Divine knowledge which parallels Maharishi’s description of Transcendental Consciousness experienced during the Transcendental Meditation technique, and to which John gives many different expressions. John first calls it “inteligencia pura” (“pure knowledge”) (S2, 14, 11), “sencilla y pura sabiduría” (“simple and pure wisdom”) (S2, 15, 4). Since the Divine is hidden in the deepest recesses of the soul, direct transcendental experience of the Divine occurs when the attention is focused deep within in “sumo recogimiento” (“deepest recollection”) (C1, 6), and is withdrawn from “todas las cosas criadas” (all other things”) (N2, 16, 14). John also calls this direct transcendental experience of God “una noticia amorosa general, no distinta ni particular” (“general loving knowledge . . . neither distinct nor particular”) (S2, 14, 2) because it imparts pure wisdom and love to the recipient. The direct transcendental experience of God touches the heart as well as the intellect. It is “sabiduría y noticia amorosa” (“loving wisdom and knowledge”) (L3, 33) in that “la voluntad ama en general sin distinción alguna de cosa particular entendida” (“the love in the will is also understanding”) (L3, 49). It is an ineffable experience because it is so subtle and delicate. God’s very substance is infused into the soul directly: “el mismo Dios es el que allí es sentido y gustado . . . aunque no manifiesta y claramente” (“it is God himself who is experienced and tasted there . . . [although it] is not manifest and clear”) (S2, 26, 5). It is an experience of “quietud y ocio” (“quietude and idleness”) (N1, 10, 1) imparted “en el mayor ocio y descuido del alma” (“while the soul is in [greatest] idleness and unconcern”) (N1, 9, 6).

John’s descriptions of the direct transcendental experience of the Divine bear striking similarities with descriptions of transcendental pure consciousness experienced during the Transcendental Meditation technique. Maharishi (1969) describes pure consciousness as “the absolute state of knowledge which can be described as a state of knowingness” (p. 310).<sup>5</sup> During the practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique the practitioner’s awareness enters “the field of the Transcendent, the state of pure con-

sciousness” (p. 437) which “represents the complete infusion of cosmic Being [transcendental pure consciousness] into the individual mind” (p. 144). Transcendental Consciousness not only imparts pure knowledge, but is an experience of “infinite joy” (p. 425), “pure bliss-consciousness” (p. 165).

The practitioner of the Transcendental Meditation technique does not experience “the infusion of Being [the deepest level of the mind] into the nature of the mind” (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1966, p. 63), Maharishi explains, because the process “is never on the thinking level of the mind” (p. 62); it takes place rather in the transcendent, and only later through the precious benefits found in activity is any change in the individual noticed. In the experience of pure consciousness the practitioner enters, he says, “a state of no experience because the whole field of relativity has been transcended (p. 60). Arriving at Transcendental Consciousness “is the result of diminishing activity until the nervous system ceases to function and reaches a state of stillness, a state of restful alertness” (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1966, p. 302). In this completely restful state a person is fully alert and fully conscious because Being is consciousness, a field of unbounded pure consciousness. Therefore, in this state the “conscious mind becomes consciousness” (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1969, p. 422). Scientific research suggests that transcendental pure consciousness experienced during the Transcendental Meditation technique is a fourth major state of consciousness, a state of restful alertness, physiologically distinct from waking, dreaming, and sleep states of consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

John’s direct transcendental experiences of the Divine not only parallel Maharishi’s descriptions of pure consciousness. John also believed, as Maharishi has explained, that transcendence forms the framework for human development, which John saw as the full transformation of the human person in God, an ideal accomplished by the progressively greater infusion of the divine nature into the individual through direct experience (N2, 10, 6). To make this process of human development concrete, John uses an analogy comparing the human person to wood and the direct experience of the Divine to fire. Just as fire transforms wood into itself (N2, 10, 1), the direct experience of the Divine removes imperfection and makes the individual increasingly divine (S2, 5, 3). In Maharishi Vedic Science (1966) the goal of human development is achieved when “limited individual life” takes on “the status of unlimited cosmic existence” (p. 28), when Transcendental Consciousness becomes an ever-present feature of the mind and individual perception. This goal is accomplished by alternating the experience of Transcendental Consciousness gained through the Transcendental Meditation technique with a normal routine of activity. With each experience of transcending, practitioners retain something of the unbounded absolute nature of pure consciousness (p. 61) and act in their daily rounds “with a certain degree of Being” (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1969, p. 344). Eventually, the full infusion of Being becomes permanent, maintained throughout waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states of consciousness (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1966, p. 63).

While John of the Cross likens the transformation of the individual into the Divine to wood consumed by fire, Maharishi (1969) compares the infusion of Being into the mind to the process of dyeing a cloth. In some places dye is made colorfast by repeatedly dip-

ping a cloth first into a dye and then exposing it to the sun (p. 313). Scientific research suggests that the Transcendental Meditation technique “dyes the cloth” of individual awareness, in that it develops the full potential of its practitioners, by alternating Transcendental Consciousness with daily activity (Alexander, 1987, pp. 113–120).<sup>7</sup>

### Literature and Divine Consciousness

This transformative effect of the Divine into the life of the individual is captured in John of the Cross’s best poetry. Through his three major poems, “Noche oscura” (“The Dark Night”), “Cántico espiritual” (“The Spiritual Canticle”), and “Llama de amor viva” (“The Living Flame of Love”), John of the Cross sought to give some sense of the richness, depth, and bliss of his inner, direct experiences of the Divine. He also wrote prose commentaries to further investigate this direct transcendental experience of the Divine, its evolution and role in human development. Nonetheless, he was keenly aware that language is inadequate to express an inner experience that transcends language; therefore, he urged his readers to aspire to their own experience of the Divine Word beyond language.

During the Renaissance the practitioners of sacred rhetoric pursued “the appropriate expression of the psyche in its attempt to apprehend and articulate transcendence” (Shuger 1988, p. 194). Through their art they inspired their readers “to move from the seen to the unseen . . . to embrace what is invisible under corporeal similitudes” (p. 201). According to Maharishi Vedic Science this is the purpose of literature: to lead the reader’s awareness inward, “toward the Self, toward the level of pure consciousness underlying the more active levels of the mind” (Orme-Johnson, 1987, p. 353).

John of the Cross believed it worthwhile to speak of transcendental experience because he felt the subtlety of his words would be understood by those readers who experienced divine reality deep within themselves, even if they had never pursued the academic study of theology. This is clear in his dedication of the “Cántico espiritual” to Ana de Jesús, prioress of the Discalced Carmelite convent in Granada: “pues, aunque a V.R. le falte el ejercicio de teología escolástica con que se entienden las verdades divinas, no le falta el de la mística, que se sabe por amor en que, no solamente se saben, mas juntamente se gustan” (“Even though Your Reverence lacks training in scholastic theology, through which the divine truths are understood, you are not wanting in mystical theology, through which the divine truths are understood, you are not wanting in mystical theology, which is known through love and by which these truths are not only known but at the same time enjoyed.”) (C, Prólogo, 3). John assumed that individuals who experience mystical theology, that is knowledge of God gained through the direct experience of the Divine, are able to overcome the limitations of language and intuit the whole of the experience behind the poetry and its commentary.

Maharishi (1972) in his Vedic Science similarly emphasizes the importance of the experience of consciousness for both writers and readers: “All the successful poets have tracked the path of transcending.” Readers will fully appreciate literature that springs from the writer’s experience of transcendence only if they themselves have experienced pure consciousness. Orme-Johnson (1987) observes, “Readers who have never experienced pure consciousness, had glimpses of higher states of consciousness, or known of their existence would be unable to understand references to these states and might take

them to be merely fanciful or primarily metaphysical speculation” (p. 364).

### **Sacred Texts and Vedic Science**

According to theories of sacred rhetoric in the West, the abilities of both the poet to write and the reader to apprehend the meaning of the text are mediated by the Spirit, the person of the Trinity associated with divine inspiration and the intuition of divine presence. The Spirit transfuses “spiritual efficacy into the dead letter” for the writer and the reader (Shuger, 1988, p. 231). According to John of the Cross, it was the Spirit, experienced as a burning love of God, who compelled him to write the verses of the “Cántico espiritual” (C1, Prólogo, 1). Only the Spirit gives inspiration free of error. Rather than relying on theology or personal experience to compose “Subida del Monte Carmelo,” John looked to Sacred Scripture inspired by the Spirit as the only sure guide for its composition (S1, Prólogo, 2). John relied on Sacred Scripture in his commentary on the “Cántico espiritual” to keep his discussion of advanced experiences of transcendence free of error (C, Prólogo, 4). He delayed writing his commentary on the “Llama de amor viva” until he felt sufficient divine inspiration to undertake the task (L1, Prólogo, 1).

The Spirit instructs the soul through the direct experience of divine transcendental reality. John of the Cross intentionally avoids too detailed a commentary on his poetry so that the Spirit might complete the instruction of his readers. He observes in the commentary on the “Cántico espiritual” that “los dichos de amor es mejor declararlos en su anchura, para que cada uno de ellos se aproveche según su modo y caudal de espíritu” (“It is better to explain the utterances of love in their broadest sense so that each one may derive profit from them according to the mode and capacity of one’s own spirit.”) (C, Prólogo, 2). The reader’s own direct experience of the Divine allows him/her to intuit the transcendental experience that inspired the text. John asserts that the Spirit leads each reader to discern the meaning of the text in the light of that experience.

While theories of sacred rhetoric discuss the role of the Spirit in the writing and appreciation of texts, Maharishi Vedic Science similarly elucidates both through a description of the transforming power of pure consciousness, and the capacity of the human nervous system to experience pure consciousness and integrate it with all forms of activity, including communication through speech and written texts. Transcendental (or pure) Consciousness lies at the basis of speech, and therefore, language; speech and language have their source in it. Vedic grammarians, Maharishi explains, characterize speech as ranging from transcendental, unmanifest to most expressed, audible speech. The transcendental stage of speech or language, its subtlest level, is the level of *Parā*, in which the speaker, speech, and the process of producing speech are one, even though each of these three aspects of speech can be distinguished conceptually (Orme-Johnson, 1987, p. 343).

The purpose of language, Maharishi states, is to transmit the ideas of the speaker to the listener in such a way that they are equally and fully understood by them both. If pure consciousness is lively in the awareness of both speaker and listener, “then communication will be most meaningful and effective” (quoted in Orme-Johnson, 1987, p. 344). The degree of communication possible ultimately depends upon the degree of

expansion of consciousness in both the speaker and listener. Maharishi maintains that the full value of language and communication is available only if the consciousness of the listener and the speaker have “been expanded to the level where it is unbounded or nearly unbounded.” Only then is “the full value of the connection of the sign to its referent” (quoted in Orme-Johnson, 1987, pp. 344–345). The complete success of communication is assured, then, only when the full value of Transcendental Consciousness is available to both listener and speaker. To those who are “awake” to this fullness of Transcendental Consciousness, language reveals the fullness of its secrets. Maharishi (1971) quotes the *Âk Veda* (I.164.39) to emphasize that those who are not awake to Transcendental Consciousness are limited in what they can derive from language: “He who does not know Being, for him, what can the hymn accomplish?”

Just as John of the Cross sought to communicate his experience of the Divine through his poetry and prose commentaries, the Vedic *Âishis* also sought to express in spoken language, in the most manifest or *Baikhari* stage of speech, their cognitions of the *Para* stage, or transcendental reality. The authors of the Vedic hymns did not seek to demonstrate their creativity or originality through the hymns; they instead sought to make their experience of transcendental reality available to their listeners (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1971).

John of the Cross implies that the reader’s ability to intuit the fullness of the transcendental experience at the basis of his poetry can overcome the limitations of human language. Parallel to the Vedic concept, explained by Maharishi, that it is the experience of transcendence common to both speaker and listener that allows for full communication, John trusted that in the shared experience of direct contact with Divine inspiration, which has its source in the Spirit, the transcendental experience described by his poetry could be apprehended fully (C, Prólogo, 3).

### **Textual Meaning and the Process of Reading**

Parallels between Maharishi Vedic Science and the writings of John of the Cross further exist in the shared acknowledgement that listeners or readers derive different meanings from texts depending on their level of consciousness. The Vedic seers communicated their cognitions with symbolic language that lends itself to many different interpretations. Maharishi (1971) correlates different interpretations of language to different states of consciousness: “A word, a sound, will have a meaning, either correct or far from correct. It will have a meaning for every level of consciousness.” He points out that the Vedic word *Ushas*, which literally means dawn, can symbolically represent the end of the night or the dawn of spiritual liberation. The consciousness of the reader is the final determination as to whether the text will yield a profound or superficial meaning.

This notion of texts yielding multiple meanings can also be found in the tradition of sacred rhetoric in the West. The Bible’s words and images function as a complex system of signs not meant to be understood only on the literal level. The idea that the Bible, as an inspired text, has multiple levels of meaning lies behind a method known as the “fourfold interpretation” of biblical texts, a method for reading and studying

Scripture practiced in all monasteries in the West during the Middle Ages. This method of interpretation consists of drawing four levels of meaning from any given passage of Scripture: the literal, the moral, the allegorical, and the anagogical (or mystical) (McGinn, 1989, p. 15). Shuger (1988) observes: “Instead of expanding horizontally through a discursive sequence of words, biblical prose interweaves metaphor, type, allegory, and symbol to create a vertical movement from signifier to multiple levels of signification” (p. 168).

In the context of this tradition of biblical interpretation, John of the Cross acknowledges multiple meanings in his poetry and prose commentaries. Just as the Bible is considered to be inspired by the Spirit, texts which flow from experiences of transcendence are inspired by the Spirit as well (Shuger, 1988, p. 236). As noted above, John preferred his commentaries to be open-ended to make allowance for a reader’s varying levels of attainment (C, Prólogo, 2). In his recourse to scriptural guidance to explain his texts, he seldom made use of the literal level of meaning, preferring to draw out the allegorical and anagogical levels, levels which allow for an interpretation of the poetic text in terms of the direct experience of the Divine.

Through these subtler literary levels, John of the Cross achieved the fundamental purpose of his prose commentaries: a complete analysis and description of the direct transcendental experience of the Divine, the prerequisites of this experience, its characteristics, its theological justification, and its role in spiritual development. His two commentaries on the poem “Noche oscura” often seem only remotely related to the poem itself because of John’s de-emphasis of the literal in favor of the allegorical and anagogical. For example, the second book of the “Subida” purports to be a commentary on the second stanza of “Noche oscura.” In the opening stanzas of the poem, the poetic persona leaves the quiet house by secret ladder in the dark of night. For John of the Cross, the secret ladder refers to a process of interior recollection (“recogimiento interior”) allowing transcendence of all thoughts, images, and feelings, enabling the spiritual seeker to enter into interior darkness, to enjoy inner solitude. The quiet house is the stillness of the mind and body that no longer entertains any thought, image, or feeling (S2, 1, 2). The virtue of faith guides those who seek the Divine in interior darkness to enjoy direct contact with the transcendental being (S2, 1, 1 and S2, 9, 4).

John of the Cross regularly draws on scriptural passages to support his metaphor of finding the Divine in the darkness of faith. Referring to the darkness of faith as he does, he is alluding to the need for interior recollection. In addition to the usual meanings ascribed to faith such as belief or trust, John gives it a special meaning, pertaining to the direct transcendental experience of the Divine, beyond all thought, image, or feeling about God.

As John defines faith it is more than simple belief: it is a concept analogous to the natural tendency of the mind in Maharishi Vedic Science; it is the inner predisposition necessary for the experience of transcendence. Faith for John is the guide and light which gives the ability to let go of anything that can be understood, felt, or imagined (S2, 4, 2). It is a prerequisite for interior recollection of finer and less familiar levels of mental activity and the very absence of thought.<sup>8</sup> During the Transcendental Meditation technique, the practical technology of Maharishi Vedic Science (1966), it is the mind’s

natural tendency to effortlessly experience increasingly finer levels of thought, naturally attracted by the greater bliss available at finer levels of thinking, that takes the mind to transcendental Being (p. 55).

John of the Cross characterizes the experience of very subtle mental activity as “dark” because it is highly abstract and barely perceptible (S2, 14, 8). Faith is dark because it is associated with the wholly abstract experience of transcendence (S2, 1, 1). John compares the darkness covering Mount Sinai when Moses climbed it to speak to God to the darkness of faith, dark because the Divine is hidden (unmanifest) during the experience of the transcendent. Just as Moses had to climb up into the cloud on Mount Sinai in order to encounter God, in order to experience the Divine directly, one’s awareness must fathom the inner darkness beyond the mediation of distinct thoughts, images, and feelings (S2, 9, 3). One plunges into that darkness because “debajo de ella está Dios escondido” (“God is hidden under the cloud [of faith]”) (S2, 9, 1).

For John of the Cross, Elijah hiding his face in the presence of God (1Kgs 19.13), represents the blinding of one’s faculties in order to be free to receive the direct inflow of the Divine (S2, 8, 4). John explains elsewhere that such blinding is necessary because all thoughts, images, and feelings are finite and thus incapable of giving direct access to the infinite God. Since the wisdom of God “no cabe debajo de imagen ni forma, ni cabe debajo de inteligencia particular” (“has neither mode nor manner, neither does it have limits nor does it pertain to distinct and particular knowledge”), one’s awareness must be “pura y sencilla, no limitada ni atenida a alguna inteligencia particular, ni modificada con algún límite de forma, especie y imagen” (“pure and simple, unlimited and unattached to any particular knowledge, and unmodified by the boundaries of form, species, and image”) (S2, 16, 7) in order to experience it directly in its infinite nature.

According to John of the Cross, Psalm 139 asserts that “the night shall be my light” (Ps 139.11) (S2, 3, 6), referring to the dark night of faith that gives the light of divine nature to the soul. Jesus claimed that he came into the world so that those who see might become blind (Jn 9.39); John interprets this paradoxical statement as the willingness to blind one’s faculties by embracing the darkness of faith in order to experience God in transcendence (S2, 4, 7). John understands Jesus’s statement about the renouncing of all possessions, the denial of the ego to take up one’s personal cross (Mk 8:34), to be a call to transcend. He believed that the radical self-denial Jesus preached simply meant leaving behind all thought through interior recollection allowing for the direct experience of the Divine (S2, 7, 8). John of the Cross’s treatment of faith in his prose commentaries is just one of any number of examples that demonstrate his use of the allegorical and anagogical levels of textual interpretation.

### **Levels of Language**

In addition to acknowledging literal, more abstract, and finally spiritual levels of meaning in texts, John of the Cross also speaks of a level of language available only in transcendence. He urges his readers not to seek knowledge of the Divine on the gross level of meaning: “porque en la una manera se le comunica sabiduría de una o dos o tres verdades, etc., y en la otra se le comunica toda la Sabiduría de Dios generalmente, que

es el Hijo de Dios, que se comunica en fe” (“In the first kind of illumination, wisdom concerning one, two, or three truths, and so on, is communicated; in the second kind, all God’s Wisdom is communicated in general that is, the Son of God, who communicates himself to the soul in faith”) (S2, 29, 6). John describes transcendental experience as the language of the Divine and of nature because pure wisdom is communicated directly into the individual’s awareness. The direct experience of the Divine is “lenguaje de Dios al alma de puro espíritu a espíritu puro” (“the language of God to the soul, of Pure Spirit to pure spirit”) (N2, 17, 4); it is communication that takes place within transcendence.

In ordinary experience, according to John, consciousness and knowledge are separate facets of experience as are consciousness and communication; in the transcendent they are not differentiated. In keeping with the traditional understanding of the indivisibility of divine nature, consciousness, knowledge, and communication are aspects of one undivided reality in the transcendent. This understanding of pure wisdom parallels Maharishi’s (1986) three-in-one structure of pure knowledge: *Saṁhitā* or wholeness as “the collectedness of knower, known, and knowledge” in the self-referral state, . . . that all-powerful, immortal, infinite dynamism at the unmanifest basis of creation” (p. 27).

Whereas language is generally acknowledged to exist only on the spoken and mental levels, we have already seen that the Veda, as Maharishi (1972a) explains, maintains that language also exists on the intuitive and absolute levels. Vedic grammarians recognize a transcendental level as the most subtle of four levels of speech: spoken language (*Baikhari*), thought or mental speech (*Madhyamā*), pre-verbal feeling or intuition (*Pashyantī*), and transcendental speech (*Parā*).

Vedic grammarians uphold, Maharishi explains further, that by nature the absolute in its undivided state must possess language and consciousness in an inseparable wholeness as the home of all knowledge. The usual process of gaining knowledge, which attends to only one part of knowledge at a time, yields only partial knowledge because the knower, the means of gaining knowledge, and the object of knowledge are all separated. Vedic cognition, on the other hand, is a perfect means of gaining this knowledge because it reveals knowledge completely in the three-in-one wholeness of *Saṁhitā*. Maharishi (1971) describes the level of consciousness capable of perfect and true knowledge as *Ritam bharā pragyā*, a level of perception open only to truth. It gives “the knowledge of anything within the window of our own heart.” Hence, those who desire knowledge but do not have access to the transcendental level of speech are necessarily limited to incomplete knowledge.

Similarly, John of the Cross dismisses those who settle for concepts, images, or feelings about God because they possess only incomplete knowledge of the Divine: “todo lo que de Dios en esta vida se puede conocer, por mucho que sea, no es conocimiento de vero, porque es conocimiento en parte y muy remoto; mas conociéndole esencialmente es conocimiento de veras” (“All the knowledge of God possible in this life, however extensive it may be, is inadequate, for it is only partial knowledge and very remote. Essential knowledge of him is the real knowledge”) (C6, 5). The essential knowledge to which John alludes is the knowledge provided by direct transcendental experience of

the Divine. In the poem “Spiritual Canticle” the beloved pleads with her divine lover to send her no more messengers, but instead to present himself directly to her (C6, 5).

John of the Cross recognizes two types of knowledge: the ordinary knowledge gained when the intellect evaluates the information it receives from the senses, and pure wisdom infused into human awareness when it is united with divine transcendental reality. John advocates the path of knowledge that does not involve multiplying thoughts, feelings, and images (S2, 7, 8). Finite objects of perception cannot serve as means to unite the seeker with the Divine because “la Sabiduría de Dios, en que se ha de unir el entendimiento, ningún modo ni manera tiene ni cae debajo de algún límite ni inteligencia distinta y particularmente, porque totalmente es pura y sencilla” (“God’s wisdom to which the intellect must be united has neither mode nor manner, neither does it have limits nor does it pertain to distinct and particular knowledge, because it is totally pure and simple”) (S2, 16, 7). Therefore the seeker’s consciousness must be free of all objects of perception: “pura y sencilla, no limitada ni atenida a alguna inteligencia particular, ni modificada con algún límite de forma, especie y imagen; que, pues Dios no cabe debajo de imagen ni forma, ni cabe debajo de inteligencia particular, tampoco el alma, para caer en Dios, he de caer debajo de forma y inteligencia divina” (“The soul must also be pure and simple, unlimited, and unattached to any particular knowledge, and unmodified by the boundaries of form, species, and image. Since God cannot be encompassed by any image, form, or particular knowledge, in order to be united with Him the soul should not be limited by any particular form or knowledge”) (S2, 16, 7).

Just as John of the Cross insists that thoughts, images, and feelings, no matter how sublime, cannot substitute for the direct experience of the Divine, Maharishi (1969) asserts that while intellectual understanding about the nature of absolute Being is important, complete knowledge of Being can only be gained when intellectual understanding is supplemented by the direct experience of Being (p. 271). Maharishi explains that Vedic cognition takes place when the Rishi’s awareness is united with *Brahman*, the supreme transcendental reality. Then, alone, does it know truth. Vedic cognition is the self-revelation of reality that the Rishis translate into audible and intelligible words. Maharishi (1971) observes, “Vedic hymns are the expression of the intention of the Creator.” When one’s awareness is not established in Transcendental Consciousness, one is limited to the partial knowledge available through the more expressed stages of speech and language, the *Madhyamâ* and *Baikharî* levels (Orme-Johnson, 1987, p. 345).

The Western tradition also makes a distinction between pure knowledge and ordinary knowledge. Following Thomistic psychology, John of the Cross maintains that most human beings are limited to knowledge gained through the mediation of the senses (S2, 12, 4), which is necessarily incomplete. On the other hand, to the fortunate who can transcend all thoughts, images, and feelings, God directly infuses Godself into the awareness bypassing the senses (L3, 46). John considers this to be an experience of pure wisdom not only because it transcends words and differentiated cognitive content but because he identifies the Divine as the source of all knowledge and of the structure of creation.

Both the Vedic and Judeo-Christian traditions conceive of the divine word as transcendental language. In the Hebrew scriptures the divine word is known as *dabar*, a

substantial word uniting speech and event, sound giving rise to form (Ong, 1987, pp. 113, 182). In the Christian scriptures the divine word is the Logos or Christ. The Logos is the “primary ‘utterance’ of the Father, equally eternal,” the perfect representation of the Divine (Ong, 1987, p. 185). The notion of the Logos in the West parallels that of the “A” of *Agnimile* from the *Āk Veda*. Maharishi declares that “the entirety of creation, the wholeness of life” is contained in the first letter of *Āk Veda*, the “A” :

When the seed of the Absolute started to sprout, when the unmanifest value of pure Being, or pure existence, or pure intelligence, or Pure Consciousness starts to express, this first sprout contains the totality of the expression of the tree. (1972a)

Maharishi (1972a) explains that all of creation is expression in the form of language as much as in the objects to which language refers. The Laws of Nature that structure the forms of creation found in their unmanifest state in the Absolute, also structure the true names for the forms. The source of language and the source of the Laws of Nature are the same: the field of pure consciousness.

John of the Cross draws from the Christian understanding of Logos to characterize the experience of transcendence. He quotes Paul’s letter to the Hebrews that the Word is the splendor of God’s glory and the image of God’s substance (Heb 1:3) (C11, 12). Nothing comes into existence except through the Logos (John 1). Paul teaches that the Logos upholds all of creation through the power inherent in His Word (Heb 1:3). According to John, the direct experience of the Divine unites the seeker’s awareness with the Logos, the hidden and secret Word that inhabits the deepest recesses of the heart (C14, 15–17). This union is described as hearing the transcendental voice of the Divine in silence: “Una palabra habló el Padre, que fue su Hijo, y ésta habla siempre en eterno silencio y en silencio ha de ser oída del alma” (“The Father spoke one Word, which was his Son, and this Word he always speaks in eternal silence, and in silence must it be heard by the soul” (“Avisos” 99, “Sayings” 100).

### **Knowledge, Wisdom, and Light**

The direct apprehension of the Logos is associated with knowledge, wisdom, and light. John of the Cross follows closely the characterization of the Logos found in John the Evangelist’s gospel. He recalls the Evangelist’s assertion that through Christ all things were made (C5, 1). Through the direct experience of the Divine the recipient tastes the wisdom of God (C14–15, 4) and receives “una fuerte y copiosa comunicación de lo que El es en sí” (“a strong and overflowing communication and glimpse of what God is in himself”) (C14–15,5). Spiritual development is described as the recipient’s transformation into divine wisdom which is the Logos (C36, 7).

John the Evangelist drew on the concept of wisdom in the Hebrew scriptures to describe the Logos. According to the Hebrew scriptures, Wisdom had a role in creation; she issued forth from the mouth of God and helped to save human beings (Brown, 1988, p. 21). By associating the knowledge and wisdom gained through God’s transcendental speech to light, John of the Cross draws on the references to the Logos as light found in John the Evangelist’s gospel. John the Evangelist calls Christ the light of the world (Jn 9:5). John of the Cross maintains that the divine light of God’s being abides deep within

the soul (S2, 5, 6). When the awareness goes beyond finite objects of perception in meditation, it is transformed into transcendental light which is “la sencilla y pura sabiduría, que es el Hijo de Dios” (“simple and pure Wisdom, the Son of God”) (S2, 15, 4). The divine spouse of the “Cántico espiritual” is the divine sun whose light overshadows all lesser expressions of light (C22, 3).

A similar association of light, wisdom, and knowledge is found in the *Upanishads* from the Vedic tradition. *Swetasvatara Upanishad* relates the supreme Lord of creation to the light of full knowledge: “The light of thy knowledge shining, / There is nor day nor night” (Prabhavananda, p. 201). This verse suggests that seers gain complete wisdom, that is, “they alone are immortal” because they directly experience the Lord of Creation in their purified hearts (p. 201).

### Divine Communication

Both Maharishi and John of the Cross express that the transcendental level of existence communicates without mediation to those in direct contact with it. John of the Cross develops the notion of transcendental speech in his commentary on the fourteenth and fifteenth stanzas of the “Cántico espiritual” to indicate the nature of this communication. The beloved addresses these verses to her divine lover:

Mi amado, las montañas  
los valles solitarios nemorosos,  
las ínsulas extrañas,  
los ríos sonorosos  
el silbo de los aires amorosos

La noche sosegada  
en par de los levantes de la aurora  
la música callada  
la soledad sonora  
la cena que recrea y enamora

My beloved, the mountains, / and lonely wooded valleys, / strange islands, /  
and resounding rivers, / the whistling of love-stirring breezes, the tranquil night /  
at the time of the rising dawn, / silent music, / sounding solitude, / the supper  
that refreshes, and deepens

Pure wisdom is imparted through the direct infusion of divine being into the substance of the soul such that being, consciousness, knowledge, and communication cannot be separated: “Comunica al alma grandes cosas de sí, hermoseándola de grandeza y majestad y arreándola de dones y virtudes y vistiéndola de conocimiento y honra de Dios” (“God communicates to the soul great things about himself, beautifies her with grandeur and majesty, adorns her with gifts and virtues, and clothes her with the knowledge and honor of God”) (C14–15, 2).

These stanzas refer to communication that is not imparted through the senses, but rather to the communication that comes from a divine voice, beyond words, a whistle that imparts knowledge and transforms consciousness: “Y al silbo de estos aires llama una subidísima y sabrosísima inteligencia de Dios y de sus virtudes, la cual redundo en el entendimiento del

toque que hacen estas virtudes de Dios en la sustancia del alma” (“This most sublime and delightful knowledge of God and his attributes, which overflow into the intellect from the touch, which produce in the substance of the soul by these attributes of God, is called by the soul the whistling of these breezes”) (C14–15, 12). A hidden or transcendental word, “una palabra escondida,” imparts the very substance of God into the soul (C14–15, 18).

The sound of the rivers is the transcendental voice of the Divine: “es un ruido y voz espiritual que es sobre todo sonido y voz, la cual voz priva toda otra voz, y su sonido excede todos los sonidos del mundo” (“[it] is a spiritual clamor and outcry, louder than any other sound or call. This cry prevails against all other cries and its sound exceeds all the sounds of the world”) (C14–15, 9). The sound embodies the divine attributes: “es voz espiritual y no trae esos otros sonidos corporales ni la pena y molestia de ellos, sino grandeza, fuerza, poder y deleite y gloria” (“[it] is a spiritual cry that does not contain these other material sounds, or their pain and disturbance, but rather grandeur, strength, power, delight, and glory”) (C14–15, 10). It is an infinite voice that cannot be separated from the effects it produces in its recipient: la voz espiritual es el efecto que ella hace en el alma” (“the spiritual voice is the effect produced in the spirit”) (C14–15, 10).

The oxymorons “la música callada” (“silent music”) and “la soledad sonora” (“sounding solitude”) express the paradox of communication within divine oneness, a communication which not only reveals the divine attributes but also complete knowledge of creation. The participation of all of creation in divine nature creates a transcendental music whose harmonies come from the voices of all the beings and laws of nature. The “música callada” or silent music provides “inteligencia sosegada y quieta” (“tranquil and quiet knowledge”) in the silence of the transcendent (C14–15, 25). In the sounding solitude one cognizes the relationship of all creatures to the Creator: “ve que cada una en su manera engrandece a Dios, teniendo en sí a Dios según su capacidad; y así, todas estas voces hacen una voz de música de grandeza de Dios y sabiduría y ciencia admirable.” (“She beholds that each in its own way, bearing God within itself according to its capacity, magnifies God. And thus all these voices form one voice of music praising the grandeur, wisdom, and wonderful knowledge of God”) (C14–15, 27). All creatures attest to the greatness of God because they have some knowledge of God’s voice. John cites Wisdom 1.7: “este mundo que contiene todas las cosas que él hizo tiene ciencia de voz” (“this world which contains all things has knowledge of the voice”) of God (C14–15, 27).

### **Knowledge and Language as One**

John of the Cross characterizes the pure wisdom of transcendence as the secret and hidden word of God (C14–15, 15) which the divine spouse gives freely to the beloved soul. His observations about transcendental speech and sound parallel the insights afforded by Maharishi Vedic Science. While John of the Cross describes the effects of the direct experience of the Divine as those of the hidden, secret transcendental word that imparts God’s substance into the soul (C14–15, 18), Maharishi (1969) describes pure awareness experienced during the Transcendental Meditation technique as “the infusion of cosmic Being into the individual mind” (p. 144). Maharishi (1971) calls transcendental Being “that basic unmanifest sound” which is the foundation of all words. Maharishi observes further that “the knowledge of the Veda is not gained by reading the letters of the Veda” (*The Relationship*). He explains

Veda is not knowledgeable on the basis of the words; it is knowable on the basis of the foundation of all words, that basic unmanifest sound, pure Being, consciousness. The knowledge of the Veda becomes a living reality without having to go through the reading of the words of the Veda, by gaining familiarity with that essential element from which the words of the Vedas are made, transcendental Pure Consciousness.” (1971)

John understands transcendental sound or speech to be one with what it signifies (C14–15, 10). Similarly, the relationship between name and form is central to an understanding of Vedic cognition. According to Maharishi Vedic Science (1971), name and form have a common basis in Being or Pure Consciousness. The name for any thing (form) that exists is an impulse of energy that emerges from transcendental Being: “Form is a more solidified structure of that impulse, and therefore, the name is the more delicate expression of form.” Maharishi (1971) goes on to explain, “The form which is indicated by the name, is actually contained in the structure of the name.”

The Vedic hymns or Vedic expressions are not words created by poets or philosophers; rather they are the exact expressions of the relationship between the Creator and creation that emerge with creation and structure it. Maharishi observes: “Vedic hymns are the expression of the intention of the Creator.” The unmanifest has the intention to become manifest, “And then that intention progressed and out sprang the whole creation, each item from those syllables.” Maharishi explains the reality of those hymns by the Vedic seers:

They are the cognitions, and cognitions of the reality or truth. Truth of what? Truth of the mechanics of nature, how the creation comes, and how it evolves. (1971)

Maharishi Vedic Science recognizes the intimate relationship between name and form, language and consciousness, and language and knowledge on the cosmic level of existence.

Just as Maharishi Vedic Science understands creation to emerge from the intention of the unmanifest to manifest itself, in John of the Cross’s tradition, the Word of God is also considered to be God’s revelation of transcendent Godself in texts of the Bible, in the Logos or Christ, and in creation itself. John asserts that divine attributes and the complete knowledge of creation are imparted in the direct experience of the Divine (C14–15, 27). In John’s description of the experience of sound within transcendence (analogous to Maharishi’s depiction of Vedic cognition), the transcendental sound reveals to the beloved that all aspects of creation are grounded in one fundamental transcendental reality and reflect in some measure the glory of the Creator (C14–15, 27).

The theme of God as Word is central to John of the Cross’s discussion of spiritual development through direct experience of the Divine in transcendence. The seeker aspires to transcend human language and unite with the divine Word (C1, 5) in order to hear the hidden voice of God (C14–15, 17). John describes Jesus as God’s only Word—*”todo nos lo habló junto y de una vez en esta sola Palabra, y no tiene más que hablar”* (“He spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word and he has no more to say”) (S2, 22, 3). The Son speaks this word forever in eternal silence and in silence must be heard (“Avisos” 99, “Sayings” 100).

Just as the Word in the Christian tradition perfectly represents the transcendent

Godhead and is responsible for the existence and maintenance of creation, Maharishi (1971) maintains that transcendental Being is the basic unmanifest sound which underlies all of creation. In the first sprout of creation from transcendental Being is contained the totality of the expressed value of creation. When a person's awareness is awake in Transcendental Consciousness "then one is the knower of all, the whole field of speech, the whole field of existence" (1972a).

Thus both in Maharishi Vedic Science and in the writings of John of the Cross, the power and efficacy of language is a function of the speaker's and the listener's ability to access the transcendental ground of being and its transcendental speech. Both the Christian tradition of sacred rhetoric of which John of the Cross is a part, and the ancient Vedic tradition as brought out by Maharishi Vedic Science, take into account the manifest and unmanifest levels of speech. These parallels between John of the Cross and the Vedic tradition on divine language and the possibility of transcending the limitations of human language, when elucidated by Maharishi, demonstrate the profundity of John of the Cross's insights into the relationship between transcendental Being and transcendental speech, as well as the link between thought, audible speech, written texts, and the experience of Transcendental Consciousness.

Taken together, Maharishi Vedic Science and John of the Cross present a new paradigm with which to read and assess literature and linguistic studies. Linguistic-based theories of literature presently in vogue are the product of a fragmented view of human life, a view which does not take into account the transcendental level of existence (in this case, in the areas of speech and language). John and Maharishi Vedic Science, on the other hand, have separately asserted that only when the writer and reader "know" the deepest level of language, what Vedic Science calls the *Parā* or transcendental level, do they know the wholeness and essence of language. The Transcendental Meditation technique, the applied value of Maharishi Vedic Science, has now made this experience of the transcendent universally available. By knowing language from this deepest field of life writers will be able to communicate to readers their most refined thinking. Readers in turn will have the capacity to receive not only all that writers express, but also the transcendental, unexpressed foundation of language. Knowledge of this field for John transforms the literary experience into a spiritual exercise; for Maharishi it transforms it into an act of evolution towards higher states of consciousness. This is the precious contribution that Divine or Transcendental Consciousness brings to literature and language.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>In Christian theology, contemplation refers to the direct experience of the Divine, unmediated by thought, image, or feeling. Maharishi uses the term in his Vedic Science to refer to the activity of thinking about a topic. For Maharishi, contemplation means developing an idea or an image on the surface level of the mind in which "one's attention goes from meaning to meaning, fathoming newer avenues of knowledge" using the mind's conscious thinking capacity. According to Maharishi (1972, lesson 3), when the mind is contemplating it is engaged in ordinary thinking and does not transcend to deeper levels. The Transcendental Meditation technique is "a method of experiencing the

source of thought, the field of pure creative intelligence, in an effortless, systematic manner” through the natural and spontaneous refinement of thought until the mind “settles down to a state of no activity, but with full awareness.” For John of the Cross the terms are reversed: contemplation refers to the direct transcendental experience of the Divine and meditation refers to ideals, feelings, and images *about* the Divine (which Maharishi would call a kind of contemplation).

<sup>2</sup>Protestant thinkers argued that Christians gain salvation through faith in Christ alone, whereas Catholics maintained that while faith is important for salvation, it must be accompanied by works. Consult “The Mental World of Martin Luther” in Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform: 1250–1550*.

<sup>3</sup>This is the judgment of Jorge Guillen and Damaso Alonso, for example, who are themselves distinguished contemporary poets from Spain (pp. 79–80, Alonso pp. 176–79).

<sup>4</sup>The quotations of John of the Cross’s works are taken from *Vida y obras de San Juan de la Cruz*. The following abbreviations are used: S = “Subida del Monte Carmelo,” N = “Noche oscura,” C = “Cantico espiritual,” and L = “Llama de amor viva,” followed by the book, chapter, and verse number. The English translations are taken from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*.

<sup>5</sup>*Gita* refers to citations from *Maharishi Mahesh Yogi on the Bhagavad-Gita: A New Translation and Commentary with Sanskrit Text*.

<sup>6</sup>For a review of the relevant scientific research on the validation of Transcendental Consciousness and its effects gained through the Transcendental Meditation technique see Alexander, Boyer, Alexander, 1987, pp. 108–112.

<sup>7</sup>For a detailed discussion of the parallels between the experience of pure consciousness in the Transcendental Meditation technique and its role in human development with John of the Cross’s understanding about the direct experience of the Divine, see Toft (1983) “San Juan de la Cruz.”

<sup>8</sup>Maharishi links faith to the process of transcending in the mind in his commentary on Chapter Four, verse 39 of the Bhagavad-Gita: “Meditation is a process which provides increasing charm at every step on the way to the Transcendent. The experience of this charm causes faith to grow” (p. 317). Rather than faith providing confidence in the existence of the transcendent, the experience of the transcendent gives rise to faith. John of the Cross likens the movement of human awareness toward the transcendent (the attractive pull of God on human awareness) to that of a stone falling rapidly toward its center (C12, 1).

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