

# MARTINISM: THE WAY OF THE HEART

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*In this article RCUI Instructor and long time Martinist member Steven Armstrong presents the Way of the Heart as it has been practiced in various traditions throughout history including in the Traditional Martinist Order.*



Central and foundational to Martinism and the Traditional Martinist Order is *La Voie Cardiaque*, The Way of the Heart. Far from being emotional or sentimental, this is one of the most widespread spiritual paths on the planet, embraced by countless spiritualities. And it is effective.

The Way of the Heart is part of what some scholars call the Sophia Tradition. *Sophia*, or Wisdom, has many meanings. One of these is the Gnostic Myth of Sophia, in which she is an *Aeon*, emanated from the One, who falls from grace and is one of the ways that the material world is created. But that is not the Sophia that we will be dealing with in this study, although there are connections to our Sophia.<sup>1</sup>

## Sophia

The Sophia of the Way of the Heart is a feminine image of the Divine. One of her earliest appearances is in Plato's *Protagoras*, where Wisdom is one of the four cardinal virtues. Of course, her name is part of the whole field of philosophy, which means love of Wisdom.

Even more strikingly, Wisdom is widely present in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Hebrew word for Wisdom is *Chokhmah*, familiar to students of Kabbalah as the second of the Sephirot. When the Jewish community of Alexandria translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in the late second century BCE by order of Ptolemy

II, Chokhmah was translated as Sophia. This translation is known as the *Septuagint*.

Perhaps her most famous appearance is in Proverbs 8:22-36; 9:1-6:

*Adonai* [the Lord] made me as the beginning of his way,  
the first of his ancient works.

I was appointed before the world,  
before the start, before the earth's beginnings.

When I was brought forth, there were no ocean depths,  
no springs brimming with water.

I was brought forth before the hills,  
before the mountains had settled in place;

he had not yet made the earth, the fields,

or even the earth's first grains of dust.

When he established the heavens, I was there.

When he drew the horizon's circle on the deep,

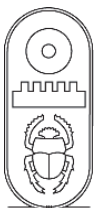
when he set the skies above in place,

when the fountains of the deep poured forth,

when he prescribed boundaries for the sea,

so that its water would not transgress his command,

when he marked out the foundations of the earth,



I was with him as someone he could trust.

For me, every day was pure delight,  
as I played in his presence all the time,  
playing everywhere on his earth,  
and delighting to be with humankind.

Therefore, children, listen to me:  
happy are those who keep my ways.  
Hear instruction, and grow wise;  
do not refuse it.

How happy the person who listens to me,  
who watches daily at my gates  
and waits outside my doors.  
For he who finds me finds life  
and obtains the favor of *Adonai*.  
But he who misses me harms himself;  
all who hate me love death.

Wisdom has built herself a house;  
she has carved her seven pillars.  
She has prepared her food, spiced her wine,  
and she has set her table.  
She has sent out her young girls [with invitations]:  
she calls from the heights of the city,  
“Whoever is unsure of himself, turn in here!”  
To someone weak-willed she says,  
“Come and eat my food!  
Drink the wine I have mixed!  
Don’t stay unsure of yourself, but live!  
Walk in the way of understanding!”

In addition to this passage, Wisdom is a major theme in the Psalms, the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, the Book of Wisdom, the Wisdom of Sirach, and Baruch in the Septuagint. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, *Balev Tabor* (The Blessings of the Wise), published in an original translation in the *Ros-*

*icrucian Digest* in 2007,<sup>2</sup> praise Wisdom and her followers. As an Essene document, this would have been well known to John the Baptist and the Master Yeshua.

Judaism has enshrined this concept of the feminine Divine manifestation as *Shekhinah*, both in Eternity and here below. That is why each Rosicrucian Temple has a Shekhinah at its center, the Divine presence within the Temple.

Christianity continued this Wisdom Tradition. Eastern Orthodox, Byzantine and Roman Catholics, and the Reformed Churches (Anglicans and Protestants) all consider Sophia as a feminine manifestation of the Divine. In Orthodoxy, Icons of Holy Sophia have all of the earmarks of the Icons of Christ. Indeed, as in Neoplatonism, especially in Philo, Sophia and the Logos are linked, perhaps even the same. Holy Wisdom is Sophia/Logos incarnate in the Christ. She is seen as Divine. In the nineteenth century, some Russian mystical theologians (Sophiologists) even attempted to find a way of integrating Sophia as one



of the Persons of the Trinity. Of course, the central Church of the Roman Empire was *Hagia Sophia* in Constantinople.

### The Spiritual Marriage

Among mystics of all these Christian groups, the ultimate goal is the spiritual marriage of the soul with Sophia. Christian Mystics as diverse as Jacob Boehme (Lutheran), Hildegard von Bingen (Catholic), and Vladimir Solovyev and Sergius Bulgakov (Orthodox) all worked toward this goal.

Nor is this Wisdom tradition confined to Judaism and Christianity. Through Neoplatonism, Sophia has a central role in Islam, especially Sufism. The *Bezels of Wisdom*, often attributed to Ibn Arabi, speaks of the “transcendent divine wisdom.”<sup>3</sup>

Broadly speaking, the Sophia Tradition in the West is known as *Theosophy* (Divine Wisdom).<sup>4</sup> (This is not to be confused with the Theosophical Society, which is a spiritual organization which began in the late nineteenth century in India.) It has parallels in practically all world spiritual traditions as we will soon see.

Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, whose teachings and approaches are transmitted in the Traditional Martinist Order, was a major theosophist in eighteenth century France. He held Jacob Boehme as his “second teacher,” and learned German so that he could translate his works into French. One of the treasures carried on in the Martinist Order is the primary practice of the Divine Wisdom Tradition: The Prayer of the Heart.

### The Prayer of the Heart

The Prayer of the Heart is as old as humanity itself. Students visiting the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum in San Jose often ask why the ancient Egyptians disposed of the brain but kept the heart and replaced it during the mummification process.

Certainly the Egyptians understood the vital role of the brain during life. We know they practiced trepanning, a surgical procedure to drill through the skull to relieve pressure on the brain. We have ancient remains where the hole had grown shut, evidence of the success of this procedure. Furthermore, they knew that certain kinds of head injuries could cause loss of speech and other disorders.

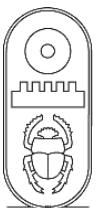
They also knew, however, that the brain was only needed on this plane of existence as a kind of interface between the soul and the body. Both here and in the afterlife, it is the Heart that is the true center of Wisdom, of the human person. The Heart (or more properly, the Heart Center, one of the seven major psychic centers), is the true seat of consciousness, and is the Center which can most directly commune with the Divine rhythm of all that is, manifest and unmanifest.<sup>5</sup>

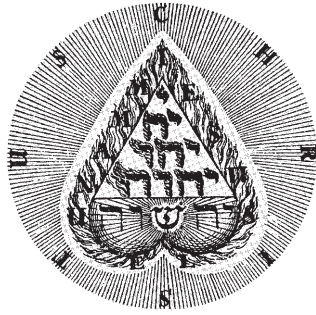
The tool used to awaken the Heart to this rhythm, and to attune the whole person with it, is known in Martinism, and in the West in general, as The Prayer of the Heart. Its most basic manifestation is deep rhythmic breathing, while mentally repeating a name or a mantra which represents the deepest mysticism of the practitioner, breathing in and breathing out.

At the beginning, an aspirant will do this for periods of time, consciously. For those who practice this ancient art assiduously, it becomes second nature, and becomes part of the fabric of their lives, following the injunction to “pray ceaselessly.” Let us take a moment to review the manifestation of The Prayer of the Heart in several world traditions.

### Heart-Centered Prayer in the Abrahamic Traditions

In Judaism, this heart-centered prayer consists of using these methods while mentally reciting the Divine Names while





meditating. In Kabbalah, this is usually the meditative recitation of the 72 Names of God from the *Sepher Yezirah*.

Christian heart-centered prayer is most commonly practiced by Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine Catholics, who use the phrase, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner,” or simply the Name “Jesus.” This ancient practice, part of the mystical discipline known as *Hesychasm* (Being Quiet), was made popular in the West with the publication of a translation of *The Way of a Pilgrim*<sup>6</sup> in 1931 from the Russian original dating from at least 1884. The simple narrative is the story of a Russian pilgrim and his use of the Prayer of the Heart (known in Christianity more commonly as “The Jesus Prayer”). It is often practiced using a knotted bead rope known as *Chotkis* or *Komboskini*. The Roman Catholic Rosary is a slightly different variation of this.

In Western literature, J.D. Salinger used *The Way of a Pilgrim* and this prayer as the central theme in his 1961 short story collection, *Franny and Zooey*, further popularizing this form of meditation. He compares it to usages in Hinduism and Buddhism. Today, not only Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine Catholics, but also all Catholics, Anglicans, and many mainstream Protestants use this ancient heart-centered prayer.

In addition to this, the Western Mediaeval practice of *Lectio Divina* (Divine Reading) is still widely practiced today. In this approach, the practitioner rhythmically breathes in and out while very

slowly mentally reading a prayer, or a passage from Scripture, sometimes repeating one word or phrase for many iterations. Originally a Monastic practice, Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, refers to something very similar in “The Three Methods of Praying” in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Through the work of the Society of Jesus, this has become better known today.

Islam’s heart practice is known as *Dhikr* or *Zikr*, meaning invocation. It is the repeated and rhythmic recitation, usually mentally, of phrases with which one “Remembers Allah.” Many sections of the Qur’an recommend this practice highly. Most typically citations from the Qur’an or exclamations such as “God is Greatest!” or “There is no God but God!”<sup>7</sup> are used.

### Practices in the East and Beyond

*Japa* is the form that the heart prayer takes in Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism. Usually accompanied by the use of a 108-bead chain, the practitioner repeats a mantra or Divine name mentally. Common mantras are Aum, Hare Krishna, and Om Mani Padme Hum. *Japa* means “to utter with a low voice, repeat internally.”

In Pure Land Buddhism, *Nianfo* or *Nembutsu* is the repetitive prayer for “mindfulness of the Buddha.” It consists most commonly of the rhythmic repetition of the name of *Amitabha Buddha: Namo Amitabhaya*, “Homage to Infinite Light.” The practice dates from at least the first century BCE. It is also translated into the languages of the culture of the practitioner.

Sikhs also practice repetition of the Divine Name with 108-bead chains, and members of the Baha’i tradition follow a similar practice. Shamanism often uses repetitive formulas in its many meditative practices as well.

### Esoteric Traditions

While Rosicrucians do not have a direct analogue with the Prayer of the Heart,

the use of Vowel Sounds and the Lost Word are quite similar.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the Mystics of the Essene/Carmelite/Rosicrucian Vizcaino expedition to Carmel/Monterey in 1602 were well initiated into this form of deep mental meditation. The first Rosicrucian Expedition to North America certainly had heart-centered Mystical prayer as its center.

The second round of Rosicrucian work in North America also had strong ties to this type of Meditation. The Ephrata Cloister and Johannes Kelpius were steeped in the traditions of Pietism, which is allied to deep mystical heart prayer. Shakers and modern-day Quakers often practice this kind of mental prayer.

Martinists practice the Prayer of the Heart in its direct and most basic form, using the name of the Grand Architect of the Universe in the mental repetition. This is commemorated each year near the Winter Solstice.

In fact, this practice is one of the most powerful ways to bring about the goal devoutly sought by Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin and all Martinists:

... the only initiation I advocate and search for with all the ardor of my soul is the one through which we can enter into the heart of God and make God's heart enter our own, there to make an indissoluble marriage which makes us friend, brother, and spouse of our Divine Repairer.

There is no other mystery to arrive at this holy initiation than to go more and more down into the depths of our being, and not let go till we can bring forth the living vivifying root, because then all the fruit which we ought to bear, according to our kind, will be produced within and without us naturally, as we see occurs with our earthly trees, because they are attached to their particular root, and do not cease to draw up its sap.<sup>9</sup>

It should be no surprise that with the central place that the concepts of "Wisdom" and "Word" have in the Primordial Tradition, and as many traditions consider that the universe was created by the utterance of a word or sound, that the Prayer of the Heart would hold the central place in Martinism, and indeed, in so many mystical paths.




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## ENDNOTES

1. For other conceptions of Sophia, see Caitlin Matthews, *Sophia: Goddess of Wisdom, Bride of God*. (Wheaton: Quest, 2001).
2. Dead Sea Scrolls. "Balev Tabor: The Blessings of the Wise" (4Q525:1.1-2, 2.1-12). Translated by Sean Eyer. Rosicrucian Digest 86:2 (2007): 32. [http://rosicrucian.org/publications/digest/digest2\\_2007/online%20digest/articles/05\\_balev\\_tahor.pdf](http://rosicrucian.org/publications/digest/digest2_2007/online%20digest/articles/05_balev_tahor.pdf)
3. Ibn Arabi, *The Pearls of Wisdom*. Translated by Mukhtar Hussain Ali. <http://www.universaltheosophy.com/sacred-texts/the-pearls-of-wisdom/>
4. The best introduction to Western Theosophy (Divine Wisdom Tradition) is three books by Arthur Versluis: *Theosophia: Hidden Dimensions of Christianity* (Hudson: Lindisfarne, 1994); *Wisdom's Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition*. Suny Series in Western Esoteric Traditions (Albany NY: State University of New York Press: 1999); *Wisdom's Book: The Sophia Anthology* (St Paul: Paragon House, 2000). With the references in these works, the student will also be able to connect with Islamic and Jewish theosophy.
5. See the excellent discussion of this in Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming An Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2003).
6. *The Way of a Pilgrim and A Pilgrim Continues His Way* (1991) Olga Savin (translator), Thomas Hopko (foreword) (Boston: Shambhala 2001).
7. Perhaps the greatest Western scholar of Islamic Mysticism was Henry Corbin (1903-1978). A fine introduction to his work may be found in Tom Cheetham, *The World Turned Inside Out: Henry Corbin and Islamic Mysticism* (New Orleans: Spring Journal, 2003).
8. Two fine Rosicrucian studies on the Way of the Heart and related topics are by the Quebecois Rose+Croix University International instructor Aline Charest: *La Priere du coeur* (Paris: Diffusion Rosicrucienne, 2008); *Les grandes voies de l'amour* (Paris: Diffusion Rosicrucienne, 2003).
9. Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, "The Way of the Heart," letter of June 19, 1797 to Kirchner, Baron of Liebstorf. Published in *Pantacle 2* (2002): 24-25 (San Jose, English Grand Lodge for the Americas, 2002).

