

The Dearness Code

R (Chandra) Chandrasekhar

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A chance meeting with Sol

My bosom friend, Solus “Sol” Simkin, unexpectedly turned up at a seminar I was attending one afternoon. We had not seen each other for almost three months, and the chance encounter was most gratifying. Having made eye contact, we tacitly agreed to walk and talk after the seminar was over.

And that was when I said, “Sol, I had not realized how precious you are to me. We haven’t met for a dozen weeks now, and I would normally have thought nothing of it, busy as both of us are. But the moment I laid my eyes upon you, all the warm emotions came tumbling into my heart. It might sound a little *schmaltzy*, but I must tell you how literally dear you are to me.”

Sol’s eyes gleamed at my admission, but he was far too reserved to express reciprocal feelings. Instead, he asked me, “What is it that makes someone or something dear? Is it wealth, or utility, or relationship, or an indecipherable longing, or something else entirely? Have you ever thought of that?”

“Let us spend the little time we have together before dusk, to enjoy the shift in the rhythm of the world, as day *melds* into night. The *ponderous, cerebral* question you just asked me can wait for another day,” I replied.

“Quite so,” replied Sol as we strode briskly, enjoying the animated birdsong that celebrates the passing of every day, as light turns to dark.

“May I insist, however, that we return to the question of dearness when we meet next,” Sol said as we walked in silent eloquence, enjoying each other’s company.

We met again three weeks later, on a crisp and sunny morning, to resume our discussion on dearness. This time, I was the dominant conversationalist, with Sol voicing only short interjections or questions.¹

The scriptures of Sanātana Dharma

I started off by saying “What makes something dear is the nucleus of a celebrated dialogue in the scriptures of India. First, the context.

¹ For completeness, the dialogue is given in transliterated Sanskrit and in English translation in my account below.

“The four **Vedas** provide the foundation for Sanātana Dharma, often called Hinduism. The **Upaniṣads** comprise the concluding portion of the Vedas, and provide the philosophical basis for the way of life enjoined by Sanātana Dharma.

“Interestingly, the Upaniṣads generally assume the Question-and-Answer (Q & A) format, suggestive of contemporary forums on the Web. Typically, a student will ask an earnest philosophical question of his or her guide, who is often a Ṛṣi,² or seer of Truth. The latter will answer. That answer will spawn more questions, and so on and so forth.

“The initial question thus generates a dialogue in which the issue is dissected anatomically, with the Q & A volley going back and forth, as in an intense ping-pong match. The dialogue resolves into silence when a statement of finality is reached. For those in the know—the pundits—the **denouement** can be as exciting as the conclusion of a mystery thriller, or a riveting sports match.” Sol took it all in with rapt attention.

The Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue

“I now come to the subject under discussion”, I resumed.

“**Yājñavalkya** was a towering Vedic spiritual figure, and one of the most celebrated Ṛṣis of Sanātana Dharma. The Vedas have preserved many of his utterances in various books. Among these is the **Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad** [1–6].³ It is the oldest and largest of the Upaniṣads, and lays the foundation for a unique and unitary view of the world.

“The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (2:4) features one of the most profound dialogues between two people. The questioner is the contemplatively inclined **Maitreyī**, one of the two wives of Yājñavalkya. The person answering is, of course, our illustrious sage.

The Prologue

“Yājñavalkya starts out [6] by declaring that he would like to renounce the world. Thus, he wishes to divide his estate between his two wives, so that they would be catered for after his departure from the role of householder and provider.⁴

maitreyīti hovāca yājñavalkyaḥ, udyāsyānvā are’hamasmāsthānādasmi, hanta te’nayā kātyāy-
anyāntaṃ karavāṇīti || 1 ||

‘Maitreyī, my dear,’ said Yājñavalkya, ‘I am going to renounce this life.’ Allow me to settle
between you and Kātyāyanī.⁵ (1)

“The introspective Maitreyī immediately asks whether wealth would confer immortality on her.

sa hovāca maitreyī, yannu ma iyaṃ bhagoḥ sarvā pṛthivī vittena pūrṇā syātkathaṃ tenāmṛtā
syāmīti; neti hovāca yājñavalkyaḥ, yathaivopakaraṇavatāṃ jīvitāṃ tathaiva te jīvitāṃ syāt,
amṛtatvasya tu nāśāsti vitteneti || 2 ||

² Pronounced /ṛ.ṣi/.

³ Bṛhadāraṇyaka literally means “Great Forest”. Upaniṣad means “Sitting Near (the teacher)”. Its name conjures up the vision of a student sitting close to the teacher and discussing philosophy in the sylvan solitude of a great forest.

⁴ The dialogue occurs in Chapter 2 Section 4 of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad and is repeated substantially in Chapter 4 Section 5.

⁵ Yājñavalkya’s second wife is called Kātyāyanī.

Thereupon Maitreyī said, ‘Sir, if indeed this whole earth full of wealth be mine, shall I be immortal through that?’ ‘No,’ replied Yājñavalkya, ‘your life will be just like that of people who have plenty of things, but there is no hope of immortality through wealth.’ (2)



Figure 1: Sage Yājñavalkya and his wife Maitreyī having their famous dialogue on dearness and immortality.

“Wait a minute!” interjected Sol. “What has immortality got to do with the husband renouncing the world? The wife might be shocked by his sudden announcement. Very likely, she will miss him, and that could lead to the sorrow of parting or even grief. But immortality? No, I don’t buy it. If this is the way the dialogue single-steps its way, I think it feels contrived rather than an account of what really transpired.”

“I think I can allay your doubts with a slight detour, Sol,” I said. The loss of the husband’s companionship will leave a void in her life. But Maitreyī is an introvert. Like a Chess Grand Master, she has already started thinking several moves ahead.

“Her thought process would have run like this. My husband is dear to me and I will miss his presence. What is most dear to me after him? Is it my body? My mind? My life?

“And here, Sol, I will crave your indulgence to make a small detour into Shakespeare-land.”

Maitreyī’s question and Shakespeare’s Macbeth

“In his plays, the bard often uses his characters—even minor ones—to make profound statements. In Macbeth, there is an exchange about how the Thane of Cawdor met his death that is relevant to our discussion. As Malcolm recounts it in Macbeth (I:4):”

...nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving it; he died
As one that had been studied in his death

To throw away the dearest thing he owed⁶
As 'twere a careless trifle.

“I fail to see how this is relevant to the Upanishadic dialogue under discussion,” interjected Sol.

“Patience, for a moment please, Sol,” I replied.

“Shakespeare is describing how the traitorous Thane of Cawdor faced his own death: bravely, without fear, and with dignity. He ‘[threw] away the dearest thing he owed (owned) as 'twere a careless trifle.’ *The revelation here is that the dearest thing any of us owns is our own life.*”

“I grant you that,” admitted Sol, perhaps a little hesitantly.

“Moreover,” I continued, “the Thane of Cawdor was *renouncing his life itself*, whereas Yājñavalkya was *renouncing the householder’s life*. Surely, the similarity does not escape you!

“This little excursion brings us back to Maitreyī and what she must have gone through in her mind.”

The dearest thing

“Since she believed in the finality of Yājñavalkya’s resolve to renounce the world, Maitreyī immediately caught on to the ‘dearest thing’ *she owned*—her own life. If she could not forestall the absence of Yājñavalkya, at least could she prolong her own existence to infinity?

“Like a flash of lightning, Maitreyī asks if Yājñavalkya’s wealth would confer immortality on her, to which Yājñavalkya, as we have seen, replies in the negative. And this is the start of a breathtaking volley of implied questions and answers on dearness that should thrill any philosopher or logician.”

Dearness examined threadbare

“The dialogue continues thus:

sa hovāca maitreyī, yenāhaṃ nāmṛtā syāṃ kimahaṃ tena kuryām? yadeva bhagavānveda
tadeva me brūhīti || 3 ||

Then Maitreyī said, ‘What shall I do with that which will not make me immortal? Tell me, sir, of that alone which you know (to be the only means of immortality).’ (3)

“We have in Maitreyī an uncompromising seeker of the ultimate verity for whom no platitudinous dilutions of raw truth will suffice. She *wants* immortality, and implicitly, the means to it.

sa hovāca yājñavalkyaḥ, priyā batāre naḥ satī priyaṃ bhāṣase, ehi, āssva, vyākhyāsyāmi te,
vyācaṣṇasya tu me nididhyāsaveti || 4 ||

Yājñavalkya said, ‘My dear, you have been my beloved (even before), and you say what is after my heart. Come, take your seat, I will explain it to you. As I explain it, meditate (on its meaning).’ (4)

“Every teacher loves an earnest, eager, and engaged student, and Yājñavalkya is no exception. He calls Maitreyī ‘(especially) dear’ and this sets the tone for the dialogue on dearness. In keeping

⁶ The word *owed* had the meaning of *owned* in the time of Shakespeare.

with the ardour of the student, his instruction is for her to contemplate on his words. It is no armchair philosophy, but one of active experiential exploration through solitary self-effort.

“Verse 2:4.5 below embodies the kernel of this dialogue. Yājñyavalkya examines threadbare the relationships that lead to dearness in descending order of closeness.

sa hovāca:

na vā are patyuh kāmāya patiḥ priyo bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya patiḥ priyo bhavati ।
na vā are jāyāyai kāmāya jāyā priyā bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya jāyā priyā bhavati ।
na vā are pūtrāṇaṃ kāmāya putrāḥ priyā bhavanti, ātmanastu kāmāya putrāḥ priyā bhavanti ।
na vā are vittasya kāmāya vittaṃ priyaṃ bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya vittaṃ priyaṃ bhavati ।
na vā are brahmaṇaḥ kāmāya brahma priyaṃ bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya brahma priyaṃ bhavati ।
na vā are kṣatrasya kāmāya kṣatraṃ priyaṃ bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya kṣatraṃ priyaṃ bhavati ।
na vā are lokānaṃ kāmāya lokāḥ priyā bhavanti, ātmanastu kāmāya lokāḥ priyā bhavanti ।
na vā are devānaṃ kāmāya devāḥ priyā bhavanti, ātmanastu kāmāya devāḥ priyā bhavanti ।
na vā are bhūtānaṃ kāmāya bhūtāni priyāṇi bhavanti, ātmanastu kāmāya bhūtāni priyāṇi bhavanti ।
na vā are sarvasya kāmāya sarvaṃ priyaṃ bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṃ priyaṃ bhavati ।
ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo maitreyi, ātmano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matyā vijñānenedaṃ sarvaṃ viditam ॥ 5 ॥

He said:

It is not for the sake of the husband, my dear, that he is loved, but for one’s own sake that he is loved.

It is not for the sake of the wife, my dear, that she is loved, but for one’s own sake that she is loved.

It is not for the sake of the sons, my dear, that they are loved, but for one’s own sake that they are loved.

It is not for the sake of wealth, my dear, that it is loved, but for one’s own sake that it is loved.

It is not for the sake of the Brāhmaṇa, my dear, that he is loved, but for one’s own sake that he is loved.

It is not for the sake of the Kṣatriya, my dear, that he is loved, but for one’s own sake that he is loved.

It is not for the sake of the worlds, my dear, that they are loved, but for one’s own sake that they are loved.

It is not for the sake of the gods, my dear, that they are loved, but for one’s own sake that they are loved.

It is not for the sake of the beings, my dear, that they are loved, but for one’s own sake that they are loved.

It is not for the sake of all, my dear, that all is loved, but for one’s own sake that it is loved.

The Self, my dear Maitreyī, should be realised—should be seen, heard of, reflected on, and meditated upon. By the realisation of the Self, my dear, through seeing, hearing, reflection, and meditation, all this is known. (5)

“And in each case, he emphatically states that the object of dearness is dear *not for its own sake* but because of the *self* to whom it is dear.

“The word *ātman* meaning *self* requires some clarification here. The *ātman* is the irreducible consciousness residing in the observer. We are not talking about deep sleep or anaesthesia, but about that, without which a physical being becomes a corpse. That complex, when peeled of all outer layers, is the self.

Paradoxically, although the self is closer than the skin of the observer, to cognize it in oneself requires prolonged ‘seeing, hearing, reflection, and meditation’. This spiritual prescription is to be practised until one realizes oneself.

“Yājñavalkya goads Maitreyī to put in the effort to transform the truth of what he has said into her own experience. This realization does not come cheap. But when it *is* one’s own experience the jackpot has been hit. There is no need to be convinced after one has experienced; one truly knows.

The dearness theorem

“But the true bombshell comes *before* he explains how to cognize the self in oneself. Yājñavalkya states his ‘theorem’ on dearness:

ātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṃ priyaṃ bhavati |
For the sake of the self, everything is dear.

“This is one of the most mathematically precise statements on how love arises and operates. Loosely stated:

“I love you because I *am* you. All creation is an elaboration of my own self. There is no other.

“The centrality of the self and the importance of knowing oneself are corollaries that follow from this realization. Yājñavalkya exhorts Maitreyī to exert herself to achieve this, not as mere knowledge that can be parroted, but as unshakeable realization, founded on actual experience.

“The importance of this exchange is such that it is repeated substantially in Chapter 4 of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad—a reiteration which these terse texts do not indulge in much.”

“Whew! That was one mouthful, or should I say brainful?” exclaimed Sol as I concluded my verbal account.

“I will now rest my narration from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, Sol,” I replied. “Your brain needs rest!”

But Sol persisted.

Sol’s rejoinder

“The hardest part for me to accept is that there nothing else except my self in all of Creation. If that were true, why do I not experience it?”

“We are all under a magical spell called *maya*,” I clarified. “All human beings have drunk the potion of forgetfulness of who we really are. And so we flounder through life. Is that fair? It does not seem so. But yet, here we are dilly-dallying our way through life, without so much as a clue about who or what we really are.

“Perhaps the most palatable analogy I know of is this: when we sleep and dream at night, we are totally engrossed in the dream and believe it to be true in every detail. It is only upon waking up that we effortlessly dissolve the dream and start experiencing our workaday world.⁷”

“Yājñyavalkya is egging Maitreyī on to wake up from the grand illusion of *maya*, our waking life. She would then automatically behold her own *ātman* in everything, and would have unlocked the dearness code at its very fount.”

“You have made a valiant effort at convincing me, but I still nurse within me serious doubts about what is taken as established truth,” Sol rebutted mournfully. “It is a bit **fantabulous**, to be honest.”

A knotty issue

“Yājñyavalkya’s reply is cryptic and opaque to me,” said Sol. “I can follow his *hierarchy of dearness* and can relate to it. But how does that lead to literally *everything* being dear because of the self? Where does the self enter the discourse? I know that you have explained the self by saying that upon death, the self departs the body. What *is* this self?”

“I hear you, Sol,” I said. “Great philosophical profundity is hidden within Yājñyavalkya’s reply. Some principles from science as we know it today might give you a scaffolding on which to hang some plausibility arguments in this most arcane of discussions. I will start with a thought experiment in Physics to start the ball rolling.”

The struck and the unstruck bell

“Consider two large identical bells like those used in temples or churches. Let them be hung, say, five metres apart, without any physical connection between the two bells. If one bell is struck, the energy from the struck bell travels as sound waves and causes the other bell also to vibrate, even though—apart from the air—there is no material connection between the two bells.

“How does the remote, unstruck bell vibrate in sympathy with the struck bell? Through the medium of the air, which transmits the sound waves or acoustic energy, from the first bell to the second.

“But, hold on. Why doesn’t every structure also vibrate like the second unstruck bell?” I continued.

“**Resonance**,” quipped Sol.

“In a word, yes,” I replied. Resonance happens in life all the time. Every physical object has one or more resonant frequencies. When energy vibrating at a resonant frequency hits another object with the same resonant frequency, it too will vibrate *at that identical frequency*. Objects that do not possess *the same* resonant frequency will not so vibrate.

“This is how our unstruck second bell started vibrating sympathetically with the first struck bell, whereas other objects within the same space remained unperturbed by this *energy exchange*.”

Spiritual Resonance

“O! I see now. The dearness alluded to by Yājñyavalkya is a phenomenon of resonance: spiritual resonance to be precise,” said Sol.

⁷ Which is itself *another* dream.

“You have intuited the concept, Sol,” I said with exhilaration.

“We know that an electron in an **iron** atom and an electron in a **rubidium** atom are made of the same stuff, whatever that stuff is.⁸ This is the basis for the **Periodic Table**: that electrons, protons, and neutrons are the *same* in all elements, even if their energy states and conformations within atoms and molecules are different, giving rise to the **phantasmagoria** of the physical universe, with its repetitive patterns.⁹

“In like fashion, suppose for a moment, that there is one universal consciousness that pervades all creation. Let us call it the self, or *ātman*, to accord with Yājñyavalkya’s terminology. Every perceived object—animate and inanimate—is pervaded by this consciousness. Stone, plant, animal, human, saint: everyone is *constructed out of this one consciousness* even if the outward expressions are different—like iron and rubidium.

“If accept this, Sol, granting Yājñyavalkya his thesis, then we may extrapolate from physics to metaphysics to claim that *spiritual resonance* is the spiritual counterpart to physical resonance.

“One hop, step, and jump, and we may say that the perceiver sees himself or herself in *everything* that is perceived, and this recognition leads to spiritual resonance, which is accompanied by the perceived object being dear to the perceiver. If I see myself in you, I cannot help but love you.”

“By Medusa’s gaze!” I see it clearly for the first time, exclaimed Sol, with uncharacteristic fervour.

“If there is only one, and none else, then there is no *other* to love,” I continued.

“All binary emotional relationships coalesce into a love for one’s own expansive self. There is no scope for negativity *because there is no other*, no duality. Just one lucent ocean of consciousness holding all creation within itself. And even that is verbosity for something better expressed through the silence of pure awareness.¹⁰

“Every religious exhortation becomes vacuous—a null expression because the absence of ‘otherness’ leads to an oceanic wholeness where distinctions and scriptural prescriptions dissolve into axiomatic truth.”

“I think Yājñyavalkya’s reply was a masterstroke wherein he gives a reply from the standpoint of non-duality to what is essentially a question founded in duality,” Sol said with grave thoughtfulness. “Dearness pre-supposes duality.”

“It reminds me of Einstein’s apocryphal quote that a problem cannot be solved at the level at which it arose. But if one adopts a more inclusive point-of-view, the conundrum may be resolved most satisfactorily.

“I shall henceforth approach the Upaniṣads with a reverence founded on my own epiphany, even if it is only intellectual at present,” concluded Sol.

⁸ We do not know what that stuff is: particles, probability clouds, entangled information, vibrating strings, or whatever your fancy dictates!

⁹ The arrangement of the Periodic Table follows the atomic number of the elements, which is the number of protons in that element. For an electrically neutral atom, the number of protons equals the number of electrons.

¹⁰ There is no one *else* to talk to.

Summary of the Dearness Code

I bumped into Sol three weeks later at our favourite haunt—the **Orchard Valley Coffee Roastery**. I could tell that the echoes of our last discussion were still reverberating in his mind when he opened abruptly with, “I think I can summarize the theoretical basis of the Dearness Code we last talked about. I have done additional research that seems to me to be watertight.”

“Do tell me, Sol,” I replied.

“Simply put,” said Sol:

1. “Just as all matter is made up of electrons, protons, and neutrons, and ultimately, of **quarks** and **leptons**, so also, behind the facade of matter is a unitary consciousness permeating all forms, both inanimate and animate. *All matter is cut from this same cloth of one consciousness.* This is a vital realized and established fact, not a mere scientific hypothesis. If it were not for the illusion of separateness, we would all be aware of this truth.¹¹
2. “When I feel that you are dear to me, I have recognized that you are me but in another, apparently separate form. That recognition triggers a *sympathetic resonance* because I love myself above all else. This sympathetic resonance manifests as ‘You are dear to me.’
3. “Stated poetically, ‘Dearness happens when the myself in me recognizes and celebrates the myself in you as being *identical*. Love and dearness are but synonyms of this profound realization.’”

“Yes, indeed, Sol,” I replied. You have decoded dearness and love in one magnificent sweep.”

For further exploration

Two ideas introduced in this blog are unlikely to be familiar to the casual reader. The first is resonance.

The second, introduced by Sol, after he did some serious thinking about dearness, is the idea of quarks and leptons—to replace my simple analogy with electrons, protons, and neutrons—as the fundamental constituents of matter.

Of these, resonance is easier to understand because its effects can be perceived. Quarks and leptons exhibit behaviour that is so strange and far removed from our everyday perception that the suggestion of an underlying consciousness behind the facade of matter does not sound so far-fetched after all!¹²

Resonance

Resonance underlies very many physical phenomena: mechanical, electrical, acoustic, optical, etc. The **Schumann resonances** apply to the Earth itself. So, it is not so far-fetched to extrapolate from the physical to the non-physical, and to characterize the recognition of the underlying unitary consciousness as an example of spiritual resonance.

¹¹ Many who have had **Near Death Experiences** (NDEs) attest to an effortless experience of this unitary consciousness upon separation from the physical body. YouTube is replete with such first-person accounts.

¹² I am deliberately not suggesting the reader to explore quarks and leptons for fear of inducing a headache!

The experiment of two temple bells resonating is a difficult one to replicate in the laboratory. Tuning forks are more manageable, and are used instead of bells. There is also a well-known claim that a high-pitched operatic voice can shatter a wine glass through resonance. I give below links to several YouTube videos that will help the lay reader better grasp the physics of resonance in an enjoyable and lively fashion.

1. [Sympathetic Vibrations in RamZland!](#) is an easy-to-follow explanation of resonance with quick and sharp experiments. It is less than four minutes long and recommended if you have no clue about what resonance is [7].
2. [Resonance Explained](#) is a slightly more formal exploration of resonance, with cute animations. It is a little over five minutes and remains accessible while staying true to the physics [8].
3. The third video comes from [MythBusters](#) who are known for testing myths with live experiments, presented in a self-deprecating, light-hearted manner. There is a video entitled [Breaking Glass: Can a Voice Shatter Crystal?](#). It is a little long at just over seven minutes. If you are impatient to see the glass break, fast-forward to around 5:49 and watch it for yourself [9]!

Acknowledgements and Feedback

I am grateful to the many sources, available online, that I have consulted to ensure the accuracy of this blog. Any errors of commission or omission are mine alone. Kindly [drop me an email](#) with your comments and corrections.

A PDF version of this article is [available for download here](#):

<https://swanlotus.netlify.app/blogs/the-dearness-code.pdf>

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