

The Contentment Dividend: Meditations for Realizing Your True Self

Michael Goddard

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Encouraging seekers toward union with the divine and experiences of awe, wonder, and love, The Contentment Dividend is a supportive spiritual guide.

For neophytes and experienced seekers alike, Michael Goddard's spiritual self-help guide *The Contentment Dividend* introduces interior meditation in terms of its spiritual rewards—union with the divine and experiences of awe, wonder, and love.

Using multiple names for the divine, including LoveSource, Shabd, Nam, Sound Current, and Audible God Stream, the book asserts that human beings are “sparks of God” with the innate hunger to return to their source. The closer a seeker gets to that source, it says, the more their karmic debts are erased. Its brief chapters trade between arguing for a form of attuned spiritual practice and imparting instructions for tuning into the divine presence. They are designed to be accessible to believers across faiths who are interested in the rich territory of the silent, sacred self.

This is personable, if sometimes vague and unsurprising, work. There are direct addresses to the audience, with Goddard referring to his readers as “dear friend.” As a guide, though, Goddard assumes an aura of detachment; other seekers are told to cultivate this too. Audiences are also encouraged to avoid saying, doing, or writing anything that could cause suffering, with the idea that good and bad karma accumulate through numerous reincarnations. Distractions—including sensory pleasures, fear and negativity, and looking outward for affirmation—are advised against; greater thought about the repercussions of one's actions is promoted. There's also familiar advice regarding daily meditations and connecting with mentors (the book advises choosing a person “whose soul has risen beyond the mental realms and realized its Godhood while living in the physical”). Instances of fresh prose do arise, though they are somewhat delayed; midway through the book, there's a list of a cornucopia of delights in a single extraordinary sentence and a short, alluring chapter that is limited to a single declaration, “The soul adores God.”

Despite its focus on general spiritual guidance, the book is at its most centered (and least generally applicable) when it comes to its memoir portions. It details unhappiness in Goddard's early life; he endured emotional, physical, sexual, and verbal abuse. In adulthood, he struggled to be able to support himself as a writer; he was also marginalized in spiritual circles, with his religion of choice rejecting his sexual orientation. The book details his work to find a life partner as well. Still, his personal struggles are couched in positive terms, credited with leading him to greater enlightenment and peace, moving toward his ultimate preparation to let go of his life and meet “the grand departure” head-on.

A compelling spiritual guide, *The Contentment Dividend* is filled with recommendations for deepening one's connection to the divine.

DEBORAH TOBOLA (March 27, 2024)

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