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## **TWO METHODS OF CONTEMPLATION: YOGA AND HESYCHAST PRAYER**

**An Exercise in Comparative Religion\***

Using Arvind Sharmas's comparative method of *reciprocal illumination*, this essay examines two contemplative methods, the Hindu yogic, as defined in Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra*, and the *hesychast*, as developed primarily within the Eastern Christian monastic tradition. Despite differences in the overall theological context, the similarities in several aspects of the technique are worth noting as they point out that the practice, rather than theory, reveals the common ground – a similar understanding of the nature of human mind, and its inner workings.

*Key words:*

comparative religion, contemplation, Hinduism; Yoga-sūtra, Eastern Christianity, hesychasm; Jesus Prayer

“Comparison is the hallmark of the study of religion,” notes Arvind Sharma, “and the *raison d'être* of that form of it called comparative religion.”<sup>1</sup> Despite its critics, the comparative method remains very important in the academic study of religion, which has increasingly become multitradeational and polymethodic in nature. Sharma's method of *reciprocal illumination*, in which “comparison is not meant to serve some other end, but is used to clarify the items under comparison themselves,”<sup>2</sup> is especially suited for the study at hand, in which the data from two religious tradition, Hindu and Eastern Christian, are not used to valorize them in any way, but rather to put them in a dialogical relation so that the very exercise of comparative examining may enhance our overall and/or specific understanding of

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\* This paper is part of author's book project on topics in comparative religion.

<sup>1</sup> Arvind Sharma, *Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology* (Albany: SUNY, 2005), 247.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

religious phenomena we are looking at. In other words, our goal is not to establish theological or ontological superiority of one method over the other (theological and ontological reductionism), nor is the purpose of the comparison to simply show similarities between the two ways. Rather, the intention is to see if one contemplative practice can shed light onto another so that the experience of each, as described by the practitioners, “the insiders”, may become more intelligible to those who study them – hence reciprocal illumination.

Yet in our case, right at the beginning, we are reminded by Theophanis the Monk, one of the spiritual masters of hesychasm, who says in his Ladder of Divine Graces that “*experience teaches one, not words.*”<sup>3</sup> Thus our task of comparative effort takes place in the shadow of the question of how to approach our subject knowing that it is grounded in practice and that means experience rather than solely on speculation, or divorced from it. The answer to this question, however, is only going to be sporadic, more as a sign of awareness of the problem than an attempt at tackling it. If the knowledge in question is gained through experience, and for yogis and Eastern monks alike, experience is a way of knowing, all we can know as scholars is *about* the experience. In that sense it is “about” that we are talking about.

Since in our times the term yoga has acquired various popular connotations, one feels compelled to specify the context in which it will be used here. My discussion on yoga is based on one of the classical texts of Indian philosophy called *Yoga-sūtra* ascribed to the author Patañjali.<sup>4</sup> Scholars commonly distinguish six schools or ‘views’ (*darśanas*) in Indian philosophical tradition, yoga being one of them. It is often paired with another school called *sāṃkhya*,<sup>5</sup> which is interesting for us here only in that Patañjali uses its two key concepts in his own elaboration of yogic contemplative practice: those terms are *puruṣa*, often translated as pure consciousness or spirit, and *prakṛti*, material nature.<sup>6</sup> Another interesting idea from *sāṃkhya* is its theory of evolution of unconscious matter, which takes place or can take place only through the presence of conscious *puruṣa*, who is only a witness, but who mysteriously becomes entangled in and thus bound by material nature falling into the fatal error of identifying its being with it. Material nature is understood as energy in potential form, always ready to flow out and actualize itself. The term that defines the relationship between pure consciousness and material nature according to both philosophical views is that of ‘ignorance’ (*avidyā*). While *sāṃkhya*’s answer as to how this ignorance should be removed is more theoretical

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<sup>3</sup> *Philokalia*, vol. III, G.E.H. Palmer, et.al eds. (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995), 67 [emphasis added].

<sup>4</sup> The dates on Patañjali waver as far apart as the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE (thus identifying him with the famous Sanskrit grammarian Patañjali, the author of *Mahābhāṣya*), and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE (based on the textual analysis). The issue of dating is not of any significance for us here though.

<sup>5</sup> The first proponent of *sāṃkhya* is said to be Kapila (ca. 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE), but the first complete text of this philosophical school, *Sāṃkhya-kārika* of Īśvaraḥṣṇa, was composed several centuries later (ca 3<sup>rd</sup> century). The other two philosophical pairs are *nyāya-vaiśeṣika* and *pūrva mīmāṃsa-uttara mīmāṃsa*; the latter is better known as *vedānta*.

<sup>6</sup> The two can also be discussed in terms of subject – object.

in nature, Patañjali's concern in his *Yoga-sūtra* is more pragmatic, making yoga more of a path-philosophy in which speculative and practical go hand in hand. In words of one scholar, "Patañjali is not engaged in a search for new knowledge. Rather, he seeks a new perspective on the nature of knowing..."<sup>7</sup> Patañjali thus provides a *method*, a liberating discipline by means of which yogi realizes an absolute calm, beyond words and our ordinary ways of knowing. Some would call such experience and/or state of mind mystical; others would deny it any mystical dimension.<sup>8</sup> However, the question can be legitimately asked – how do we (scholars) know whether it is one or the other? Isn't the question as much about what we understand as "knowledge" as it is what we hold experience itself to be?

The text of *Yoga-sūtra*, its 195 aphorisms (*sūtras*), is divided into four parts: the first (*samādhi pāda*) contains the famous definition of yoga, and refers to a blissful state (*samādhi*) wherein yogi witnesses his true nature. The second (*sādhana pāda*), which contains his equally famous eight limbs of yoga, i.e., the discipline of freedom itself. The third, (*vibhūti pāda*) discusses the supra-normal powers that develop as a side effect of the ascetic effort and the dangers and subtle challenges they pose for yogi; and lastly, in the fourth part (*kaivalya pāda*), Patañjali describes the nature of spiritual liberation and the reality of the transcendental self. At the very beginning of *Yoga-sūtra*, Patañjali defines yoga as: *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*. Namely, yoga is cessation (*nirodha*) of the turning (*vṛtti*) of the thought (*citta*). The notion of *citta* is very complex indeed; it is commonly translated as mind or thought, but in reality it comprises the totality of mental processes including thought, memory, dream, imagination, associations, and the like. In other words, yoga is inhibition of the oscillations (*vṛtti*) of mental substance. The oscillations of mental substance, such as thought and imagination, for example, take place automatically and are opposite in nature to concentration, which is the first of the three steps on an inner ladder of ascent to the state of complete spiritual emancipation (*samādhi*). However, before one gets to the three inner steps, there are five outer ones to contend with. Or, to be more precise, there are three strictly outer, and two mediating between the outer and inner. They together constitute the famous eight limbs of yoga: The first limb (*yama*) is a commitment (vow) to live by five moral principles. The second limb (*niyama*) pertains to observances while the third to the body posture (*asana*). The fourth limb is breath control (*prāṇāyāma*); the fifth is the withdrawal of senses (*pratyāhāra*). Finally, there are three inner limbs, which define yogic contemplative practice in the narrow sense: concentration (*dhāraṇa*), meditation (*dhyāna*) and contemplation (*samādhi*). I will return to these in a moment.

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Stoler Miller, *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996), ix.

<sup>8</sup> Thus Barbara Miller, for example, says that what Patañjali talks about is "far from the mystical ecstasy of poets like St. John of the Cross or the ritual ecstasy of the shaman in the trance." *Ibid.*, x). The problem here, and otherwise when such claims are made, is that the statement implies that the scholar knows what St. John of the Cross experienced in contradistinction to a yogi.

In the hesychast tradition of contemplative practice – a spiritual trend which coincides with the very beginnings of monasticism in Christian East, but which was codified as a specific method of prayer in the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries – the key term to is the *hesychia* itself. The etymology of the word is not certain, but we encounter it in the use of ancient Greek philosophers as the state of calmness, the cessation of external causes of trouble or the absence of inner agitation.<sup>9</sup> In the Old Testament the similar meaning is found and in the New Testament, as in the Gospel of Luke (14:4) it is also used in the sense of being silent, or in reference to observation of the “Sabbath rest” (Lk: 23:56).<sup>10</sup> However, the current understanding of hesychia in Orthodoxy draws primarily on its interpretation in the writings of the holy fathers from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century, assembled in *The Philokalia*, that anthology of the Orthodox spirituality, (compiled in the 18<sup>th</sup> century), or from the writings inspired by it. There hesychia means stillness: “a state of inner tranquility or mental quietude and concentration which arises in conjunction with, and is deepened by the practice of pure prayer and the guarding of heart and intellect.”<sup>11</sup> However, in *The Philokalia* stillness is sometimes seen as “a virtue, sometimes as a method of the control of senses and the acquisition of the virtues, and sometimes as the fruit or end result of ascetic practice and self-mastery.”<sup>12</sup> Since this stillness is discussed primarily in relation to mind or intellect, *nous*, another complex concept, we have to look into its meaning first. *Nous* does not correspond to the current use of intellect as a discursive rationality grounded in sense perception, but rather it is a spiritual intellect which has a potential for a direct apprehension of the eternal truths about God and the meaning of the created world (*gnosis*).

However, in order for one to ponder the eternal truths, the intellect has to be induced to come back into one’s self and be enclosed within the body. It was precisely this aspect of prayer practice which involved body that became an object of attacks by theologians from the west, such as Barlaam of Calabria, resulting in Gregory Palamas’ famous defense of those who devotedly practice a life of stillness, namely the hesychasts.<sup>13</sup> From the stand point of our topic, it is this psychosomatic aspect of the hesychast practice that links this method of contemplation with the one outlined in *Yoga-sutra* of Patanjali. Of the holy fathers who paid special attention to the psycho-somatic technique we can mention Nicephorus the Hesychast (the Solitary), Gregory of Sinai, and Pseudo-Symeon. Even though the descriptions of the hesychast techniques may vary the prayer that they all have in mind is the prayer of the heart, also known as Jesus Prayer. The full version of this

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<sup>9</sup> Tomaš Špidlik, *Prayer: The Spirituality of Christian East*, vol. 2 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 321.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *The Philokalia*, vol.1 (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1984), 364.

<sup>12</sup> See Vincent Rossi, *Presence, Participation, Performance* in *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and Christian East*, James Cutsinger, ed. (Bloomington, in: World Wisdom, 2002), 74.

<sup>13</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, the 14<sup>th</sup> century Greek father, Archbishop of Thessalonica, systematized main ideas and practice of the hesychasts; also known for his doctrine of essence and energies of God common in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

prayer is: *Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*. In practice, however, a shorter form is often used: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me*. Other elements that are commonly associated with this prayer are: a) a quiet, possibly darkened place (monastic cell, for example) to keep the mind from distractions, b) a low chair on which the monk sits, “because attentive prayer requires a restful position,”<sup>14</sup> and c) especially breathing, which is the most important aspect of the technique, but of course not of the prayer itself. It is done in such a way that while sitting the chin or beard is pressed against the chest while the eyes and attention are brought to the center of one’s belly, the navel. This is why the critics of the hesychasts called them ‘navel-psychics’ with the clear intention, as Gregory Palamas notes, to slender and disqualify them. He and many Orthodox spiritual masters before and after, have pointed out that it is not at all “out of place to teach beginners in particular to look within themselves and to bring their intellect within themselves by means of their breathing.”<sup>15</sup> Palamas goes on to explain breathing as a method helpful to those whose intellect, due to inexperience, continually “darts away” as soon as it has been focused on something.

“That is why some teachers recommend them to pay attention to the exhalation and inhalation of their breath, and to restrain it a little, so that while they are watching it the intellect, too, may be held in check. This they should do until they advance with God’s help to a higher stage and are able to prevent their intellect from going out to external things, to keep it uncompounded, and to gather it into what St. Dionysius calls a state of ‘unified concentration.’ This control of the breathing may, indeed, be regarded as a spontaneous consequence of paying attention to the intellect; for the breath is always quietly inhaled and exhaled at moments of intense concentration, especially in the case of those who practice stillness both bodily and mentally.”<sup>16</sup>

With this Palamas not only justifies the use of breathing in Jesus Prayer, but also explains that it is only a physical method, a preparation of the body for true inner prayer – the prayer of the heart. The heart that occupies central place in Orthodox ‘spiritual anatomy’ does not refer to the faculty of being passionate or emotional in the usual sense of the word. As the Coptic monk Makarios of Egypt in his *Spiritual Homilies* observes, heart is a place of unity of human person as a whole – body, soul and spirit:

The heart governs and reigns over the whole bodily organism; and when grace possesses the pasturages of the heart, it rules over all the members and the thoughts. For there, in the heart, is the intellect (*nous*), and all the thoughts of the soul and its expectation; and in this way grace penetrates also to all members of the body.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Špidlik, 341.

<sup>15</sup> Gregory Palamas, *Philokalia*, vol. IV, 337.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Kallistos Ware, *How do we Enter the Heart?*, in *Paths to the Heart*, 12.

St. Makarios, however, also advances the idea of heart as an unique place of human and divine encounter and as such he sees it as highly ambiguous: it is open below “to the abyss of the subconscious” or, in Makarian language, to “dragons and lions” and “gaping chasm;” but it is also open above “to the mystical supra-consciousness” and the Divine Light, “the angels,” “life” “treasures of grace” – “the Kingdom” itself.<sup>18</sup>

Into that heart, thus conceived, Theophan the Recluse, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian spiritual writer, invites a practitioner to descend. “You must descend from your head into your heart. At present your thoughts of God are in your head. And God himself is, as it were, outside of you, and so your prayer and other spiritual exercises remain exterior.”<sup>19</sup> Here the Russian *staretz* makes an important remark about a common human misapprehension of God as an “outsider vis-à-vis one’s self. An yet, the ascent to God is in reality the descent into one’s heart, where the Kingdom of God is to be found by the seeker in accordance with the Gospel’s “The kingdom of God does not come with observations; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Lk. 17:20-21).<sup>20</sup> If we look more closely at what is being suggested here we see that the Biblical assertion that the Kingdom is not grasped by “observation” suggesting external, tangible means; the notions of “See here” and “See there” likewise suggest the tendency to be misled, looking from outside, or distracted, looking from the standpoint of human mind. In the quote above, Gregory Palamas warns of this tendency of mind/intellect (*nous*) to “go out to external things” i.e., be outwardly dispersed through the senses. Hence the ascetic effort consists in bringing *nous* back within itself, into the heart.

Why is breathing suggested as a method to achieve this, and why heart as the final destination? Is there anything that the two share? What breathing and heart do have in common is **rhythm**. While breathing reflects rhythmic patterns of breath exchange between inside and outside, thus mediating between the two, through exhalation and inhalation, the heart reflects and directs the rhythmic circulation within, by pumping blood in and out of the organ. In terms of prayer practice we see the shift from cerebral system to the rhythmic system, because the rhythmic system is natural, and when focused on makes concentration effortless, as natural as breathing or beating of the heart. Linking the words of prayer, such as in Jesus Prayer, with the rhythm of one’s breathing makes the prayer itself flow naturally. Mental repetition of the prayer in the end gives way to wordless prayer, or silence – which is the inner state of stillness or hesychia, which resembles the surface of the calm water reflecting, in the experience of some hesychasts, the uncreated light of God.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14 and 15.

<sup>19</sup> Theophan the Recluse in *The Art of Prayer* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1977), 183.

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, as noted in the commentary to this Gospel passage “the Greek word for ‘within you’ can also be translated as ‘among you’ or ‘in your midst’” suggesting that the notions of “in” and “out” melt away with grasping of the mystery of the Kingdom. See *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 183.

Now if we step back for a moment and look at these two contemplative traditions side by side we shall inevitably notice a number of similarities in methods that accomplish the respective final goals. However, the contexts in which those methods are used are defined in radically different terms. Before we come to that, though, I would like to briefly touch on some similarities in contemplative technique and let certain aspects of one tradition reflect on the other. For example, in Orthodox tradition the spiritual way is usually divided into three stages, variously called by different fathers: the first one is *praktiki* or *catharsis* or purification; the second is *physiki* or *photismos* or illumination, and the third one is *theologia* or *henosis* or union. The first one, purification, is external in nature and is defined as practice of virtues. In Patañjali's eightfold scheme, that we have outlined earlier, we can see that the first three limbs are external too. (1) *Respecting five moral principles*: non-violence, truthfulness, abjuration from stealing, celibacy and absence of greed, certainly resonates with the ten commandments corresponding, more or less directly, to some of them; (2) *Observances*, such as ascetic practices (fasting), the study of sacred lore, and dedication to the Lord of Yoga,<sup>21</sup> correspond to the fasts (purification of body), vigils and prayers (purification of mind), on the one hand, and feasts of the liturgical calendar in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. (3) *Posture* is also a shared concept but, interestingly, completely differently conceived. Even though Patañjali does not specify what he means by posture other than saying that it should be comfortable and relaxed ("steady and easy" are his words), the tradition holds that what is meant by yogic posture is the so called lotus posture, i.e., sitting cross-legged with the back straight, often with eyes closed and generally relaxed body. The hesychasts, as we have seen, talk about curved back, chin on the chest – a circular body position, so to speak. (4) *Breathing* or *breath control* is understood and used in both traditions in a similar way: in *Yoga-sūtra* it is said: "The modification of breath in exhalation, inhalation, and retention is perceptible as deep and shallow breathing regulated by where the breath is held, for how long, and for how many cycles."<sup>22</sup> We have seen from Palamas' quote above that hesychasts understand breath control in this way, too. Difference comes in later developments, because in yogic tradition breathing exercises become much more elaborate taking life of their own, not necessarily related to contemplative practice in narrow sense, but in conjunction with further development of the posture practice (*haṭha-yoga*). In Eastern Church, however, breath control has been primarily associated with the hesychast practice and almost exclusively confined to select monastic circles. (5) The yogic practice of the *withdrawal of senses*, "when each sense organ severs contact with its objects"<sup>23</sup> is almost identical to the hesychast understanding of the same phenomenon and is variously expressed by different church fathers: "put away your

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<sup>21</sup> It is not clear who "Lord of yoga" is; the term *īśvara* refers to "lord" but here it seems to be more in the sense of an archetypal yogi, who is a model, so to say, to the aspirant. Certainly, dedication to the Lord of Yoga implies yogi's commitment to the liberating discipline. See Miller, *Yoga*, 55-56.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, *Yoga*, 58.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

physical senses (hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch),” or “enclose yourself in your body”, or “shut the doors of your perception,” etc.

Now, when it comes to the last, and most important, three limbs of Patañjali’s *Yoga-sūtra* (6,7, and 8), *concentration, meditation and pure contemplation*, the definitions are in characteristically *sūtra* style, brief and simple and yet right on target. Thus, “concentration is binding thought in one place. Meditation is focusing on a single conceptual flow. Pure contemplation is meditation that illumines the object alone, as if the subject were devoid of intrinsic form.”<sup>24</sup> These are the internal limbs of yoga, and yet, compared to what Patañjali calls *seedless contemplation (nirbīja samādhi)*, they too are external. Namely, seedless contemplation is the culmination of the transformative practice of the whole yogic endeavor resulting in the liberation of the spirit (*puruṣa*) from its entanglement with the material nature. This is described in the concluding aphorisms of the *Yoga-sūtra*: “Freedom is a reversal of the evolutionary course of material things, which are empty of meaning for the spirit; it is also the power of consciousness in a state of true identity.”<sup>25</sup>

These last limbs of yoga and their culmination in a state of true identity, correspond in many ways to the Orthodox ideas of illumination and union. Illumination is contemplation of the inner meanings (*logoi*) of the created world, based on watchfulness (*nepsis*) and discrimination (*diakrisis*). Practice of watchfulness is for the Eastern monks grounded on the Biblical calls to “Be attentive to yourself, lest there arise in your hearts a secret thing which is an iniquity” (Deut. 15:9) or “Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation” (Matt. 26:41). Watchfulness as a concerted effort of attention necessary for mastering not only the art of prayer of the heart, but any skill, is closely related to concentration, being focused on presence in the present – here and now – the assumption being that only in the present can His Presence be experienced. Close attention to or following of one’s inner and outer ‘movements’ results in their more nuanced perception, which further stimulates a finer discrimination between things. The goal of this spiritual alertness in the context of contemplative practice is *noetic prayer*, in which the *nous* is liberated from its enslavement to reason, to the passions and the surrounding world and returns from its distraction within the heart.”<sup>26</sup>

If we were to translate this into Patañjali’s terminology, the observing subject, or *neptic person* (the one who is watchful) is *draṣṭṛ*, or the “observer” (the spirit, *puruṣa*, in its conscious aspect), who is a detached witness of the world extrinsic to itself – including thoughts. This is now where discrimination comes into play for a yogi, since no matter how subtle and noble, human thought may be, in yogic understanding it still belongs to the realm of (invisible) material nature, *prak-*

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<sup>24</sup> Miller, *Yoga*, 60.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>26</sup> Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, *A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain*, Effie Mavromichali, transl. (Birth of theotokos Monastery, 1991), 189.



*rti*.<sup>27</sup> “Through discrimination (*viveka*)” Patañjali says, “one comprehends differences of origin, characteristic, or position that distinguishes two seemingly similar things.”<sup>28</sup> This means that the aspirant on his/her path of yogic self-realization in the end has to be able to distinguish between the true self, the spirit (*purusa*) and the matter in its finest thought-form (*sattva prakṛti*). Namely, when the “turnings” even of the subtlest thought, which resembles the spirit the most, have ceased (thought always being bound in time), the stage is set for the *realization* of the absolute freedom, in which there is nothing, no-thing, to prompt further “turnings of thought” and is for that reason called “seedless contemplation” (*nirbīja samādhi, kavalya*). The common ascetic strategy to “stop the turning of thought” in yoga by repetition of the sacred syllable AUM or OM, the primordial sound from which all speech and thought are said to derive, parallels (again only as a strategy!) the hesychast invocation of the holy name in Jesus Prayer to assist in combating thoughts or trivial imagining, “the ceaseless chattering of our *logismoi*.”<sup>29</sup> The difference is that unlike yogi who seeks no help outside of himself, the hesychast takes “refuge in the power and grace that act in the Divine name.”<sup>30</sup> The point, however, is that this method is used in both cases to aid concentration, by blocking the formation of new impressions or thought-forms, so that monk’s mind/thought could be “fixed” in prayer, or that the one of yogi ceases to “turn” or oscillates. As one monk describes what the hesychasts do: “they breath in the words ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ and exhale the words ‘have mercy on me; or “we breath in all the words of Jesus prayer and we breath out saying them again.”<sup>31</sup> Repetition of the syllable AUM “reveals its meaning” says Patañjali, and the practice of “focusing on the single truth” (AUM as an expression of the ultimate reality) enables yogi to prevent “distractions” caused by oscillation of thought.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the last, eighth limb of yoga, contemplation, as we have already noted, is twofold: pure contemplation in which the meditative subject is so absorbed in the object of meditation that the distinction between the two is completely lost. The thought becomes pure, crystal-clear, and in that sense “colorless.” Capable of reflecting everything around it but without identifying with any ‘color’ (thought-

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<sup>27</sup> *Prakṛti* i.e. material nature in its visible and invisible forms manifests in three qualities (*triguna*): *sattva*, relate to lucid, subtle, cohesive quality (associated with god Viṣṇu); *rajas*, “passion”, refers to revolving element from which arise the breath of life and action (associated with god Brahma), and *tamas* or dark, inert, disintegrating quality (associated with god Siva); these three *gunas*, like energy existing in potential form and in varying proportions, mark stages of existence, from inanimate to pure consciousness.

<sup>28</sup> Miller, *Yoga*, 72.

<sup>29</sup> Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom* (Crestwood, NY: St.Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000), 100. *Logismos, logismoi* (pl.) in Orthodox spiritual writings refer to thought-form(s), that can be positive (sent by God) or negative, “the equivalent of conventional devils;” “It is from spiritual guidance and discernment that we will be able to differentiate one type from the other.” Kyriacos C. Markides, *The Mountain of Science* (New York: Image, 2002), 118-119.

<sup>30</sup> Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*, 100.

<sup>31</sup> Markides, *The Mountain of Science*, 58.

<sup>32</sup> See Miller, *Yoga*, 36-38.

modification) this state of pure contemplation brings yogi direct knowledge of the world and realization that the spirit is radically different from it. He is now free from any selfish (egoistic) attachment to the world, his body included, which gives him “mastery” over the realm of material and extraordinary powers (*siddhis*) that come with it. However, Patañjali warns that “one should avoid enthusiasm or pride” because of that “lest harmful attachments recur.”<sup>33</sup> Also, the practice should not culminate in the superior material condition, but in ultimate spiritual attainment, which brings us to the notion of seedless contemplation in which that final goal is realized. Patañjali notes by way of conclusion that since thought as an object of perception cannot illumine itself it depends on the spirit, who is self-luminous, for knowledge of its own processes. So long, he says, as “a thought is the object of another thought, there is an infinite regression from intelligence to intelligence, and a confusion of memory.”<sup>34</sup> “Awareness of its own intelligence occurs,” according to Patañjali, “when thought assumes the form of the spirit through consciousness that leaves no trace.”<sup>35</sup> This consciousness is really a supra-consciousness in which “even wisdom ceases, and contemplation bears no seeds.”<sup>36</sup> It ends in freedom, which Patañjali defines as “a reversal of the evolutionary course of material things, which are empty of meaning for the spirit; it is also the power of consciousness in a state of true identity.”<sup>37</sup>

In the third and final stage of Orthodox contemplative way, that of union, the realization of the secret of divine Love in human heart takes place. “God is love; and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (I John 4:16). The goal of practice is not “to guide the nous (noetic faculty) to absolute nothingness through the ‘Jesus prayer’, but to turn it to the heart and bring the grace of God into the soul, from where it will spread to the body also.”<sup>38</sup> This union with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit is conceived and realized as a personal loving relationship, communion, between the Creator and creature. In other words, it is not a divorce from the material world, but rather an attempt at its transfiguration, or as an Antonite monk of our time put it: “we must not try to get rid of the garment of the soul, as the philosophical systems claim, but we must try to save it. We don not want to reach the point where we do not desire life so that suffering ceases. We practice the Jesus Prayer because we thirst for life and we want to live with God eternally.”<sup>39</sup> That thirst is quenched only when the *nous* descends into the heart, when the oral prayer “of the lips” has been interiorized into mental prayer and, which further matures into prayer of the heart, in which the whole person is consumed. It is no longer “a series of specific *acts* of prayer” but “a *state* of prayer that

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<sup>33</sup> Miller, *Yoga*, 72.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 42-43.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> Hierotheos, *A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain*, 49-50.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

is unceasing.”<sup>40</sup> Having reached this stage, hesychast’s prayer becomes effortless – just as a cloud pours rain (to illumine this state with Patañjali’s words). It is also a natural state, in a very specific meaning of the word, since *nous* in the state of re-integration is reflective of its true nature. The prayer itself becomes self-acting, and its only language is silence of “Christ in me;” of witnessing the uncreated light of God. Interestingly, even though Patañjali’s concern is primarily with the technique – for he does not engage in speculation on what happens in that state of mind which he apophatically refers to as “seedless contemplation” – he does say that the achieved freedom represents “a reversal of the evolutionary course of material things” reflecting “the power of consciousness in a state of true identity”. One wonders if the achieved (comm)union with God can be viewed as anything less than “a reversal of evolutionary course of material things.”

By way of conclusion, if we were to define the ultimate goals of both contemplative traditions in terms of spiritual freedom, we would say that in the yogic tradition of Patañjali the freedom that is set as a goal is **freedom from** – from the metaphysical ignorance of the knowing subject, the true Self, the spirit vis-à-vis the lucid quality of nature (expressed in human thought that can take everything as its object, including the divine). The language in which Patañjali expresses the yogic discipline of freedom is elegant, concise, direct and brilliantly psychologically nuanced, exposing the mechanisms whereby humans construct false identifications and identities. But it is at the same time a very impersonal, “technical” language addressing a mode of being to which the yogin aspires through his practice. Even Patañjali’s introduction of *Īśvara* (Lord) in the *Yoga-sūtra*, as a possible object of yogic concentration, and in a special sense of devotion, seems to correspond primarily to an impersonal experiential reality of an archetype of the yogin, rather than to a divinity of the kind represented in the Christian God.<sup>41</sup> This is why the language of the hesychast writers stands in sharp contrast to the one of the *Yoga-sūtra*, in that it is directed to the disciple as a person--a fallen, fragmented human being, who needs to be healed – and who’s Lord has instrumental role in it. The language here reflects the theological reality of Christ the Savior in which salvation is not attained through one’s effort alone, and does not emanate from oneself, but is attained in synergy with Christ, as a personal relationship “in God”. In that sense we would say that the goal of Christian freedom is not a freedom *from*, but rather **freedom for** – for communion with God in Love.

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<sup>40</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 123.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Eliade, *Yoga*, 73-76.

Милица Бакић-Хејден

## Два метода контемплације: јога и исихастичка молитва

Оглед из упоредне религије

Кључне речи:

компаративна религија,  
контемплација, хиндуизам,  
Yoga-sūtra, источно  
хришћанство, исхаизам,  
Исусова молитва

Полазећи од компаративнг модела који Арвинд Шарма зове *реципрочна илуминација*, овај оглед разматра два контемплативна метода која су се развила у склопу двеју врло различитих религијских традиција, какве су хиндуизам и источно хришћанство. Циљ поређења није валоризовање елемената који се доводе у узајамни однос, већ њихово евентуално појашњење у светлу другог. Будући да је у оба случаја у питању пракса заснована на искуству и знање које из ње произилази, академски истраживач овакве религијске феноменологије мора бити свестан да истражује, пре свега, о чему је ту реч, а не у чему је ствар.

У тексту се разматрају контемплативни метод развијен у Патањђалијевој *Yoga-sūtri*, једном од најпознатијих дела класичне индијске филозофије, и исихастичка пракса *Исусове молитве* (умно-срдачне молитве или молитве срца), која се превасходно разви(ја)ла у окриљу источнохришћанског монаштва. Иако су већ на први поглед уочљиве паралеле између појединих елемената осмочланог Патањђалијевог пута и православног концепта *praktiki-physiki-theologia* (очишћење, просветљење, сједињење), као на пример – упознавање и руковођење моралним правилима, пажњу привлаче психосоматски аспекти који се везују за положај тела, дисање и окретање чулне перцепције од споља ка унутра, а све у циљу припреме ума, његовог сабирања (концентрација), што је предуслов за јога медитацију и контемплацију, односно за исихастичко тиховање, у коме се молитвено-сабран ум уздиже ка Богу, спуштајући се у сопствено срце, као средиште сусрета с Њим. Занимљиво је да (насупротив популарној перцепцији јоге данас) Патањђали не поклања велику пажњу физичком положају тела, барем не више него исихастички духовници. Као и дисање, Патанђали *āsanu* тј. положај тела сагледава, пре свега у функцији заустављања непрестаних ‘осцилација ума’,

које су препрека његовом усредсређивању, и у том смислу је он и за њега ‘техничке’ природе. Код исихаста се такође уочава корисност одговарајућег физичког положаја тела при срдачној молитви, као и ‘везивање’ даха за име Исусово (зарад лакшег преласка пажње са линеарно-церебралног на ритмични систем даха, односно срца), али се инсистира на њиховом необавезном и искључиво инструменталном карактеру. Наиме, пракса се не препоручује без надзора искусног духовника, и то само као помоћно средство у разгоревању срца, тј. љубави према Богу.

Суштинско усмерење духовне праксе коју описује Патањђали јесте у ослобађању свести, тј. духа (*puruṣa*), од метафизичког незнања (*avidya*), које је довело до погрешне идентификације духа са материјалном природом (*prakṛti*), укључујући и менталне процесе који су њена најсуптилнија манифестација. Јога је у том смислу дисциплина духовног ослобађања свести, која води до пре-познавања њеног правог идентитета, који пак није условљен материјалним природом нити заваран њеним најсуптилнијим облицима испољавања. Овим остварењем апсолутне слободе прави се, по Патањђалију, ‘еволутивни заокрет’. Његов контемплативни метод, међутим, будући неличан, представља јасан контраст наведеном хришћанском моделу исихаста, који је сав утемељен на личном односу човека и Бога. Хришћански теолошки оквир одређује у сваком сегменту молитвену праксу исихаста, и у том смислу је она неприменљива ван хришћанског контекста, док је Патањђалијев модел лакше ‘уклопив’ у друге духовне и религијске системе, а у неким, касније изведеним, редуцираним формама, и у разне облике секуларне праксе.

Ако бисмо кроз појам слободе дефинисали и једну и другу контемплативну праксу, рекли бисмо да се у случају Патањђалијевог јоге може говорити о *слободи од* – од незнања о правој природи суштинске неусловљености духа материјалном природом, док се у случају исихастичке праксе ради о остварењу *слободе за* – за заједништво с Богом у Љубави. Но, управо са становишта религијске феноменологије и у духу поменуте реципрочне илуминације, можемо се даље питати да ли то блажено стање духа (односно свести), у коме је остварена потпуна духовна слобода, није управо оно што чини ‘слика Божја’ по којој је човек створен, а која у крајњој анализи заиста представља ‘еволутивни заокрет’. Ма како се одређивали у односу на ове ‘духовне чињенице’, из ових двеју традиција, неспорно је да удубљивањем у методологију контемплативног процеса у оба случаја, иако са различитим нагласком, открива импресивну слику разумевања унутрашњег света човековог у свој његовој изнијансираниости.