



# SPIRITUALITY STUDIES

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*Detail of Saint Benedict.*

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## Editorial

Recently, certain similarity in the attitudes of religious experience of different traditions appealed to me. I saw an older video recording of a brief instruction, in which at that time relatively young Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh was introducing a group of people to walking meditation. He suggested they should walk slowly as if they were the happiest people on Earth – as if the Pure Land had already become reality in them. Then they can in every step push such a stance into Earth and in this way contribute the Earth being pure and beautiful because by now it is far away from such a state.

The other day I was reading a passage from The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, from a tradition that is common to both Jews and Christians. Jeremiah says in it: *“For thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth.”* (Jeremiah 31:7–8a). Jeremiah, in the name of God, provokes joy, singing aloud with gladness and exultation. After the first words of the appeal, we would expect that this is the way to celebrate the end of some tribulation or great gifting. But it follows from the sequel that the prophet appeals to joy not for what has already happened, but for what God yet promises.

Both approaches take seriously spiritual experience. The touch of transcendence, which both proponents have personally experienced, is offered to others as a possibility of openness for transcendent goodness and beauty, which can transform them and the world around them. Not as a technical guide, but as an attitude, in which we can prepare ourselves for such an experience that is not fully able to provide ourselves with and that, in these traditions, is referred to as the Pure Land, the Promised Land or the Kingdom of God.

These aspects of spirituality can also be found in this issue of Spirituality Studies. The interview with William Skudlarek and the Mark Graceffo article directly deal with the dialogue between different religious traditions. Texts of Mike Sosteric and Sandó Kaisen are, in turn, a similar challenge to openness for spiritual experience as Thich Nhat Hanh's and Jeremiah's exhorts.

I wish to you, dear readers, that reading of this issue would help you not only to understand academically the aspect of spiritual experience but also to contribute to your greater openness for transcendent hope, to a possibility to be happier people.



Cordially  
**Adrián Slavkovský**

An Interview with William Skudlarek:

# Interreligious Dialogue Emphasizes an Experiential Knowledge of Other Spiritual Paths

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**Key words**

Interreligious dialogue,  
dialogue of spiritual  
experience, personal identity,  
multiple spiritual identity

**In the interview, which occurred in October 2018 at Saint John's Abbey, MN, USA, William Skudlarek addresses a series of issues concerning the dialogue and spirituality, such as the issue of personal identity in the dialogue along with the issue of multiple spiritual or/and religious identity, the nature of interreligious dialogue, the dialogue of spiritual experience and its perspectives.**



During my residency at the Collegetville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at Saint John's University, MN, USA, I had the privilege to interview William Skudlarek, Benedictine monk of Saint John's Abbey and Secretary General of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (DIM·MID), the world's leading institutional interfaith dialogue promoter. Here is the record of our dialogue on dialogue and spirituality.

## 1 Interconnection Framework

As a Benedictine monk, you are a part of a spiritual tradition that goes back to the sixth century AD and Saint Benedict. Moreover, Saint Benedict based his monastic lifestyle on the previous tradition of monasticism reaching back to its very beginnings in the second and third centuries AD. The only text attributed to him, the legendary *Regula Benedicti*, was partly composed of several previous monastic sources, such as *Regula Magistri* and others.

You are thus well aware of the fact that throughout the history spiritual traditions had been entering into mutual interactions and influenced one another either explicitly or implicitly. There are also other factors of cultural, social, economic, and political nature that could cause – to some extent – moments of transformation within a particular tradition. Benedictines are not an exception and a long history of the Benedictine Order provides a historian with a bunch of examples of such transformational moments.

The ideas of mutual interconnection and mutual interference between various spiritual traditions have significant consequences for theologies of religions and interreligious dialogue. This is also the framework I would like to place into our conversation today.



**Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB, Ph.D.**, is monk of Saint John's Abbey, MN, USA, and Secretary General of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (DIM·MID). He also serves as Associate Editor of *Dilatato Corde*, an international journal devoted to the dialogue of religious experience and practice. He is available at [wskudlarek@csbsju.edu](mailto:wskudlarek@csbsju.edu).

## About the author



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**Q** Let me open our dialogue with a question – a bit broader and personal at the same time: How this historical awareness of transformational moments in your monastic tradition influenced your understanding of your own personal identity – an identity of a Christian, a Benedictine, a priest, a monk engaged in interfaith dialogue of spiritual experience?

**A** This is not an easy question to respond to because so much of my identity as an ordained Benedictine Christian has been shaped by social and cultural dynamics that affected me in ways that I – at least in my earliest and most formative years – was not conscious of. I grew up on a farm in a region of central Minnesota that was almost 100 % Catholic, but in a township where one's identity was also determined by one's German or Polish descent. At the age of 12 (it was a different era!), I entered the minor seminary (high school) at Saint John's. Even though Saint John's was only 10 miles from where I grew up, its religious and intellectual culture made it a world quite different from the one I knew. When I was a child, many people still spoke German and Polish – my great grandfather, who lived with us, spoke only Polish. High school not only forced me to overcome my "Stearns County accent", it also gave me my first opportunity to study a language (Latin) and whetted my appetite for learning other languages. I suspect that my fascination with the different ways people put into words their experience of the world around them laid the foundation for my interest exploring religious worlds different from the one that initially shaped and continues to shape my religious identity as a Roman Catholic Benedictine monk.

## 2 Identity & Interspirituality

The topic of identity – its development and transformations – has its relevance not only for experimental and clinical psychology (E. Erikson, J. Marcia etc.), but for spirituality as well. In the spiritual context, it opens up a wide variety of questions, the question of multiple spiritual or/and religious identity among others.

**Q** First and foremost, is multiple spiritual or/and religious identity possible at all? What is your view of the issue?

**A** Togo, a tiny West African country with less than eight million inhabitants, has 39 tribal languages. All formal education, however, is in French.

On a visit to a monastery in Togo in 2009, I met a relative of the superior of the monastery who had been a school teacher for many years. When I asked her if she had forgotten the language she was born into, she replied, "*One never forgets the language of one's mother!*"

A well-known dictum – at least among Catholic sacramental theologians and liturgists – is that Christians are made, not begotten. Theologically, I believe that is correct. At the same time, I would not hesitate to say that I was born a Catholic. Even if I wanted to forget my Catholicism, I doubt that I would be able to.

To continue with the linguistic analogy, although my parents were able to speak some Polish, I was born into a primarily English-speaking world. That is my linguistic identity, and I can't imagine that I will ever forget how to speak English, even though I speak other languages, a couple more or less fluently.

I have learned about and from other religious traditions, but my Catholic religious identity, like my mother tongue, was given to me *ab initio*, and it is from that identity that I appreciate and draw on the beliefs and practices of other religious traditions.

The double or even multiple spiritual or/and religious belonging enquiry brings us to another contemporary concept, the notion of interspirituality. The term itself was introduced by Wayne Teasdale and described as a movement that is bringing together people who simultaneously follow two or more spiritual traditions of various religious backgrounds while staying rooted in a particular religious tradition (W. Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*, 1999).

**Q To what extent is the practice of double or multiple spiritualities of different religious backgrounds in accordance with fidelity to one's own religious tradition from your perspective?**

**A** I think what I have said in response to the previous question could also serve as a response to this one.

You have published extensively on Swami Abhishikatananda, a French Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux (1910–1973) who went to India in 1948 and devoted his life to building bridges between Hindus and Christians. Le Saux personally met with some of the extraordinary saints of the Indian sub-continent of the time and was deeply impressed particularly by Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. Afterwards, he made a life-long effort to integrate his “advaitic experience”, he experienced in the presence of Ramana Maharshi shortly after his arrival to India, with his Christian worldview.

In one of your articles, you describe his understanding of dialogue as follows: “*true interreligious dialogue is not discussion about the differences of religious practices or doctrines, but heart-to-heart communication about the experience of God*” (“Abhishiktanadna’s understanding of the monk”, *Dilatato Corde* 1 (1) 2011).

**Q How would you characterize the legacy of the life and work of this remarkable man, a great pioneer of interreligious dialogue of spiritual experience? What is the continuing importance of his work for today?**

**A** I have said – though not in writing – that although I greatly admire Swami Abhishikatananda, I am not personally attracted to “advaitic spirituality”. I suppose I could say I am too much of a dualist, someone for whom an “I-Thou” relationship to God in Christ and through the Holy Spirit is a more appealing and intelligible expression of my relationship with the divine.

What I admire about Abhishikatananda is his total commitment to a spiritual path, which, although radically different from the one in which he was formed, offered him a compelling and authentic way to strive for union with God.

I believe it is significant, however, that after his intense spiritual experience of oneness with the divine shortly before his death, he described that experience as his discovery of the Grail. In other words, he too could not forget “the language of his mother”.

Between the years 1994–2001 you had been staying in Japan as a member of the priory of Saint John’s Abbey and at that time you began practicing Zazen within the Sanbō Kyōdan school of Zen. Over the centuries, all traditions of Japanese Zen Buddhism restricted the transmission of Zen to Buddhist monks exclusively. However, since Sanbō Kyōdan school of Zen was established in 1954 by Hakuun Yasutani, this exclusivist rule was broken, and Zen was made available at first to Buddhist laity, later on to non-Buddhist as well. Since 1970, Yasutani’s successor, Kōun Yamada, has allowed to receive Zen training and to obtain the right to teach Zen, the so called “Dharma transmission”, to Christians without requiring them to convert to Buddhism. This means that the Dharma transmission was officially granted to non-Buddhists. Such a dramatic turnaround can only be described as revolutionary.

The first Christian, who successfully completed his Zen training under the direct guidance of Rōshi Yamada, was a German Jesuit Fr. Hugo Makibi Enomiya-Lassalle (1978). Others followed soon – clergy, nuns and monks, laymen. Altogether, over twenty Christians until 1989, out of which twelve were granted the Dharma transmission mandate.

Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle is another exceptional example of interspirituality – as an officially recognized Rōshi, master of Zen, he had never forsaken his Christian and Jesuit identity.

**Q How could you explain to us this kind of multi-religious and multi-spiritual identity represented by Fr. Enomiya-Lassalle, SJ, at present by Fr. Robert Kennedy, SJ, and others?**

**A** I think both have made it clear that they were drawn to Zen Buddhist not as an alternative to Christianity but as a way of developing dimensions of their Christian identity that had gone unrecognized or were underdeveloped.

The reason I became affiliated with the Sanbō Kyōdan was that shortly after my arrival in Ja-

pan, I visited Fr. William Johnston, SJ, and asked him how I could go about becoming familiar with Buddhism as a spiritual path. He recommended the Sanbō Kyōdan to me precisely because it was an expression of Zen Buddhism that was open to foreigners and people of other religious traditions – but one that also attracted Japanese followers. It was there that on several occasions I heard the comment of Yamada Kōun Rōshi, the the Dharma heir of Hakuun Yasutani and father of one my masters, Yamada Ryouun Rōshi, that the practice of Zazen was like drinking tea: you didn't have to be a Buddhist to do it and to profit from it.

### 3 Interreligious Dialogue of Spiritual Experience

We have already been talking about interfaith dialogue today. Let's have a closer look now at the dialogical stance of a religious tradition you are rooted in – the Roman Catholic Church.

The turning point for the Roman Catholic Church was the Second Vatican Council in many regards. Following the apostolic mission of the pioneering Pope John XXIII. (1959), Vatican II announced “aggiornamento” – “bringing up to date” the Church in herself as well as in her relation to the World. In regard to non-Christians, the Council issued a revolutionary *Declaration on the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church to other religions Nostra aetate*. Here, all Catholics are “exhorted”, as you often remind us, to “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values” in other religions (*Nostra aetate* 2, 1965).

You serve as Secretary General of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (DIM-MID), one of the leading promoters of the interfaith dialogue nowadays. An integral part of DIM-MID's mission is “to open up new pathways of dialogue of spiritual experience”.

Q

**Could you be more specific in this regard and describe DIM-MID's original approach to the dialogue of spiritual experience in the above-mentioned context?**

A

The predominant model of interreligious dialogue has been that of an academic conference in which papers are presented, discussed, published – and then, of course, added to one's *curriculum vitae*. One of the reasons for this practice can be found the very word “dialogue”, which immediately implies talking to one another. Another reason is the ease with which religious people – especially Christians, I would say – emphasize the doctrinal expressions of religious belief.

DIM-MID's approach to interreligious dialogue emphasizes an experiential knowledge of other spiritual paths and promotes “plunging” into another religious tradition to gain this experiential knowledge.

In the words of Fr. Pierre de Béthune, the first Secretary General of DIM-MID, “*If you are deeply rooted in your tradition, as can be expected of a monk who has been formed over many years, you don't have to be afraid of immersing yourself in another religion. It's not a question of compromise, saying I'll accept this, but not that. No. I accept everything! But I accept it with all that is mine. It's a meeting from faith to faith. Or more exactly, from fidelity to fidelity.*” [*Si on est profondément ancré dans sa tradition comme on peut l'espérer d'un moine qui a été formé pendant de nombreuses années, à ce moment, il ne faut pas avoir peur de s'immerger, de se plonger dans une autre religion, ce n'est pas une question de compromis, non plus, en disant je prends ça mais je ne prends pas ça, non, je prends tout! Mais je le prends depuis mon tout! C'est une rencontre de la foi à la foi. Peut-être même plus précisément de la fidélité à la fidélité.*] (From the documentary film “Strangers No More”.)



Twenty-five years after the promulgation of *Nostra aetate*, another important Church's document on interreligious dialogue was issued, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991). Here, the "double commitment" of the Roman Catholic Church to proclamation and dialogue was discussed in more depth.

**Q** **What is your stance on this issue of bringing together proclamation and dialogue when they seem to be in direct contradiction?**

**A** As is the case with understanding "dialogue" as a conversation/discussion about doctrine, the problem here is understanding proclamation as the assertion of doctrine(s) that must be believed to assure one's eternal salvation.

Proclamation of the Gospel means proclaiming Jesus Christ and Him crucified – proclaiming by our lives more than by our words the love that God revealed to the world in the person of Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, a love that is also revealed in the fruits of the Spirit, which are also found outside the parameters of Christian faith and practice.

Words come into play when we are asked to give an account of the hope that is in us (see 1 Peter 3:15). If our lives do not raise curiosity and questions, then our verbal proclamation can easily be regarded as proselytizing.

## 4 The Dialogue of Spiritual Experience Perspectives vs. Critique and Skepticism

Despite its solid doctrinal foundations, interfaith dialogue is not always welcomed among Christians, clergy, and even theologians, and is confronted with the old exclusivist mentality.

**Q** **How would you address suspicions and doubts concerning the dialogue on the side of Christians?**

**A** I would address such suspicions and doubts by referring to and developing what Pierre de B ethune has to say about being firmly rooted in one's own religious tradition.

We have mentioned today just a few pioneers of interfaith dialogue who made their impact in history and, at least for some of us, become examples of the possibility of building bridges instead of walls, attempting at understanding instead of ignorance, spreading compassion and love instead of animosity and hatred. My concern is: Who will follow to continue their mission of building bridges in the divided world?

**Q** **Finally, I would like to hear from you at the end of our dialogue on dialogue and spirituality: What is your account of the future of interreligious dialogue, what are the perspectives of dialogue of spiritual experience in particular?**

**A** The center of activity of interreligious dialogue, more specifically, monastic interreligious dialogue, is shifting from Europe and North America, where age is taking its toll and there is not much sign of interest among the younger monks and nuns and beginning to develop in Asia and Africa. A monk from Korea has recently completed his doctorate at Regis College, University of Toronto, with a dissertation on Thomas Merton's dialogue with Buddhism. A monk from Kenya, now living at a newly founded monastery in Egypt, is completing his doctorate at the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islam. I have encouraged both and offered them editorial assistance in writing their dissertations. They are enthused about returning to their home countries and continents and promoting monastic interreligious dialogue there.

Thank you very much for sharing your insights with the Spirituality Studies readers!

The Issue of the Sex of a Conceived Child in Islam:

# From the Pre-Islamic Conceptions to the Current Methods of Genetic Selection of the Sexes

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## Key words

Bioethics, Islam, genetic selection of sexes, ART, PGD

The Qur'an warns against the practice of preference of male over the female sex in children, which led pre-Islamic Arabs to infanticide of girls. Muslim's hadith of the 9th century explains the causes of the formation of embryo with male or female sex, and the Islamic scholars in the Middle Ages still respected this tradition, which however has its roots in ancient Greece and in the Hippocratic tradition, especially in the writing *De victu* – "On Diet" – the author of which is unknown. An important medieval Islamic author confirming the authenticity of this tradition is Sunni lawyer Ibn Qayyim al Yawziyyah with his work *Tuḥfatul Mawdūd fī Ahkām al-Mawlūd*, whose teaching is currently experiencing a great revival among muslims. Introducing new procedures in the context of ARTs (Assisted Reproductive Technology) in recent times has raised new issues within Islamic bioethics, new challenges that also involve preimplantation diagnostics in the question of sex selection out of medical or non-medical reasons.

## 1 Introduction

The question of the sex of the child is very widespread in the history of the religions of the world, although it is not given the necessary attention in the literature and is usually mentioned only marginally. Male preference could be analyzed in the context of all five current world religions, regardless of the theoretical anchoring of sex equivalence in their holy scriptures. For Arabic tribes of the pre-Islamic period, the practice of infanticide of girls in the form of burial alive was a matter of course. The Qur'an also hints at this practice: "... when the souls join their bodies and buried alive will be asked, because of what sin she was killed" (Qur'an 81:7–9). Adnan sets out two key reasons that have led to the widespread practice of girls' infanticide in pre-Islamic times: fear of poverty and fear of dishonour. Girls were considered less executive and useful for family life than boys and they had the status of persons connected to ornaments (see Qur'an 43:16–19), which was a picture of the negative female qualities and vanity. At the time of the wars and the capture of the daughters of the proud Arab fathers by the enemies who invaded their territory, the infanticide of the girls was done immediately after their birth, so that later there was no rape, the abuse by the enemies, which would always mark families in the sense of defamation of their honor (Adnan 2004, 30–31).

Prophet Muhammad addressed the Arab tribes in particular with two revolutionary ideas: that God is the only one and that the infanticide of the girls is not to be done because it is evil, wrongful act. In the early Meccan Surah 16 it is written: "*And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide*" (Qur'an 16: 58–59).

The question of the formation of a particular sex in a future child has already been dealt with in Islam in Muslim's Hadith, which originated in the 9th century. The Hadith informs that one Jew came to Muhammad and asked him, how the fertilization works in the case when a boy or a girl is conceived: "*He [the Jew] said: I have come to ask you about a thing which no one amongst the people on the earth knows except an apostle or one or two men besides him. He [the Holy Prophet] said: Would it benefit you if I tell you that? He [the Jew] said: I would lend ears to that. He then said: I have come to ask you about the child. He [the Holy Prophet] said: The reproductive substance of man is white and that of woman [i.e. ovum central portion] yellow, and when they have sexual intercourse and the male's substance [chromosomes and genes] prevails upon the*



### About the author

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female's substance [chromosomes and genes], it is the male child that is created by Allah's Decree, and when the substance of the female prevails upon the substance contributed by the male, a female child is formed by the Decree of Allah. The Jew said: What you have said is true; verily you are an Apostle. He then returned and went away. The Messenger of Allah [may peace be upon him] said: He asked me about such and such things of which I have had no knowledge till Allah gave me that." (Sahih Muslim 003:0614).

Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Ayyūb al-Zurī l-Dimashqī l-Hanbalī, who is well-known as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya ["The son of the principal of the school al-Jawziyya"] was very interested in the issues connected to formation of particular sex of the child based upon the Qur'an and Hadith in conjunction with Hippocratic tradition, mainly the doctrine of the writing *De victu*. He is one of the most famous medieval (13th–14th century) Sunni theologians and lawyers because he was a student of the mischievous Ibn Taymiyyah. The education of Ibn Qayyim far exceeded the time requirements of an expert in the legal science in particular of the Hanbali madhab, for which he is generally considered; his contribution in his studies has tended to be reduced to questions of evidence in court proceedings, as he enrolled in the history of legal science in Islam. His spiritual motivation to examine issues related to embryology and genetics consisted of the desire to direct believing Muslims in everyday life, while respecting the principle of unity of faith and reason.

We have found out, that scientific studies on issues of sex selection in children connected to the threat of PGD [1] were published already in the late 1980s. Since about 2000, the focus of articles has changed: from the PGD threat there is a shift to the factual aspect of PGD processes; only exceptionally, we can also find in this period some studies on ethical justification of the usage of sex selection in children. The bioethical dimensions of sex selection have become a priority of scientists' interest about five–six years later and continue to this day, focusing in particular on the following three aspects:

- elimination of X-linked hereditary diseases;
- the sex balance in society;
- male preference in a traditionally masculine-based religious society, e.g. in Judaism and Islam.

## 2 Methods

The issue of our study required the analysis of holy scriptures as a basis; analysis of Qur'an and Hadith. Subsequently, we have proceeded to analysis and comparison of the writings of Ibn Qayyim al-Yawziyyah: Tuḥfatul Mawdūd fī Ahkām al-Mawlūd and the anonymous writing of Hippocratic tradition – *De victu*. In order to be able to confront the state of the problem in a historical aspect with the present one, we had to use the scientific databases of the studies, with which we have worked by entering the key words of our topic. We have used these databases: Web of Science, Pubmed, Ovid, Google Scholar, and iGoogle Scholar. To the findings from the databases we have added the latest findings published in monographs of English, Bosnian, Croatian, and Czech provenience. So that our analysis of chosen issue can be comprehensive – including the expert and lay world, at the end we have used the database of Bosnian islamic periodic *Preporod*, which is being issued by *Rijaset islamske zajednice u Bosni i Hercegovini*, and which is the most important periodic in Balkan part of *umma*. *Preporod* serves on communication of islamic scholars and mullahs who inform and give religious guidance to believers; they are dealing with the most acute questions of Muslims'everyday life. Sex selection subject has been analyzed in our study using diachronic and synchronic approach.

## 3 Results

Current Islamic reproductive bioethics respects first Qur'an, Hadith and Shari'a, to which are the results reached by the reason added; that means, the results of the science, which should be in the harmony with the Revelation, e.g. holy scriptures: "*If it comes to it [to the collision between reason and Revelation], then it is only a seeming obstacle that must be eliminated in a professional manner. In removing that contradiction, the following hypotheses must be applied: that a scientific matter that is in the conflict with religious attitudes and teachings, has not yet reached the level of scientific fact, or that the religious attitude and teaching that is in a collision with a scientific fact is not authentic or not understood in the right way*" (Topoljak 2010, 89).

Since a healthy man in Islam is only the one who takes care both of his physical and spiritual aspect, it is not possible for the responsible believer to ignore the reproductive and genetic health issues. The question of sex selection, which belongs to the two mentioned areas, has evolved. We have captured this development continuously from pre-Islamic times to today.

Ibn Qayyim al Yawziyyah has analyzed in his work *Tuḥfatul Mawdūd fī Ahkām al-Mawlūd* also the questions of formation of embryo with male or female sex and has tried to explain this phenomenon by using Qur'an, Hadith, and thoughts of the antique writing *De victu*. He argues, that creation of a child is based exclusively on the copulation of male and female. This model, continuity, which was determined by Allah for all humankind was not disrupted by exceptions, which are Adem and Hava (Adem was created from the soil and by breathing the soul, while Hava was drawn from him) and Messiah (Eesa ibn Maryam was created from Maryam's water and malak's air blasting). Ibn Qayyim has mentioned in Hadith, which is repeatedly introduced by Sahih al-Buchārī, Sahih Muslim, Sahih al-Tirmidhi, and Sahih al-Nasa'i: "The male's seed is white and dense, and the woman is watery and yellow. Which of them overcomes and prevails, the child will look like him" (El-Dževzijje 2011, 166).

So, according to Ibn Qayyim, there are two kinds of semen: the male and the female. They are of different colors and consistency. He also counts on two different power relations between male and female semen: overriding and overpowering. In the case of overriding of one type of semen, that will be a reason, why a child resembles mother or father. In the case of overpowering of one type of semen, the result is a child of the sex of more powerful semen. Ibn Qayyim argues, that there is no reasonable explanation for the predomination of one type of the semen and that there is no natural cause. He attributes this overall to the will of Exalted Creator. The sex of the child is Allah's gift and depends on His will, knowledge and power (El-Dževzijje 2011, 169–170). Ibn Qayyim has taken the folk conceptions in the question of prettiness or ugliness of child, e.g. if a mother during the sexual intercourse thinks on persons she loves and misses them, a conceived child will look like them: "Nature is being transmitted, and that is the fact that everyone knows" (El-Dževzijje 2011, 173). He refers to Hippocrates and his *Book on Children in Mothers' Wombs* without mentioning its title and paraphrases its content as follows: "If there will be more male seed than female seed, the child will look like the father. If there will be more female seed than male seed, the child will look like the mother. He says: the seed descends from all body organs. From the healthy goes healthy seed, and from the ill ill. He says: Bald-headed give birth to bald-headed. The wise give birth to wise, and powerful to powerful" (El-Dževzijje 2011, 172). When compared the attitudes of Ibn Qayyim and those attributed to Hippocrates, we can see a difference in the conception of power versus number of semen, which decides of which sex or resemblance will a child be. Further observations connect-

ed to Ibn Qayyim's linking-up to the writing *De victu* will be presented in the Discussion.

Regarding genetic research there are current guidelines in Islam issued in Kuwait in 1998: "Islam must move to the fore in genetic research. Recourse to genetics to cure hereditary or acquired pathologies does not contradict the acceptance of divine will. Research treatment and diagnoses on the genetic condition of a person must be performed with the previous and free consent of the individual concerned [2] or, if incapable, of the guardian. If consent cannot be obtained, the research may be carried out if it brings about a clear benefit for the health of the person. Every genetic diagnosis must be treated with confidentiality. Genetic research must never have priority over the rules of the Shari'a and respect for human rights" (Atighetchi 2007, 239).

In the context of today's embryology and genetic engineering is the question of the sex of the offspring formulated in connection with medical indication of sex selection, but also in relation to non-medical individual wishes of future parents to have their offsprings of balanced male and female sexes [3] or they want to choose a specific sex because of personal sympathy or fulfillment of the religious requirement of keeping the genealogy through a male offspring. In antiquity and continually and in the Middle Ages, there was a conception, that a particular sex in the semen of men and women predominates (semen of man and women combine to form the embryo of a particular sex); we could in the context of today's possibilities of PGD talk about its analogy in Ericsson's method (Beernik, Dmowski, and Ericsson 1993, 382–386), which also works with some thoughtful dominance of elements of complex genetic material: "In Ericsson as sperm passes through albumin gradient, the differences in mass between the X and Y chromosomes cause the females dragged down by the weight of the extra 'leg' of the X sex chromosome. The method has a 70–72 % success rate [4] for boys and a 69–75 % success rate for girls" (Dezhkam, Dezhkam, and Dezhkam 2014, 289). Use of isolated sperm in women who were taking clomiphene citrate resulted in about 70 % female births. The other method to select the sperm sex is Micro Sort method. According to Shia jurisprudence there are no obstacles to use PGD and Ericsson method, which are accepted by the U. S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Authors Dezhkam L., Dezhkam H., and Dezhkam I. see the only problem when dealing with the use of Micro Sort and Ericsson method, and that is the possibility of committing the sins of unlawful sight and unlawful touch (Dezhkam, Dezhkam, and Dezhkam 2014, 290).

Contemporary Islamic religious publications for both expert and lay believers point out that a woman was wrongly condemned in the past for giving birth to a daughter instead of a son because she cannot make a decision about the sex of a child. She does not bear any responsibility in this question and therefore there's no sense to scold her for that and attack her (Jakubović 1997, 16). This is explained using the cytogenetic explanation that the female egg contains only the chromosome X, whereas the sperm can be either chromosome X or Y. The female (XX) is born if the egg is fertilized with the X chromosome sperm; the boy (XY) is born when an egg is fertilized with sperm with Y chromosome. The responsibility for the sex of the child is therefore fully on the male sex chromosome (Taslaman 2016, 173). To keep the principle of consensus on science and faith, the authors point out to the Qur'anic text: "that He created pairs, male and female sexes from one sprouted drop of seed" [5] (Qur'an 53:45–46). They deduce that the Qur'an claimed 1400 years ago that the sex of a child depends on the genetic basis of sperm, which until recently has not been known to science.

## 4 Discussion

The basic premise of human reproduction in Islam is the institution of marriage, the contractual relationship of men and women, respectively man and a maximum of four women, who is he able to provide the same standard, to secure their housing and nutrition. The man has to choose a suitable wife, who will be a good educator for their common children. The child has the right to a Muslim name and religious education, especially to the knowledge and memorizing of the Qur'an (Hájek and Bahbouh 2016, 49). Allah gives a baby to spouses as a gift. Allah is also a Donor of reason and consequently also the achievements of science that serve the benefit of humanity. Therefore, Muslim spouses are invited to use the achievements of science also in the area of reproduction.

Medieval conception of formation of sexes presented in Ibn Qayyim's work takes over the antique conception of existence of two types of semen: male and female. The existence of female semen is presented in several works of Hippocratic tradition: *De victu*, *De morbis*, *De mulierum affectibus*, *De natura pueri*, and *De genitura (De semine)*. Next to this conception antiquity had also another one: that the father is the only procreator, and the mother plays the role of keeper and nourisher of his seed. The author of *De victu* believes, that fertilization is possible only in one day per month; he writes on the changes of humidity of the uterus on which the success of the fertilization depends. He describes the inception of new human being as a mixture of two parental seeds, that

could be of both sexes (Hippokrates 2012, 524–525). Depending on the process of genesis of new being, the author of *De victu* speaks in its 28th chapter of three types of males, and later in 29th chapter of three types of females that can be formed (Hippokrates 2012, 469–471). Here we can find also the origin of Ibn Qayyim's conception of predomination (in his words: overriding and overpowering) of male and female semen, which determine the sex of conceived embryo. There is a dualism of the strong one, and the weak one. This dualism, or better to say, oppositeness is also present in the *De victu's* explanation of the nature of males and females: while males lean towards fire and are growing because of the food and diet that are dry and warm, females lean towards water and are growing thanks to food and diet that are wet, cold and mild [6]. At the end of our analysis of Ibn Qayyim's inspiration by the doctrine of *De victu* in the topic of the origin of sexes we would like to mention, that to already introduced particularities, diet has to be added. In *De victu* it is said, that concrete diet can influence the formation of male or female sex in embryo. Analogously, Ibn Qayyim speaks of the diet as a key factor in the issue of prettiness or ugliness of future child.

In order to encourage reproduction in spouses who are unable to conceive the offspring naturally, Islam allows to use ARTs to the extent that complies with the requirements of religious writings and conclusions of Islamic scholars in fiqh and medicine. However, it is interesting that on the list of great sins, which includes the change of Allah's creature in terms of intervention in the body for beauty and wearing a wig, are according to the magazine *Preporod* of Islamic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina still in 2003 both usage of ARTs, cloning and sex selection (without mentioning medical indications connected to X-linked diseases) (Sedić 2003, 3). This example clearly shows, how big is the difference between Islamic scientific perception of specific religious problems and between their interpretation by mullahs to laity. Although there are always some exceptional cases of Muslim infertile spouses who are interested in the attitude of religious authorities to state-of-the-art in ARTs, the communities of Muslim-believers are generally much more reticent and more conservative in their attitudes. But to be fair, we have to mention that in 2017, in this same magazine *Preporod*, an interview with the distinguished Bosnian professor of tafsir, Enes Karić, was published, and Karić has significantly shifted the paradigm of the connection between the conclusions of the historical Islamic authorities and the present world presented in this magazine when he said: "Of course, we need traditions, history, and historical studies, we also need to study the past, but in no way in the manner to get drunk on the past and that we out of this 'drunkenness' project a falsified

*present or future. I have never considered Islamic authorities, such as those of seven centuries ago, to solve our present needs”* (Tucaković 2017, 14).

The current attitudes of Islamic scholars to the use of PGD have already been highlighted in our study in 2015 (Zaviš 2015, 190), where we have referred to a high positive PGD rating for eliminating the genetic causes of a child's severe diseases, but also to a warning against the use of PGD for choosing the sex of the child and eliminating embryos of the undesirable sex. Islamic scholars consider it a particularly controversial question of the use of PGD in the creation of “rescue siblings”, whose life is justified only by the task of providing assistance in the form of donation of needed necessary body organ or a tissue to already living, but fatally ill sibling. A special place in this context have bioethical debates of Muslim scholars on the situations, when the elimination of the hereditary disease is conditioned by the choice of the sex of the embryo, as in the case of DMD (*Duchenne muscular dystrophy*), haemophilia A and B; in general, we can speak of a group of *X-linked Mendelian recessive diseases*, which can be prevented right by choosing a female embryo. Most Muslim scholars agree on the use of disease prevention. Already at the first international conference on bioethics in the Muslim world, which took place in 1991 in Cairo, the PGD was its main theme, and out of eight factual conclusions, directives, two (no. 4 & 5) relate directly to the subject of our analysis:

Sex selection is allowed if a particular gender is predisposed to a serious genetic disability. One of the first couples to choose this technique was hoping that their child would avoid a lethal hydrocephalus disease that is conditioned by X-linked heredity that almost always affects only boys. Embryonal selection of sex allows the elimination of a variety of X-linked hereditary diseases including haemophilia, DMD and fragile chromosome X syndrome.

PGD aimed at changing the hereditary features of pre-embryos (e.g. hair and eye color, intelligence, body height), including sex selection, is prohibited (Nordin 2012, 256).

Sachedina, however, points out that, despite the positives of the PGD in the prevention of diseases, the phenomenon of medically unindicated sex selection of a child has been expanding in many countries, which he does not consider moral. The preference of boys in some cultures has led to the systematic destruction of female embryos, which is a disruption to the fundamental determination and respect of the dignity of human beings according to the Qur'an and Hadith, which apply to all human beings without the preference of

one of the sexes. According to Sachedina in Islam, there is no justification for the selective abortion intervention based on the choice of the child's sex (Sachedina 2009, 108). Sex-selective abortion is in Islam essentially in general strictly forbidden and therefore there is no need for further discussions on this topic (Dezhkam, Dezhkam, and Dezhkam 2014, 289).

The ever-present preference of male offsprings in Muslim spouses who undergo PGD has been analysed in 2015 by the authors Chamsi-Pasha and Albar. They state the following preference criteria for male offspring: ensuring continuation of the family, support and care for aging parents, raising family standards, maintaining family assets, and possibility of making specific religious rituals. Fatwa released in 2007 by Islamic World League – Islamic World Association, however, prohibits sex selection practices for social reasons. Conversely, medically indicated sex selection is allowed. However, some Sunni scholars allow exceptions to the admissibility of medically unindicated sex selection, and that is in the case of a woman who has given birth to five or more daughters, while her husband still insists on a male offspring (Chamsi-Pasha and Albar 2015, 110).

In Shi'ite Islam, which is open to new ARTs because of the greater flexibility of their theological-legal system than the Sunni one, it is even envisaged to provide third-party donation. Tappan points out that PGD is needed right in such cases because it is necessary to have knowledge of cardiologic, psychological, oncological diseases, diabetes, etc., to which the offspring has the right to be alerted to be able to count with their treatment. Tappan, however, based on his research in Iran, has concluded that none of the Iranian clinics had a genetic information storage system. He states: “*If clinics are concerned about the archiving of donor information in case their child summoned to court on inheritance, this lack of information could have a detrimental effect on the lives of children*” (Tappan 2012, 111).

## 5 Conclusion

The Human Genome Project with an international effort to map and sequence the entire human genome in 2003 has alerted all religious and ethical commissions, authorities, because the first feelings that it has aroused in the public was the fear of abuse. A huge relief has provided information on the use of genetics to prevent and treat disease conditions before and after birth. Islam has welcomed and supported the idea of using the prevention of hereditary diseases, which can also be done by choosing the sex of the future child. Genetic prevention and genetic treatment (see Sabatello 2009,

198–199) are the forms of helping humankind which was created for serving and worshiping Allah, the Donor of life and the Donor of reason, which his servants are obligatory to use, support and develop its achievements. We have seen in our analysis of the topic of sex selection in the history of Islam that it has gone through a lot of changes both regarding the attitude towards female sex, towards responsibility of women, conceptions of formation of female sex, to current possibilities to select particular sex on the basis of medical indication or non-medical motives, wishes or religious com-

mitment of future parents. Sex selection based on egoistic motives of future parents is not considered to be an argument for the interruption of conceived child of unwanted sex in Islam. Modern religious authorities in Islam strongly support such current and prospective research in genetics, which will bring health, and in the same time will not be misused on fulfilling the selfish ambitions of wealthy individuals regarding reproduction, ARTs, and sex selection, which are contradictory to Allah's will.

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## Notes

- [1] PGD – *Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis* – preimplantation genetic diagnosis of embryos or oocytes before *in vitro fertilization* (IVF). It is used to identify DNA mutations that produce genetically transmitted diseases. The PGD also allows recognition and selection of the future child's sex out of medical (e.g. inheritance of diseases in the lineage of male offsprings, so-called x-linked diseases when the female sex of the child is chosen) and non-medical reasons (e.g. for religious reasons, for the family to have a male heir and continuator).
- [2] Muslim patients use to consult their health condition and decision to undergo particular medical procedure, examination or treatment with their family members before giving an official informed consent. Gynecological or sexual issues belong together with end-of-life issues to the most sensitive in Muslim patients (Daar and Al Khitamy 2001, 62).
- [3] According to Valjan this is a justified request when there is a wish to ensure family balance and it has educational significance. When family consist of the parents and the offsprings of different sexes, it reaches better educational usefulness and also psychological balance. However, parents should never feel guilty, if this wish of children with different sexes occurs in them if they are open to accept the conceived child no matter of what sex, without psychological and abortifacient rejection of this child. Responsible parenthood should be planned and be without any signs of egoism. The way, how would parents like to reach their planned family depends only upon them, and the state where they are living should not, or has no moral right to involve into their decision making (Valjan 2004, 228, 230).
- [4] There are several expert polemic studies on this height of rates in males in Ericsson. Some web sites of the ARTs clinics show lower percentage prediction.
- [5] Arabic translation according to Qur'an in Arabic and Bosnian edition (Sarajevo: AA): "*ve ennehū haleka-zze-vdžejni-žžekere ve-l'unṣā n'min nutfetin izā tumnā*".
- [6] This antagonism of dry and wet, warm and cold, male and female reminds us of the Chinese dualism represented by the basic principles of the world *Yin* and *Yang*, where *Yin* is female, wet, cold, dark, connected to water and soil, and passive, while *Yang* is male, dry, warm, bright, connected to fire and wind, and active.



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# Everybody Has a Connection Experience: Prevalence, Confusions, Interference, and Redefinition

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**This paper is an attempt to bring forward awareness of the existence and significance of “connection experiences”, what others call mystical experience, religious experience, and so on. The paper addresses the reality of the experiences, and well as some of the confusions, misconceptions, distortions, and just plain avoidance displayed by sociologists and others.**

## 1 Introduction

We live in a world where most people believe in God. Despite propaganda to the contrary, the number of atheists in the world remains rather small (only 3 % in the U.S.A, and only 9 % in Canada), and this is even after a couple of centuries of scientific progress (Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006, 9). We can ask the question why, and of course, some people will say that it is because people are stupid and gullible (Dawkins 2006), but that is not always the case. People who accept the existence of God, and people who take spiritual experiences seriously, do so not because they are stupid and irrational, but because they are logical and intelligent (Boyer 2001), because there are structures in their brain that support it (Newberg and Waldman 2009; Newberg, d'Aquile, and Rause 2001), and (most importantly) because they have had *experiences* that make them question the dogmatic scientific view that the only thing that exists is the material universe that we can see with our material eyes.

Yes, you heard me right. Some people, who knows how many, believe in the spiritual side of life because they have had various types of spiritual experiences that make them believe in a spiritual side to life. These experiences cause them to question their current ontological assumptions and open up their thinking to expanded possibilities. This much has been recognized for thousands of years. In the Western world, there are traditions of spiritual/mystical experience that go all the way back to Plato and beyond (Versluis 2007). Some Western academics have even taken mystical experience seriously. William James, the man who helped found American psychology, felt that all religions were based on the mystical experience of some charismatic avatar (James 1982), and others have agreed. Indeed, Abraham Maslow made his career on the study of "peak experiences" (Maslow 1994, 1968, 2012; Lester *et al.* 1983) which are just a secular name for weak mystical experiences. The point here, people believe not because they are stupid, but because they have experiences that prove to them that something else exists.



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*Let's face it, these hidden laws [of mysticism] are hidden, but they are only hidden by [your] own ignorance. And the word mystical is just arrived at through people's ignorance. There's nothing mystical about it, only that you're ignorant of what that entails.*

George Harrison

## 2 How Many?

I suppose the question now becomes, how many people have these experiences? Conservative estimates put the number anywhere between thirty and fifty percent (Bourque and Back 1971; Bourque 1969; Yamane and Polzer 1994). And note, it is not just the uneducated who have these experiences. The limited sociological research that has been conducted on the phenomenon has found that those with more education are equally likely, if not *more* likely, to have profound mystical experiences (Bourque and Back 1971; Bourque 1969). Educated Westerners just don't conceptualize it in the same way as others. Instead of using language and concepts provided to them by priests and gurus, they use a secular and psychologically neutral language. The educated characterize mystical experiences as peak experiences (Maslow 1971; Maslow 1962), transcendence experience (Maslow 1971), "pure consciousness events" (Forman 1999), or as Albert Einstein put it, "cosmic religious feeling" (Einstein 1930). There are a lot of different names for the same core experience. I think, arguably, if we were to open the field and synchronize our definitions, we would find that most people have mystical experiences. Indeed, Abraham Maslow found exactly this. His surprise at the ubiquity of religious experience is expressed in the following quotation:

*In my first investigations... I used this word because I thought some people had peak-experiences and others did not. But as I gathered information, and as I became more skillful in asking questions, I found that a higher and higher percentage of my subjects began to report peak-experiences... I finally fell into the habit of expecting everyone to have peak-experiences and of being rather surprised if I ran across somebody who could report none at all. Because of this experience, I finally began to use the word 'non-peaker' to describe, not the person who is unable to have peak-experiences, but rather the person who is afraid of them, who suppresses them, who denies them, who turns away from them, or who 'forgets' them (Maslow 2012, 340–1).*

He goes on:

*At first it was our thought that some people simply didn't have peaks. But, as I said above, we found out later that it's much more probable that the non-peakers have them but repress or misinterpret them, or-for whatever reason-reject them and therefore don't use them. Some of the reasons for such rejection so far found are: (1) a strict Marxian attitude, as with Simone de Beauvoir, who was persuaded that this was a weakness, a sickness (also Ar-*

*thur Koestler). A Marxist should be 'tough'. Why Freud rejected his is anybody's guess: perhaps (2) his 19th century mechanistic-scientific attitude, perhaps (3) his pessimistic character. Among my various subjects I have found both causes at work sometimes. In others I have found (4) a narrowly rationalistic attitude which I considered a defense against being flooded by emotion, by irrationality, by loss of control, by illogical tenderness, by dangerous femininity, or by the fear of insanity. One sees such attitudes more often in engineers, in mathematicians, in analytic philosophers, in bookkeepers and accountants, and generally in obsessional people (Maslow 1962).*

It is interesting to me that Maslow suggests that Freud, notorious for his opinion that religion was an infantile human delusion (Freud 1964), had his own mystical experience, but that he "rejected" it for an unknown reason. Maslow suggests it is because of the mechanistic bias of 19th-century science, or perhaps his pessimistic personality. Freud, it would seem, had a mystical experience, maybe more, but came down hard against its validity and utility.

So what are we to make of this? Unless we want to discount the evidence, and people's experience, we need to accept the fact that at least a lot, if not most (and perhaps all) people have mystical experiences, whatever those might be, and that these experiences form the basis of their belief in things beyond the material world. Since I am not the kind of scholar to discount people's experience, and since I wholeheartedly agree with both Walter Stace who says that mystical experience is "a psychological fact of which there is abundant evidence" (Stace 1960a), and with Abraham Maslow who thinks that everybody has mystical experiences, but some people deny or misrepresent, for personal, emotional, or psychopathological reasons that have nothing to do with the reality or science of it all, I'm going to accept the reality of mystical experience. You, the reader, can believe whatever you want.

### 3 What is Mystical Experience?

Once we accept the validity of mystical experience, then we need to be careful not to pathologize it. Although there are some cases where mystical experience intersects with madness (Heriot-Maitland 2008), in most cases mystical experiences have positive effects on the mental health of the people who have them (Newberg, d'Aquile, and Rause 2001). Indeed, Abraham Maslow said that the healthiest people have mystical experiences (Maslow 1962).

If you accept that mystical experience is valid and a lot of people have them, and if you can avoid pathologizing it long enough to take a closer look, the next question becomes, *what is a mystical experience*. Unfortunately, that is not an easy question to answer, not because the answer is particularly difficult to come up with, but because we, and by “we” I mean the scholars who study mystical experience, often get stuck trying to answer it. We get stuck for a few reasons, I think.

**Reason one: Mystical experience is big.** The first reason we get stuck trying to understand and explain it is that it is big..., really big..., so big in fact that the people who have them often exclaim they are “ineffable” and “beyond words” (Stace 1960a, b). Mystical experiences are often, though now always, filled with grand cosmic revelations, glorious divine enlightenments, and the recognition of vast and powerful cosmic intelligence, as Einstein put it (Hermanns 1983), far beyond “normal” human consciousness. It’s like an LSD trip when your brain is still underdeveloped. The psychedelics of it “blow your mind”, at least temporarily, and make it difficult to find words.

The size of these experiences is a problem. It is a problem for the people who have them because it makes it difficult to integrate and ground their “cosmic experiences”, as Einstein would say. It is also a problem for some scholars because from the subject’s expression of ineffability, some scholars conclude ineffability, and leave it at that, not trying. Happy to poke around at the periphery of the phenomenon, they leave it at that. “We’ll never understand it,” they’ll say, “because it is above human language, and impossible to understand.”

**Reason two: No common language.** Of course, not everybody gets stuck on the cosmic bigness of the mystical experiences, or cops out trying to figure it out. Some do try to explain it, but that can be a problem as well because those who do try to explain it contribute to what I want to call **lexical confusion**. Lots of people have come up with lots of different words to describe the whole thing, but all these words get

poured into an intra-cultural word soup that does more to obscure than enlighten. Western mystics talk about the experiences of gnosis (Inge 2005, 9) [1], oneness, **connection** with the incorruptible one (Wisse 1990, 105), or the descent of Christ consciousness. Hindus call it *Samādhi* (Zimmer 1951), *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, or experiencing the boundless bliss of Brahman. Sufis say *Fana* (Vaughan-Lee 1998) and Buddhists say *Satori* (Smith 1958). In the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*, we connect to the *Clear Light* (Evans-Wents 1960). Evangelical Christians speak of being “born again” into the Light or experiencing the *Living Flame of Love* (John of the Cross 2015) or the *Love-Fire* (Böhme 1912). And it is not just the extremely faithful that speak of it. Even those few scientists who have looked at it have come up with their own language, calling them peak experiences, “pure consciousness events”, *cosmic religious feeling*, and so on. It is a bloody Babylonian tower of bewildering biblical proportions, that is for sure. With no consistent and agreed upon language or framework, defining mystical experience clearly, discussing it sensibly, and understanding it even a little, is a challenge.

**Reason three: Confusion and obfuscation.** Lexical and phenomenological obstacles are not the only reasons we get stuck trying to explain mystical experience. Another problem comes from the fact that some hide their teachings and understandings to confuse and obscure. This sounds conspiratorial, but not really. What I am talking about here are the political and social class dynamics of human spirituality. Just like all things, there are complex social class, political, and even gender interests figure into human spirituality. There is evidence of members of certain social classes inferring with and obfuscating human spirituality throughout human history. Consider for example the western Tarot deck. This tarot deck, which some take to be a fountain of esoteric spiritual wisdom, is a remarkable piece of spiritual/political propaganda, so remarkable in fact that the foremost and most respected historical scholars of the tarot called it the

*...most successful propaganda campaign ever launched: not by a very long way the most important, but the most completely successful. An entire false history, and false interpretation, of the Tarot pack was concocted by the occultists; and it is all but universally believed (Decker, Depaulis, and Dummett 1996, 27).*

Essentially freemasons developed this deck at a time when they needed to shift spiritual thinking in a direction away from support of feudal elites, and towards support and development of capitalist agenda (Sosteric 2014). They used the

power and authority vested in their lodges to create a tool to disseminate not wisdom about mystical or religious experiences, but western propaganda disguised as spiritual wisdom. The dissemination of a propaganda deck that presents as a tool of deep spiritual wisdom *confuses* and *obfuscates* the issues.

Of course, the tarot is not the same as mystical experience, but they do speak about it in their works, and it does point to the reality of interference in human spirituality. Other sociologists have uncovered more examples of direct obfuscation. Sociologists Bender (2010) and Jantzen (1995) have pointed out how political interests, economic interests, and even gender biases figure into the sanitation and obfuscation of mystical investigations and scholarly theorizations of same. Jantzen, for example, notes how powerful men have sanitized and “domesticated” mystical experience, *stripping it of important elements* and abstracting it into a private and personalized thing *nothing like* the actual experiences of those who have them. It has been going on a long time. In a working paper entitled *From Zoroaster to Star Wars, Jesus to Marx*, I point out how most of the world’s institutionalized spiritualities are rooted in what elite Sassanian priests did with Zoroaster’s original mystical teachings when they captured them and wrote them down some eighteen hundred years ago (Sosteric 2018a). I hypothesize, but have little doubt, which in the process, they sanitized and stripped important elements of the experience, distorting, confusing, and leaving it harder to understand the nature and import of the experiences.

Interestingly, suggesting there is deliberate interference in human spirituality is not particularly novel, nor are sociologists the only ones who do it. As the historian Versluis notes, western mystical traditions are quite elitist and have a long history of obscuring the truth behind closed temple doors so that “the masses” do not have access to the real truths (Versluis 2007). Ostensibly, they hide their understanding because they believe that the masses “*cannot handle the truth*” [2]. The words of Brother Wilmhurst, a Freemason and advocate of esoteric spirituality, which is spirituality where mysticism is obscured and hidden from public view, eloquently expresses this idea, which is that mysticism should be hidden from public view and the teachings obscured.

*In all periods of the world’s history, and in every part of the globe, secret orders and societies have existed outside the limits of the official churches for teaching what are called ‘the Mysteries’: for imparting to ‘suitable and prepared minds’ certain truths of human life, certain instructions about divine things, about the things that belong to our peace, about human nature and human destiny, which*

*it was undesirable to publish to the multitude who would but profane those teachings and apply the esoteric knowledge that was communicated to ‘perverse’ and perhaps to ‘disastrous’ ends (Wilmhurst 1922).*

From the above quote you can see that members of esoteric (read elite) organizations want to hide the truth, they have an excuse for hiding the truth, and, as sociologists are beginning to discover in more detail, they work hard to confuse, obfuscate, and sanitize the truth. Why? As a sociologist, I think it is because they don’t want the people to see the uncomfortable truth about mystical or religious experience, which is they trend in democratic, revolutionary, and egalitarian directions that are antagonistic to the status quo (Sosteric 2018b). Human spirituality is something that those interested in maintaining the status quo need to control and subvert, and they work hard to do just that. Even Christian scholars themselves must now admit that the elites in the Catholic Church entered thousands of edits into the bible (Ehrman 2007). They may stumble trying to understand why, but a sociologist would immediately hypothesize social class dynamics and interference, with the only real issue being to unpack the specific reasons why.

I have so say, uncovering the social class dynamics of human institutions, human actions, and human knowledge, is what we, and by “we” I mean sociologists, do. It is our “thing” so to speak, and it is a thing that I believe is very valuable and necessary, not only academically to those interested in the full truth of human spirituality, but also practically, for society and the world, especially in these times when we are beginning to explore the spiritual/existential roots of violence (Dědová 2018), and especially as we are beginning to see how easy it is to weaponize human spirituality. Given that there is clear historical and sociological evidence for interference in human spirituality, and given that sociologists are particularly adept at exploring the related dimensions, I think that to fully understand human spirituality, we need a multidisciplinary effort with increased contributions from sociologists. Contributions by sociologists are going to raise awareness of some of the “conspiracies” that have subverted what I would call authentic spirituality, but that can only add to our understanding of human spirituality.

**Reason four: Explaining to the uninitiated.** Lexical confusion, the bigly-ness of it all, and intentional interference all muddy the water and make it easy for us to get stuck, and hard for us to explain and understand, but that is not all it. Even if you do get past the bigness of the experience. Even if you do sort out the lexical confusion long enough so that you can understand. Even if you don’t get snapped up by

gender and social class distortions that, sometimes intentionally, often unintentionally, obfuscate authentic human spirituality, you still get stuck trying to explain it to the “uninitiated”. By uninitiated, I mean someone who has never, or as Maslow points out, more likely doesn’t remember having/ is repressing, a mystical experience. Trying to explain to, and have a conversion with, someone who has never had a mystical experience is like trying to explain what you see with your eyes, to somebody who doesn’t have eyes to see. I’m not saying anything new. We’re all familiar with the parable of the elephant. Trying to explain mystical experience to the uninitiated is like trying to explain an elephant to a group of blindfolded men who never get to see it, and can only understand by feeling it up.

Combine language difficulties with the size of it, intentional obfuscation, and problems communicating to the uninitiated, and you can understand why defining, understanding, and explaining mystical experience is a major challenge. I try to capture the challenge of it in my *Allegory of the Blindfold* (Sosteric 2017a), but I’m not the first one to point out the challenges, either directly or through allegory and metaphor. Indeed, Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* is a classic attempt to explain the problems associated with understanding and talking about mystical experiences to those still facing the lights on the wall.

## 4 Mystical Experience is Connection

With all the problems associated with mystical experience, is it possible to understand, define, and discuss? I believe it is, though I will say, it takes a lot of work to wrap your head around it, even when you are a longtime “explorer of the realms” as I am. I think the best way to at least start talking about the experience is to understand mystical experiences, religious experiences, as, at root, connection experiences (Sosteric 2017b). From the mystical “connection” flows the various forms of connection experience, like religious experience, mystical experience, Fana, connection to the “pure light”, and so on, with individual variation in intensity and depth being explained by psychological, sociological, and even neurological variables, like the religious or political lens through which the experience flows, any pathologies that may be present, damage to the brain systems, and so on.

Moving forward, based on research and my own connection experiences, I would like to define mystical experience simply as **connection** to something more than the **Normal Consciousness** of our daily existence. What is this more?

Lukoff suggests the “more” is the divine. According to Lukoff, mystical experience is a harmonious relationship (i.e. connection) to the divine. Similarly, Phillips (2001, 494) suggests that a mystical experience is “*direct awareness of... a ‘Spiritual Object’ [such] as Brahman*”, in other words, a connection to divinity. When somebody has a mystical experience, they are having an experience characterized by connection to the divine, or some aspect of it. That is, they are connected to something more than their normal, egoic consciousness. This definition accurately represents the general phenomenology of the mystical experience. I think if you ask anybody who has had mystical experiences, religious experience, peak experiences, etc., every single one would agree; they’ve connected to “*something more than the normal identity of their normal daily life*”.

Of course, not everybody agrees that there is anything divine about mystical experience. Some will tell you that the mystical experience has neurological roots. They will say that mystical experience occurs when neurological things happen in the brain (Newberg, d’Aquile, and Rause 2001; Newberg and Waldman 2009; Heriot-Maitland 2008). By making this claim, they reduce the “more” of mystical experience to neurological activity. Others (Dossey 2012), myself included, would say that “the more” is not neurological (though there may be neurological correlates), but in fact “more” than even that. As already noted, as Lukoff and Phillips suggest, the “more” is something divine. I prefer to put aside notions of divinity and adopt a more secular language. I would theorize that “the more” we connect to is the **Fabric of Consciousness** (Sosteric 2016) as it exists sui generis, and independently of the physical universe. You can call that Fabric God, G-D, Ain, Ain Soph, Para Brahman, the All, the Living Flame, the Clear Light, Cosmic Intelligence, or whatever you want. I simply call it “The Fabric of Consciousness”. It is to this “Fabric” that, if you can believe Abraham Maslow, we all connect to, with more or less intensity, with more or less duration, with more or less frequency, and with more or less open acknowledge, when we have a mystical experience.

## 5 Conclusion

So, everybody has a connection experience. Everybody connects, at one time or another, to something more. Whether you think the “something more” is merely a disaggregated or innervated neural network, or something that exists independently of the body, is neither here nor there. I believe it is more than simple neural activity, but until scientists can all see for themselves how consciousness can interface with physical matter without physical intervention (a “quantum”

discovery I predict is only a few years off now), my belief will only be a belief.

But, that's not the point. The point of this short little note is not to get into a scientific discussion of the merits of idealism versus materialism, or to hammer down whether it all comes down to material existence or not, the point is to simply say, *connection experiences* are valid human experiences that are a lot more common, and a lot more significant, a lot more pervasive, and not as well understood as we might at first think. That is all. What you take from these simple statements is up to you. I will say this, however. Despite secular prayers to the contrary, atheism hasn't taken hold, and it is not because humans are stupid, it is because there's something there that keeps them interested and engaged. Organized religion is certainly on the decline, but scholars

are now talking about the transition to a "new stage" [3] of religious development "*a new era of experience-based religion, one whose foundation is an intense, personal experience of sacredness*" (Roberts 2014). If that's true, and I suspect it is, it certainly behooves us, and by "us" I mean scholars in all disciplines interested in human spirituality, to get our heads around the phenomenon of religion/mystical/connection experience, fast. If we do not then, in an increasingly "connected" world that advances with or without our blessing and understanding, we're going to seem increasingly confused and out of place.

## Notes

- [1] As Inge says (Inge 2005, 9), gnosis is "*not merely hearsay and dependence*" on the teachings of others. Gnosis is that "*which envisages the unseen for itself. For it does not believe on a person, it believes in and into him.*" In other words, gnosis is direct mystical experience that you yourself have.
- [2] See, for example, Eckarshausen (1909), Lomas (2010, 2006), and Wilmhurst (1920).
- [3] This is in scare quotes because if we are now traversing to an age of connection experiences, we are certainly not traversing to a "new stage". There are simply too many words in the Sanskrit lexicon dealing with Consciousness, connection, the Fabric, union (yoga), and so on to think for a second that we haven't been here before. Rather, we are returning to a previous, how shall we say, Vedic stage of human existence, just with a lot more technology and capability. If it is true, and if the unexpected acceleration of climate change is any indication of what's in store, the next decade or two should prove quite interesting indeed.



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# Patañjali's Kriya Yoga in the Rule of Saint Benedict

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*The Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali and *The Rule of Saint Benedict* are two spiritual classics that have guided countless seekers over millennia in their search for inner peace and joy. Despite the many years and distinct cultures that separated these two sages, there are remarkable similarities in the spiritual practices they encouraged their disciples to adopt. This article highlights the three components of Patañjali's *Kriya yoga*: *Tapas* – accepting pain and discomfort as help for purification, *Svādhyāya* – study and introspection as a means to know our True Self, and *Īśvarapraṇidhāna* – dedicating and surrendering our lives to God, and examines their place in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.

## 1 Introduction

*The Yoga Sūtras* of Sri Patañjali and Saint Benedict's *Rule* (further quoted as RB) are two timeless classics that continue to inspire and guide the spiritual lives of countless men and women. Both are masterful teachings on how to live with equanimity of mind, free of selfish attachments, and in refined loving service to others. To guide us on our path of Self-discovery, Sri Patañjali offers nearly two hundred *sūtras*, or "threads" of teaching, while Saint Benedict's *Rule* consists of seventy three chapters. Although Sri Patañjali's *Sūtras*, are mostly short aphorisms, and the chapters in Saint Benedict's *Rule* mostly just a paragraph in length, both texts brim with truth and wisdom, and offer the enthusiastic student a lifetime of study, reflection, and spiritual practice.

Whereas the wisdom of Sri Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* is historically placed with India's ancient forest-dwelling sages, Benedict's wisdom, though rooted in the desert tradition of Eastern Christianity, emerged from a Western Christian milieu. But curiously, notwithstanding the years and cultures that separate their authors, traces of Sri Patañjali's teachings are seen as well in the *Rule* of Saint Benedict. A close reading of the *Rule* reveals that Sri "Patanjali's pulse" [1] beats throughout Saint Benedict's *Rule*, and that Kriya Yoga practices – accepting pain as help for purification, study, and surrender to the Supreme Being (*Yoga Sūtras* 2.1) – are seen as especially important by Saint Benedict for the spiritual formation of both monks and lay person alike.

Interestingly, while the teachings of these spiritual masterpieces have survived and grown in popularity for over a millennium, very little is known about their authors. What we know about the life of Saint Benedict comes primarily from Pope St. Gregory the Great (590–604) who authored the first biography of Benedict probably around 593–594 AD (Gardner 1911). Other than this work, we must glean insight into Saint Benedict from examining the *Rule* itself. We can be confident in our efforts, for as Pope St. Gregory said of Saint Benedict: "*If anyone wishes to know his character and life more precisely, he may find in the ordinances of that Rule a complete account of the abbot's practice; for the holy man cannot have taught otherwise than as he lived*" (RB Preface).

While Saint Benedict wrote his *Rule* about 1500 years ago, there is much less certainty about the origins of the *Yoga Sūtras*. Although Sri Patañjali's birth is generally placed in the second century, the person of Patañjali himself (herself?) is questioned by scholars. Was it just one person who put forth these teachings? Or was Patañjali really multiple people,



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whose accumulated wisdom was passed on over many years, first orally and then eventually in written form?

Regardless of the scant biographical information we have, we are very fortunate to have the spiritual gems these two sages bequeathed us with. Saint Benedict's *Rule* and Sri Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* are part of humanity's shared spiritual heritage, that while rooted in two distinct traditions, Christianity and yoga respectively, belong to no one. Seekers from any spiritual tradition, or none, can avail themselves to the wisdom found in these ancient texts. Both these sacred works offer a time-honored blueprint on how to cultivate a steady mind and the inner peace that follows. They are guides to nurturing a heart that is at all times contributing to the sanctity of life by responding with love and compassion to the people and ordinary events that shape our days. The *Rule* and *Sūtras* teach us how to become wholly capable of meeting the challenges that life presents. They do not promise us an easy life but one that allows for a greater intimacy with the joys and sorrows that every life entails.

## 2 Growth Begins with Paying Attention

Sri Patañjali's *Sūtras* and Saint Benedict's *Rule* begin in a similar fashion. They call upon disciples to pay attention. The profundity of the teachings about to be shared require disciples to put aside all concerns and pay heed to what is being said. Thus we have Sri Patañjali, in the very first sūtra saying, "*Atha Yogānuśāsanam*" or "*Now, the exposition of Yoga*" (*Yoga Sūtras* 1.1). Sri Patañjali is beginning to teach. He's telling us to take note, to stop worrying about the past or future, to be present to the moment, because he knows how to liberate us from ignorance and suffering, and lead us back to the inner peace that is our True Nature.

Saint Benedict also knew how critical attentive listening is to the spiritual life, so in the Prologue to his *Rule*, he says very clearly – "*Listen carefully my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart*" (RB Prologue 1). Like Sri Patañjali, Saint Benedict wants to ensure that his disciples know that it is time to become single minded, to concentrate on the task at hand, to *listen*. He goes on to say: "*This message of mine is for you, then, if you are willing to give up your own will once and for all, and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord*" (RB Prologue 3). With these words Saint Benedict is echoing Sri Patañjali's teaching of *Īśvarapraṇidhāna* – the voluntary surrender of one's will and the fruit of one's actions to God – the third element of Kriya Yoga. If we are to

know anything of God these two Masters tell us, we must surrender. So at the very beginning of his *Rule*, Saint Benedict drops a hint to his disciples of what is to come, what they can expect if they choose to place their spiritual lives under his guidance. To be true followers of Christ they will have to surrender their wills, Saint Benedict declares, their devotion to God must be a priority, one in which they wholeheartedly and joyfully commit their time, energy, and love to. It is the same for us today. If we are to discover the peace that is our True Nature and liberate ourselves from the ignorance that obscures it, we must learn to surrender.

## 3 Kriya Yoga

In Book One or *Pada One* ("pada" – one forth portion) of the *Yoga Sūtras*, Sri Patañjali begins his instruction by defining the practice of yoga and laying out its theoretical foundations. *Nirodha* – a still mind that no longer identifies with the habitual thought patterns that cultivate a false sense of identity – is presented as the goal of yoga. Kriya Yoga contributes to the attainment of *nirodha* by helping us be attentive to our daily experiences, and intentional in our efforts not to identify our True Self with the body, or with the whirlwind thoughts (*vrittis*) of the mind (*Yoga Sūtras* 1.2).

In *Pada Two*, Sri Patañjali delves into *sādhana* (*the means to liberation*), or the spiritual practices necessary to overcome obstacles impeding our liberation from ignorance and thus our suffering. It is here where Sri Patañjali introduces Kriya Yoga (*Yoga Sūtras* 2.1), which contains the essential components of any spiritual path and important practices to build upon to advance on the path of yoga. Sri Patañjali tells us that the three elements of Kriya Yoga: (1) *Tapas* – accepting challenges and even pain (physical and psychological) for the purpose of self-purification, (2) *Svādhyāya* – study for the purpose of refining and elevating the mind, and (3) *Īśvarapraṇidhāna* – surrendering to and dedicating one's life to knowing and serving God, constitute yoga in practice (Carrera 2006).

While Saint Benedict, of course, didn't use the term Kriya Yoga, in nearly every chapter of the *Rule*, his disciples are encouraged to use what are essentially Kriya Yoga practices to progress in the monastic life. The Sanskrit word *tapas* literally means "*to burn or create heat*". It refers to those situations that arise in one form or another on a daily basis that challenge us, and that we usually wish we could avoid. *Tapas* could be in physical form, for example a health challenge of some sort, or psychological in nature, perhaps an uncomfortable conversation that we need to have with someone.

Sri Patañjali teaches that all the *tapas* we face offer us an opportunity for growth, and our accumulated experience of facing these challenges, whether we appear successful in doing so or not, all slowly contribute over time to *nirodha*. In other words, everything that life presents us, no matter how sad, bothersome, irritating, frightening, tedious, or frustrating, can be used as material for our spiritual growth. *Tapas* will have a purifying effect if we receive them with an open mind and accept them as lessons from which to learn.

Although adopted by sixth century monks to organize their life in a monastery, the *Rule* has always been relevant for the common person, and remains remarkably so today. The daily *tapas* that Saint Benedict addresses in his *Rule* are challenges we all face, no matter our station in life. So we can turn to the wisdom of the *Rule* when wondering: How do I restrain hurtful speech so that I do not “*sin with my tongue*” (RB 6.1)? How do I “*welcome as Christ*” guests, acquaintances, and strangers (RB 53.1; 66)? How do I serve others without “*grumbling or hardship*” (RB 35.13)? How do I care for the sick and vulnerable in a manner that is “*patiently borne*” (RB 36.5)? How do I respect the rank of those higher or lower than me in my place of employment (RB 63)?

In the *Sūtras*, Sri Patañjali tells us that the value of *tapas* is not only to become stronger people who are able to endure life’s hardships. It is also the refinement of our rougher edges so that we can, over time, become kinder, more compassionate and greater lovers of people and creation. And to accelerate our growth, Sri Patañjali advises that we actually place ourselves voluntarily in situations that will create a little heat in our lives. Thus, we are to look for occasions that will be unpleasant and make us uncomfortable. Visiting someone in the hospital, for example, may be a practice of *tapas* for someone who is afraid of ill health, or aging, or death. Or volunteering to head a committee, can be a *tapas* practice, if we’re inclined to doubt our competency and leadership abilities. *Tapas*, whether we encounter them voluntarily or involuntarily, give us an experience of the wisdom and peace of our True Self, and thus the realization that we possess all we need to face the capriciousness of life.

Saint Benedict also knew that whether our challenges are physical, emotional, existential, or petty, they contain valuable lessons, and offer an opportunity to overcome that which limits living from our full spiritual potential. So the *Rule* as a whole is designed to make us “burn”, to groom us by providing teachings on how to accept and approach the challenges of daily living. Knowing that the hidden fruit of *tapas* is self-transformation, Saint Benedict extends guidance on how to handle the taxing tribulations that are part of our

daily lives. In fact, he referred to a monastery as “*a school of the Lord’s service*” (RB Prologue 45), a clear reference to his understanding that one enters a monastery, or adopts the *Rule* as a lay person, in order to learn how to use the events of daily life to burn away imperfections and thus image more clearly their Divine Nature.

## 4 Svādhyāya

The second component of Kriya Yoga that Sri Patañjali introduces is *Svādhyāya*, or study for the purpose of elevating the mind. *Svādhyāya*, for Sri Patañjali, can refer to the great scriptures of our religious traditions – the *Bible*, the *Bhagavad Gīta*, the *Koran*, the *Dhammapada* – or the study of anything that reveals to us our true Self. The mind is elevated when it is engaged in study that leads us to contemplate our unity with the Divine. As Saint Benedict asks us, in the Prologue to his *Rule*, to “*listen with the ear of the heart*”, *Svādhyāya* in the *Sūtras*, asks us to study with the heart, and to use our study to understand ourselves and our world better (Satchidananda 2012). *Svādhyāya* allows us to finely attune to the dynamisms of nature, and assists us in the self-reflection that is necessary if we are to understand how a practice of *tapas* ultimately serves our Self-realization.

Saint Benedict’s directive on study can be found in Chapter 48 of his *Rule*, titled *The Daily Manual Labor*, where he speaks of the importance both of manual labor and prayerful reading, two cornerstones of Benedictine monasticism. This reading, known as *Lectio Divina*, is a slow meditative reading of scripture, and has over the years become a common form of prayer for the laity as well as monastics. Study and reading were so important to Saint Benedict that he made it part of the daily routine of the monastery, allotting time for it between the hours of prescribed prayer, and increasing this time during the season of Lent. And just in case his monks didn’t fully understand the importance he placed on *Svādhyāya*, Saint Benedict would actually have senior monks walk around the monastery to ensure the younger fellows were studying and not “*wasting time or engaged in idle talk*” (RB 48.18)!

But for Sri Patañjali *Svādhyāya* isn’t just for the sake of study or to accumulate knowledge, theories, or facts. Its primary purpose is to allow our spiritual reading to feed our imaginations and to inspire our *sādhana*. Ultimately, Sri Patañjali tells us, the purpose of *Svādhyāya* is to *become* what we read, to reach the heights of the saints and masters, and to elevate ourselves so we become one with the One we seek. Saint Benedict would concur.

## 5 Īśvarapraṇidhāna

Finally, the last component of Kriya Yoga is, *Īśvarapraṇidhāna*, the surrender of our personal desires to those yearnings springing from the heart of humanity, which is the heart of God incarnate. To fully dedicate one's life to the wellbeing of others, requires a realization that all is gift, given to us not for our benefit alone but to share in a manner that will move all of creation forward. A life fully dedicated to the common good requires us to surrender to the will of God, and to align ourselves wholly with the Divine creativity that permeates and animates the entire creation.

A key element in an act of surrender is humility, the laying aside of one's ego so that we can serve others selflessly. Saint Benedict placed such importance on humility that the topic is by far the longest chapter in the *Rule* (RB 7). As an aid to his monks in their practice of cultivating humility, Saint Benedict turned to the Psalms, and admonished his monks to “*always keep the fear (presence) of God before your eyes*” (Ps 36:2). We remain humble, teaches Saint Benedict, by resting our attention always on the omnibenevolence of God. And as we ascend the steps of humility he lays out in the *Rule* we will “*quickly arrive at that perfect love of God*” (RB 7.67; 1 John 4:18).

It is important to note that when Sri Patañjali and Saint Benedict speak of self-surrender as central to the spiritual life, they are not only referring to the putting aside of our personal interests. The ability to surrender requires embracing a practice of obedience, and the concurrent habit of reflection and interiority that is fundamental to allowing oneself to defer to the will of a higher authority – abbot, guru, God, humanity, universal love, etc. Recognizing the human propen-

sity to resist deferring to someone else's will, Saint Benedict cautions us that our obedience should be “*free from grumbling*” and not “*sluggish or half-hearted*” (RB 5.14–15), thereby burning away the impurities Sri Patañjali speaks of. This is a key point in the practice of Kriya Yoga because for Sri Patañjali, *Tapas*, *Svādhyāya*, and *Īśvarapraṇidhāna*, weren't to be cast in a negative light, as if they are a grim burden for us to carry. No, the practices of Kriya Yoga are to be welcomed, for through them we are able to begin burning away the inner obstacles that prevent us from unlocking our fullest potential. By removing these obstacles we begin to discover the joy that arises when our actions are purposeful, meaningful, and intimately immersed in the lives of others. At the conclusion of his chapter on obedience, perhaps to lighten things up a bit, Saint Benedict reaches into Corinthians (2 Cor 9:7) and adroitly writes into his *Rule* that “*obedience must be given gladly, for God loves a cheerful giver*” (RB 5:16).

For a monk (or anyone else) following Benedict's *Rule*, nearly each of its 73 chapters can be seen as *sādhana*. For Saint Benedict, a monk's life is to be devoted to prayer and work – *ora et labora*. Prayer and work is what monastic life revolves around, and imbedded in these activities is the potential to draw closer and closer to God. Thus chapters of the *Rule* provide instruction on how to pray the Divine Office (chap. 8), how to maintain reverence in prayer (chap. 20), how to engage in manual labor (chap. 48), how to be a kitchen server (chap. 35), and how to receive guests (chap. 53). For someone trying to live the *Rule*, *sādhana* is weaved into the rhythm of his or her day. The *Rule* is their *sādhana*, their *sādhana* is the *Rule*.

## 6 The Middle Way is the Sattvic Way

Saint Benedict's way is the middle way, a path where he sets down for his disciples “*nothing harsh, nothing burdensome*” (RB Prologue 46). Because he understands just how challenging the *Rule* can be, Saint Benedict is mindful always of the disciple who may need some extra encouragement, who is perhaps a bit slovenly, or occasionally remiss in meeting their obligations. So to those who require a little more consideration, Saint Benedict softens and declares, “*Yet, all things are to be done with moderation on account of the fainthearted*” (RB 48.9). His approach in the *Rule* is, like Patañjali's in the *Sūtras*, *sattvic* – balanced, pure, always aiming to nurture and bring out the best in his followers. The *sattvic* way of Saint

Benedict and Sri Patañjali takes notice of people's strengths not their weaknesses and starts from there. So in his chapter to abbots Saint Benedict offers them this advice on caring for their flock: “*the abbot must accommodate and adapt himself to each one's character and intelligence*” (RB 2.32). The *sattvic* spirit that Benedict expects from all his monks is nurtured by an abbot's dedicated practice of Kriya Yoga. A practice that becomes fruitful when it is enthusiastically attended to without interruption over a long period of time (*Yoga Sūtras* 1.14).

As we are purified by the practices of Kriya Yoga, we are able to live life with greater depth, from a place of peace and

generosity. Both Sri Patañjali and Saint Benedict begin from the premise that our daily lives, no matter who or where we are, provide us with all we need to grow into a greater awareness of our True Nature, our Divine Nature. They remind us that our daily routines afford us innumerable opportunities to burn away our impurities and grow in sanctity. As we advance in the daily practice of Kriya Yoga our Ego begins to slowly diminish in size and weakens in its influence over our thoughts and behavior. And as our ego becomes less dominant we become more sattvic, and thus more prepared and better equipped to approach the “eight limbs” of yoga (*ashtanga yoga*) – the mix of ethical precepts, personal observances, physical practices and meditative techniques, designed to further clear the mind of impurities, and to reveal the wisdom that resides in each of us.

The sattvic way of Sri Patañjali and Saint Benedict offers us a time-honored guide on how to live skillfully and fully, both capable of meeting life’s challenges and effusively grateful for the opportunity to do so. Their deepest desire was for us to know that the God we seek dwells within us. The beauty and genius of their instruction is that it is accessible to anyone – ordinary people living ordinary lives – whose spiritual calling sets them on a path of self-transcendence. The practices of Kriya Yoga are indispensable steps on this path, serving to bolster us, as we move deeper into the cave of the heart sowing the seeds of self-transformation.

## Note

- [1] “Patanjali’s Pulse” is a phrase coined by Rev. Jaganath Carrera, founder of the Yoga Life Society, and the title of a course he taught in 2016 at the Yoga Life Center, NJ.

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# Grand Faith



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**Key words**

Zen Buddhism, Zazen,  
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**In his short essay, Sandó Kaisen addresses the role of faith in the tradition of Japanese Sōtō Zen Buddhism and its centrality for the practice of Zazen.**



Most people go astray in sterile thoughts of the mind, imagining spirituality based on morals, discipline, and achievement of various goals, and being persuaded that this means “to walk the grand Way of the Patriarchs of the past”. However, their Heart is not pure enough to reach the grand Reality and achieve liberation from all suffering. Because, Heart can be reached through Heart, not through exercises or mental thoughts. All those new meditations that attract so many people are nothing but ephemeral practices, which only add confusion to illusions already well anchored.

The Grand Way does not depend on anything that is human. It does not depend on kindness, nor concentration, nor morals, nor merits, and above all not on meditation technique.

It is not enough just to sit down. We have to sit down with faith in the Spirit. If this faith is absent, the Heart cannot be reached.

In the old days, warriors died with faith. In reality, they did not die, because Heart is not from this world. As long as we do not reach the Heart, we remain ordinary beings subject to the vagaries of ideas and convictions purely human. We are thus at the mercy of those who have learned to chain others to better possess them and take their money. The world is full of imposters with beautiful mouths and words learned, brilliant, and logical, who take humble, affable and smiling attitudes.

The reason, philosophy, techniques of well-being and perfect meditations of present day have been right for those who walk beside their Heart without ever knowing it.

People only feed their egoism without even realizing it.



## About the author

**Sandó Kaisen** (1952) is one of the main representatives of Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Europe. He has been publicly active since 1990 through his books, lectures, as well as TV and radio appearances.

We protect ourselves, we save ourselves, we cowardly hide our fears to better appear in the eyes of others – liberated, wise and tranquil. But no one can escape the Eye of the Heart. We can continue lying to ourselves and lying to the others, but there will come a time when we will have to inevitably face ourselves. Lamentation, regrets or crying will then be of no use.

If the Heart is full of all the human vanities that we ourselves have created, the earth and the sky remain forever separated.

Penetrating the Heart of the Way does not depend on us, but on the extraordinary faith that animates us.

And this faith depends on great determination and great desire to reach the Heart.





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