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Issue content

Editorial

It seems that constructivists are correct when they define human existence as conditioned. There is no doubt that we all as humans are determined in multiple ways biologically, culturally, and socially. However, constructivists are not right when they try to impose the same conditioning on the primordial human experience of conscious being, primordial subjectivity subsisting in oneself. "I am and I know that I am" is a verbal expression of that experience going far beyond ordinary human state, transcending every conditioned modality of being and establishing its unconditioned modality.

Nevertheless, we can argue, "is something like that possible at all"?

When we look deeply into the history of spirituality, or into our own experience, as some of the authors have done in this issue, we may find strong arguments to support our initial claim. At the very moment when we happen to eliminate our identification with a particular form, our authentic identity is restored. As long as our sense of ourselves is no more derived from the form, but from the awareness that is aware of every form, both physical and mental, sense of self arises from the awareness as unconditioned awareness which is aware of, and at the same time distanced from, everything that can be perceived.

In this very moment, a projection of the self into the sphere of objectivity is broken, at least for a while. It is this shift of identity from a form to the awareness aware of itself that deconstructs an unauthentic self-image and uncovers the ever-present primordial identity of the pure "I am".

The idea of identity resonates on the pages of the Spring issue of The Spirituality Studies Journal in various forms. It is discussed in regard to the alternative world of cyberspace by Prof. Slavomír Gálik and Dr. Sabína Gáliková Tolnaiová, and to the original state by Dr. Thomas Crowther. It is related to education by Dr. Marek Wiesenganger, as well as to the yoga training by Doc. Gejza M. Timčák, and applied to the processes of communication by Swami Veda Bharati. As a symbolic dot after the issue can be considered a prayer of a great contemporary Czech mystic, Dr. Míla Tomášová, a prayer that points out to the transcendence itself and evokes transformational processes of human consciousness.

Martin Dojčár

Slavomír Gálik – Sabína Gáliková Tolnaiová

Possibilities and Limits of Religion in the Cyberspace of Digital Media

The authors of this paper study possibilities and limits of religion in the cyberspace of digital media, especially in the *World of Warcraft* videogame. Based on various research cases, they claim that videogames can saturate religious needs of the hypermodern human. Nevertheless, they cannot substitute them totally, since there is the humans' body, a barrier between virtual and traditional religion. In the first case (the so-called *external limitation*), the body is irreplaceable in religious ritual such as Baptising in Christian religion or Mindfulness of Breathing (*ānāpānasati*) in Buddhism. In the second case (the so-called *internal limitation*), when the body (or its nerve centre) is linked to technologies, the boundary lies in the depth and validity of spiritual experience. The authors state that even if positive cyber-spiritual experience could be reached, it would still be necessary to plant it into broader moral and cognitive frames. Only in such case it could represent a positive stimulus for the spiritual journey.

1 Introduction

Every day we spend long hours in the virtual space of digital media searching for information, communicating, learning, buying and selling but also entertaining ourselves. The cyberspace of digital media thus becomes a new existential dimension for human, a dimension that broadens, complements, enriches and influences also the old, conventional human that rests deeply in his physical 3D world. In various spheres of life, for example in the speed of communication and search for information, this cyberspace undoubtedly wins over the old ways of communication. Dominance of the Internet and new types of media in general changes the culture and society as well. Stevan Harnad (1991) states that the Internet is a new, fourth in the row (following spoken, written and printed word), revolutionary form of media. Jean Lohisse (2003, 167) speaks similarly of the Internet being a new unprecedented medium that creates a new culture and society. Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2009, 17) even claims that the 21st century starts in 1991, with the rise of the Internet and its world-wide web application (www).

For this reason, as Gregory Price Grieve and Heidi A. Campbell (2014, 53) say, we can assume that the Internet or cyberspace of digital media will have a great impact also on religion: *"Walter Ong argues in 'The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History', that different media may make different religiosities possible. Ong suggests that religion began in an era of orality, was transmitted into visual form through manuscript writing as well as print, and has now entered the world in a new way via electronic media."*

Religion, or more precisely its oldest forms (magic, shamanism) were developed under the influence of spoken word. World religions such as Christianity of Buddhism were primarily formed by the means of spoken word and later also written word. Spoken word can draw those who communicate into presence, create unity and find meanings in the depth of communication. Written word breaks up this harmony, since it represents an external medium that is based on sequencing of linearly spread characters (phonetic writing). Such a medium supports a perspective visual perception, subject-object duality in learning, linearity of time (past–present–future) and distance in communication. Written words, especially their linear pattern of characters, bring discipline into thinking and expressing ideas and therefore launch the process of scientific thinking. On one hand, the media of spoken word and written word contribute to each, but on the other they are also very different. We believe that in Christianity this difference emerges in the complicated relationship between faith and reasoning, theology and philosophy. In Buddhism, especially in Theravada school, we can find a great importance of rational knowledge. For example, in

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meditation practice, it is important to recognize every step and stage of meditation.

The influence of media on shaping religion is vast, therefore we would like to scrutinize in this paper the extent of digital media's influence on religion. We understand "digital media" chiefly as a virtual space (cyberspace) into which religious content can be transformed, paying special attention to the videogame called *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*). We will be comparing this content with traditional religions such as Christian religion and Buddhism and, in one special case, with Shamanism. We would like to determine the possibilities for digital media to develop religious content for a modern, say secular human and then assess limitations or borders between traditional religion and religion in the cyberspace of digital media.

2   What is Religion?

Religion is a highly complex phenomenon that incorporates myths, rituals, prayers, ethical standards, community and similar aspects [1]. In reference to Ninian Smart, Robert M. Geraci (2014, 15) defines seven primary dimensions in religion: doctrine (teachings), myth, ritual, experience, institutions, and material culture.

A different, somewhat more complex and general definition of religion could be found in two great representatives of modern religions: Christianity and Buddhism. In the core of both of them is their founder – Christ in Christianity, Buddha in Buddhism. Then it is the doctrine, which is incorporated in the *New Testament* in Christian religion in both written and oral traditions, and *Dharma* in Buddhism. Further, there is the Christian fellowship of people who actively worship Christ, while in Buddhism there is *Sangha* – a spiritual community [2]. Such a definition of religion can be applied to all religions, including myths and rituals. However, it does not necessarily mean it is universal. For instance, in certain syncretic religions, like the New Age, there is no creator or perhaps the creator is not crucial.

It is important therefore for us to embrace the essence of every religion as generally as possible. The definition constructed by Mircea Eliade can be taken as a typical example; he describes phenomenologically the basic element of every religion – *sacred* – or the idea of being sacred. M. Eliade (1995, 21) states that *"the phenomenon of sacred is an element in the structure of consciousness",* found in any religion (2006, 13) and this unique and elementary structure of sacred opposes the profane way of life. Transcendence from profane to sacral life brings unprecedented spiritual experience. Eliade, for example, mentions the story of patriarch Jacob (Gn 28: 10–22), who we fell asleep

on his way to Laban. He dreamt of a ladder that angles were ascending and descending and of God's promise to him. When he finally woke up, he marked this "horrible" place and set the rock he had been sleeping on as a pillar. This story, as the Bible describes, has two dimensions – the inner one and the outer one. The first depicts an inner spiritual experience, extraordinary, transcendent, sacral and in this case also scary, while the second, following dimension, depicts the act of defining the once ordinary place as a sacred place. A sacred place, according to Eliade (2006, 18) is taken out of the usual homogeneous and amorphous place, it represents the Fullness of Being, centre of the world or perhaps a gate that leads to different worlds. A sacred place is bound to a sacred time, when the sacred happening is retrieved for example through a ritual commemorating of the original happening or event.

If then every religion is based on spiritual experiences, or if it is revitalised by such experience, then mysticism very well represents such experiencing. In its relation to spirituality, mysticism is an even more strictly defined term, describing its most intimate part. Considering this perspective (from the outside towards the inside), we can describe the following structure: *religion–spirituality–mysticism*. There are three phases in Christian mysticism – *purification*, *illumination*, and *union* phase. On their journey, mystic adepts are first confronted with their own bad inclinations from which they need to break free. After they have fully succeeded in this, the phase of inner light comes. The inner light represents energy that also unleashes and widens consciousness, which first transcends the physical barriers and then travels further through various dimensions until it reaches unity with God. We meet such a complex mysticism in the case of St. Teresa of Avila, she described it in her work *Interior Castle*. She depicted her own mystical journey through the "seven mansions". The first three mansions represent the phase or purification, the fourth mansion is the beginning of mystical experience with the illumination phase, the fifths mansion brings the mystical death, the sixth describes "soul's flight" and finally the seventh mansion means unification with God. Teresa (1921, 121) describes unification with God as follows: *"But spiritual marriage is like rain falling from heaven into a river or stream, becoming one and the same liquid, so that the river and rain water cannot be divided; or it resembles a streamlet flowing into the ocean, which cannot afterwards be disunited from it. This marriage may also be likened to a room into which a bright light enters through two windows – though divided when it enters, the light becomes one and the same."*

Even though Buddhism, being a different religious, cultural, and also language tradition, does not talk about mysticism, it still shares some features with Christian mysticism. These characteristics embrace chiefly deeper states of consciousness that

are reached through concentration and meditation. The goal of the Buddhist path is to reach the state of nirvana, unconditioned mind, not limited by any shape and any name. This state of unconditioned and pure mind is not dissimilar to unification with God that St. Teresa of Avila describes. Interesting similarities with her mysticism can be found for example in Jiyu-Kennett's Zen Buddhism. In her book, *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom or How a Zen Buddhist Prepares for Death*, she describes her own spiritual experience through meditation. Jiyou-Kennett (1997, 31, 68, 144) describes confrontation with one's own negative inclinations, release of internal light (the so-called delicate energy, *chakras*), liberation from the body and finally reaching nirvana. In Jiyu-Kennett's spirituality, we could find phases that are similar to those in Christian mysticism: purification, enlightenment and unification. However, this similarity is more structural than content-based because the content is defined by a different religion and culture.

Spiritual and mystical experiences in religions form a solid base for both Christianity and Buddhism, but, as we can consequently suppose, also other world's religions. Yet this experience is not purposeless, it leads humans towards a spiritual goal, defined uniquely in each religion (salvation in Christian religion, awakening in Buddhism) but their commons denominator is in transcendence of human destiny.

3 Possibilities for Religion in the Cyberspace of Digital Media

What are the possibilities for religion in the virtual space of digital media and namely in the cyberspace of video games? Robert M. Geraci (2014, 11) recognizes two possibilities in the context of *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life* videogames: (1) Offering a new space to practice an old religion; (2) Offering a new space for creating a meaningful life without traditional religious communities. Expressed in other words, it is the usual practice of distinguishing *religion online* and *online religion* (Gálik and Cenká 2013, 232). In the first case, we talk about providing complex information about religious groups that are established in the society officially, while the second case talks about space for virtual interactive participation, for example in liturgy, prayers, rituals, meditations and so forth. Different criteria, based on a videogame's influence on the player, is used by Markus Wiemker and Jan Wysocki (2014, 206–207): (1) Religion offers a background for the video game. For instance, Manchester Cathedral, with its main body in Gothic style (*Resistance – Fall of Man*). (2) Religion is used directly in each videogame (religious stories and similar cases). Even though the players may not be aware of religion, they will be confronted with it during the gameplay (*BioShock Infinite, Age of Mythology*). (3) Religion in

videogame directly influences the players, their thinking, imagination, and believes, for example in *Left Behind – Eternal Forces, Bible Adventures*.

It is generating new religious phenomena in the cyberspace of videogames that is most interesting to study, as Geraci proposes, along with a direct influence on religious belief of the player, described by Wiemker and Wysocki. According to Geraci (2014, 5) online communication on the Internet is becoming a place for a new form of seeking spirituality. Released in 2004, The Blizzard Entertainment's *World of Warcraft* offers such a place for spiritual realization too. Many countries, for example the USA, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Mexico, participated in creating the game. A year later also South Korea, China, the EU, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong appeared in the list. Having incorporated various symbolic and mythological aspects from different cultures across the globe, the game gained an important status. This game is presently played by some 13 million gamers across the world that identify themselves with various mythological characters, both positive and negative. The game offers a possibility to join in communities and thus fight the common enemy, which makes it even more attractive. The gameplay consists of two fictional worlds called Azeroth and Outland/Draenor. Azeroth spreads on four continents: Northrend, Eastern Kingdoms, Kalimdor and Pandaria. The biggest battlefield is in Azeroth, with Aliance and Horde fighting each other.

R. M. Geraci (2014, 3) is convinced that *World of Warcraft* offers a deeper immersion than World Wide Web and greater lifespan than standard videogames. According to him (Geraci 2014, 9) WoW is an active constituent or modern religious life helping to form, authorize and rewrite our religious practice. The author (Geraci 2014, 32) says that for numerous players WoW opens new spiritual possibilities such as community, moral compass, feeling of identity, meaningful goal and transcendent experience. Moreover, Geraci even claims that religious experience in cyberspace of WoW videogame is not less real than in traditional religions because (Geraci 2014, 213) there is no doubt that virtual worlds are real too: *"Virtual worlds enable new ways of being oneself and of interacting with others that affect the users of that world and the physical world. The interconnections between conventional and virtual life mean that religious practise and thought developed in, emergent from, and objectified by virtual worlds will help shape everyone's life in the years to come."*

Geraci (2014, 99) says that videogames bring something sacred virtually, especially in the case of WoW, but they also offer a possibility for spiritual realization for a modern secular man. This author explains that human beings are spiritual by nature, which is now reflected in videogames. In the USA, WoW is popu-

lar to such extent that it can compete other religions. As the author says (Geraci 2014, 32), there are just a handful of religious denominations in the USA that have more followers than WoW.

Jose Vallikatt (2014, 62) spent several years studying the phenomenon of videogame called *World of Warcraft* and for three months spent three hours a day playing it. He also interviewed some players in several places in India. In this videogame, Vallikatt specifically focused on presence of religious phenomena, such as myths, rituals and establishing of communities that are typical also in traditional religions. In the first case, Vallikatt found many myths that are very similar to usual myths. In the introduction to the game, on its web site, he found a mythological introduction to the story. It was a narrative about the beginning of the world (game) and about the player's role to re-create the world. In case of a new version of the game he found explanation of the changes that were implemented in the world, usually outbreak of chaos, disruption of the kingdom of Azeroth and the player's quest to establish order. In the WoW videogame, the fight between "light" and "darkness" usually takes place on the mythical *Mount Hyjal,* and usually includes defence of the "world tree". Beside cosmogonic myths, there are also various heroic myths. In the game, the player is transformed to his avatar, who is alone in the beginning of the game, and faces various quests. If the avatar – hero – succeeds, he gets a reward – he reaches higher degrees of skills and gains appreciation from the community. Vallikatt (2014, 164) says that myths in WoW constitute an important part of the game and set the way facts are perceived and the world is understood. Moreover, the players identify themselves deeply with their avatars and start to live their lives. Deep identification with avatars is visible for example when one exclaims, "I was killed" rather that "my avatar was killed".

Another important part of WoW is in rituals that, according to Vallikatt (2014, 104), share some features with rituals in religions. He sees rituals in a broader context, as unchanging actions and expressions that repeat in certain sequences. The goal of each of them is to get desirable results. Vallikatt (2014, 108) sees a great deal of rituals in challenges the player is faced with, challenges that are based on rules but also on ritual ways of succeeding in the missions. Some of the rituals are closely bound to myths, for example the ritual of healing the "world tree", ritual of player's revival and similar.

The third important part of WoW, according to Vallikatt, is community. Similarly to religions, various communities are established in order to better cooperate in the fight against monsters and generally against spread of chaos in the players' world. Vallikatt comments (2014, 141) that the players naturally become members of communities because they want to share their ex-

perience and values. When asked, many players even stated that players' communities are often better than traditional communities based on family or religion. One of the players (Muji) even said that the players' community is very real for him and that he was never able to separate online playing time from real life.

Vallikatt (2014, 168) claims that the WoW game offers its players mysterious and transcendent experiences and the player walks, consciously or unconsciously, into the world that has a religious character. In this respect, the WoW game can offer some spiritual satisfaction and the newly arising cyber-spirituality can represent religion for the hyper-modern generation.

What possibilities are there for religion in the cyberspace of digital media and, more specifically, videogames such as WoW? We agree with both authors that virtual reality is something unphysical, yet physically real in certain aspects. Connection between virtual reality is realized through our sense-perception, it can also trigger some neuroplastic response in our brain (Gálik and Gáliková Tolnaiová 2015, 12). Similarly, J. D. F. Tuckett and David G. Robertson (2014, 100) state that religion in videogames is taken as real. They refer to approach taken by Wiliam James and Alfred Schutz, who claim that if something exists in a meaningful relation to people then it is real (Tuckett and Robertson 2014, 88). It means that when people assess a situation as real, then this situation brings real consequences (Tuckett and Robertson 2014, 99). Since our fantasy can be taken as something unreal, it may also be understood as virtual reality. For example, if we have a feeling that something is moving in the darkness, then this "idea" will trigger real consequence in the form of fear, racing of the heart and similar symptoms. It is similar in the case when we are involved in a videogame in the cyberspace of digital media. In this sense, reality includes also virtual reality. It means that a spiritual experience online can be as intense as a spiritual experience offline. For this reason, *World of Warcraft*, for example, can satisfy the religious needs of a present hypermodern man. Despite this, there are still some differences that we will try to explain in the following chapter.

4 Spiritual Limitations in the Cyberspace of Digital Media

Human body, we believe, still constitutes a significant boundary between reality and virtual reality and consequently between traditional and virtual religion. We see the boundary here in two cases, which we determine as *external limitation* and *internal limitation*.

External limitation. In traditional religion, for example in Christian religion, sacraments, especially baptizing is *conditio sine*

qua non, an indispensable and essential action to attain salvation: *"If a person is not born from water and The Spirit, it is impossible that he shall enter the Kingdom of God."* (John 3: 5). The sacrament of baptising is realised by either submerging into water or pouring water on the head. In either case, presence of human's body is an inevitable condition. Virtual baptising therefore cannot be accepted since two physical components are missing – the body itself and the water. Eucharist, another sacrament, is also important for salvation: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."* (John 6: 53–54). Eucharist is again based on material things (bread and wine) that are consumed, which is, again, impossible in the cyberspace of digital media. Moreover, to attain salvation, both baptism and Eucharist are inevitable in Christian religion. In this point, Christian religion and virtual religion can never meet one another.

In Theravada school of Buddhism, there are no such sacraments as in Christian religion (or perhaps their definitions are different, for example initiation at the *Sangha*), but also here the human's body is a significant component on the road to freedom. Human's body is important in respect of mindfulness (*vipassanā* in Pali language), namely mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) or walking (*caṅkama*). Mirko Frýba (1995, 151–160) describes the first meditation as careful focusing one's attention to breathing in and breathing out, either in the area under the nose or on the belly. Each disruption, for example an idea or feeling, causes a halt in the process and the person who is trying to meditate gets back to the previous stage. Similarly in the mindful walking meditation, when the person who meditates realises each rising of the foot and putting it back, every mental disturbance is taken as a defect. In both cases the mindfulness of action is refined until the stage of awakening is reached (*nibbāna* in Pali language and *nirvāna* in Sanskrit language). Mindful breathing and walking meditation that we find in Theravada school of Buddhism cannot be replaced in the virtual space.

Perhaps even more intense work with body can be found in Tibetan (*Tantrayāna*) school of Buddhism, which works with the so-called subtle physiology, energy centres or chakras and nadi channels (Snelling 2000, 126). This school teaches that body offers a way to freedom that can be uncovered and awakened by means of concentration and meditation. If energy (*kundalini*) is unleashed, it can travel upward and thus open various energy centres from the lowest to the highest one (*sahasrāra*), in which freedom is achieved. Also in this case, it is utterly unrealistic for virtual surrounding to replace body, an indispensable condition to achieve freedom.

We believe that among these boundaries, also interpersonal human communication (Modrzejewski 2016, 8) in either Christian or Buddhist religious community could be mentioned. Human body constitutes a unique realistic principle also in interpersonal communication "face to face", thanks to which we know that communication with the other person is real and authentic. Reality and authenticity can be seen in the form of physical touch, for example, but also "auratic" radiation of the body. Neither physical contact not "aura" of the second person can be transferred through online communication in cyberspace. For this reason, spiritual experience in traditional, real religious community should be different and more intensive than the one existing in online community, offered by technologies.

Internal limitation. The second boundary, though much more subtle, lies in the technological possibility to gain deeper spiritual and mystical experience. Also here Geraci (2014, 213) is an optimist when we says*: "Researches at the Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT) at the University of Southern California, for example, have used Microsoft's Kinect to control World of Warcraft using body motions."* Other researches, according to him, use direct brain-computer connection that makes it easier for physically handicapped to control the game of *Second Life*. Geraci (2014, 213–214) goes like this: *"If the user's body and the game avatar are more closely linked through such technologies, the divide between what happens within the game and what happens outside it will turn fuzzy. [...] in the very near future the distinction between 'virtual' and 'real' will disappear."* The so-called Cyber-Shamanism also takes this direction, as it can use new technologies such as *Oculus Rift* [3] with the perspective of reaching changed state of consciousness, similarly to real shamanism [4]. The used technology is programmed to simulate changes in consciousness that happen in real trance. As one of the cyber-shamans confessed (Martínková 2008, 48), approximately one hour after an intense immersion into cyberspace he lost sense of time and space and felt thoroughly detached from everything. However, can cyber-shamanism replace traditional shamanism, which sees one of its goals in healing people? Does a cyber-shaman reach real spiritual worlds? Also, how much does such a form of cyber-spirituality transform a man? Our starting point is in the fact that after the cyber-spiritual experience the person's consciousness and thinking come back to normal. We could also think of the possibility where regular applications of cyber-spirituality lead to permanent changes in nervous system. Yet, it is questionable whether such changes would push people in the right direction. It is true that there are various "techniques" that people use in different spiritual traditions to reach changed states of consciousness, for example drumming, dancing, rhythmical breathing or hallucinogenic drugs, but these are always used in certain spiritual context, with certain knowledge and in order to achieve a concrete

goal. For this reason, cyber-spiritual experience with no further knowledge can only constitute one segment of spiritual life, a segment that cannot replace shaman spirituality or whichever other traditional spirituality.

We could think hypothetically about a direct connection between technologies and human's nervous system. We could imagine irritation of some centres of nervous system, which would result in visions similar to mystical experience. However, would this experience mean a valuable progression on the spiritual path? Will it be strong enough to introduce changes in life? Will it prevent the bad inclinations in us and replace them with high moral standards without which everything would fall back to the old ways? In traditional spiritual traditions, we speak about a whole complex of methods that work with mind and body, not just the spiritual experience itself. For example, Buddhist meditation works heavily with concentration – such as concentration on breathing or certain point in the body, which can trigger changes in the nervous system or, in case of *Tantrayāna*, energy that will broaden consciousness and mediate extraordinary experience. Yet, also here knowledge and wisdom are necessary for these experiences to integrate into one's life, and equally important is the virtue of meditation – so that the path is not interrupted. Therefore, if technology-triggered experience started one's spiritual path, there would have to be also other aspects of spiritual life, such as eager work on oneself, improving self-knowledge, eliminating bad inclinations, meditation and similar. This is the reason why we believe that technologically triggered spiritual experience can at most be merely accompanying or perhaps stimulating phenomenon in the whole context of spiritual and religious life.

5   Conclusions

With new kinds of media emerging, we can expect also changes and transformations in religions simply because we express ourselves and communicate through media. Traditional religions, such as Christian religion, grew upon spoken and written words. Spoken words influenced depth, transcendence and the sense of present time, while written words aimed at precision of expressions and thoughts, linearity of time and visual perspective. In context of Christian religion, there has always been a constant tension between these two forms of media, which is reflected in conflict between belief and logical mind, or theology and philosophy. New digital media, such as the Internet or videogames, will also be anything but neutral towards religion, they will influence it in certain ways of thinking, imagination, feeling, but also actions. The Internet, through its great multilateral possibilities in gathering information will favour non-linear thinking in religion, thinking that is realised almost

immediately and characterised by domination of images. Different platforms of the Internet, for example social networks, can offer a place for virtual religious community. All of this is, much stronger and with greater immersion in the cyberspace, present in videogames, concretely in the videogame that is the object of our study – *World of Warcraft*. Together with R. Geraci and J. Vallikatt we admit that videogames can transfer a spiritual experience or perhaps saturate needs of a hypermodern man. We may even suppose that new religious forms will be developed in the cyberspace of digital media. Here, we see some possibilities for religion to evolve in the cyberspace of digital media. However, there is still a boundary for every virtual religion – the human's body. In the first case, the so-called external limitation, the body is totally irreplaceably for example in Christian ritual of baptism, or mediation in mindful breathing in Buddhism. In the second case, the so-called internal limitation, which is still more or less a matter of science-fiction, we have the problem of connecting modern technologies with human's body. We will probably see some more experiments in here and it is possible that some partial success will be achieved in, for example, intense experiencing of spiritual visions, feeling of no time-flow and total immersion into sacred spheres. Yet, it is still questionable whether new cyber-spirituality will lead to a religious objective (salvation in Christian religion, freedom in Buddhism) or it will stay, similarly to the case of visual experiencing of the sacred, purely as experience – which is not sufficient according to the traditional approach to religions. Also here, the experience itself would have to be more intense and relatively stable in a wider moral, cognitive and social context if it should be of a mystical value. Mere experience is not enough, it is also necessary to know what kind of experience it is, how much and which way it pushes us on the spiritual path and how to work with it further on. In the worse scenario, cyber-spiritual experience could lead to fixation only on the experience, which could lead to addiction; in the better scenario, it could mean a complement and motivation for real spirituality.

Acknowledgement

Notes

[1] Etymology of the Latin word *religio* or *religere* reveals its basic meaning – to regain bond between; in this context to regain bond between humans and God, the sole Supreme Being, the Creator, etc.

[2] *Buddha*, *Dharma*, and *Sangha* are seen in Buddhism as the *Three Jewels*.

[3] "Oculus Rift" is a device that brings a very strong experience of virtual reality.

[4] Mircea Eliade and Ioan P. Culianu (2001, 231) define shamanism as a set of ecstatic and therapeutic methods to meet parallel but invisible world of ghosts and earn their interest to interact with human matters.

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Thomas Crowther

The Asperian Design

Reality is two-fold, composed of the lighted world as revealed in Genesis, and the darker primordiality which preceded it. The illuminated represents that which the human mind can comprehend, manipulate and re-order to its will: a "designed" and mechanical universe of parts. But behind it, in the backspace of reality, remains the darkness. A formless state of pre-creation, the darkness exists as an endless series of intertwining "signatures" – single possibilities waiting to be created in the illuminated forefront of reality. Permitting each and every part of the lighted world to be connected to the rest, it possesses a "design" all of its own. The question is, if we are blind in the dark, how could we ever come to know it?

1 Introduction: Genesis before the Dawn

"Creation" is the watchword of life, conjuring images of light triumphantly breaking forth out of darkness. But though the power to draw the non-existent into reality lies at the heart of all things, it is the human mind's capacity to comprehend this power that doubtless makes it one of the most brilliant things our universe can boast of. As a product of that universe however – imprisoned to the body, to time, and to all the limitations of mortality – the mind is also inclined to take a restrictive view on creation.

Drawing upon the promethean tale of Eve, this article explores this relationship between human perception and creation, arguing that two distinguishable truths (or "designs") potentially underlie it: the *Universal* and the *Asperian*. Both seek absolute states: the former, "perfection"; the latter, "liberty". Both seek a complete understanding of the universe. And both vie for the redundancy of the other. But before exploring these two "designs", we need to first enquire into their source. In other words, we need to begin by asking a fundamental question: what (if anything) is the precondition of creation?

The familiar creation tale of the Old Testament provides us with an answer in its very first verse – "*In the Beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth*" (Genesis 1: 1). Of course, one then inevitably asks, what is the precondition of God? As a child, I asked the same, and querying upon a potential back-story, I envisioned a solitary, male figure alone in a great expanse of nothingness. I thus assumed God had created *his* universe as a kind of leisurely distraction, as a bored child might. But aside from the obvious paradox behind a creator's origins, I found the nature of God's initial universe fearful indeed. For as is stated in the Bible, the earth which was first formed was "without form and void; [with] darkness [being] upon the face of the deep" (Genesis 1: 2; see also Job 26: 10; 38: 9; Campbell 1973, 297; Chupungco 1977, 82; May 1939; Niditch 1985, 72).

This is an inherently unsettling image, presenting us with a nightmarish vision of pre-existence, depicting a dark, formless and somewhat anarchic primordiality preceding the appearance of the illuminated, ordered and organised cosmos. But what I find interesting is that the story uses both water and darkness as the metaphorical precondition of creation; a common theme in creation myths around the globe (see Cameron 1992; Helms 2004; Knipe 1989; Van Over 1980; Wakeman 1973, 86). This is hardly surprising, because preceding and sustaining all life on the planet, water acts as the universal in-between – between that which is solid and vapourous – within which we are suspended, as in the womb, where we await our emergence into the world. But perhaps more important still is the disturbing image of the deep darkness which also precedes the emergence of the lighted cosmos.

The darkness before the dawn can often seem disquieting, as it is within the dark that we can slip into the "Other"; the unconscious; the "unsure", where the laws of the lighted world are equally suspended (Heijnen 2005; Morris 2011).

About the author

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This makes the dark an intimidating, but at the same time, liberating "otherworld"; a state of unsettling chaos for some and uplifting liberation for others, in which we await the solidness of the real world (i.e. the conscious universe) which light heralds in.

Both water and darkness are thus elements in which we await creation, and as such, I cannot imagine the Old Testament's dark and watery precondition as a kind of void of nothingness or as a state of pure darkness and absolute absence. Such a void alludes to the impossibility of creation, for something cannot spring into existence from nothing. So instead, I would present this dark and watery primordiality as a condition of pure expectation before creation – of pure possibility. Rather than a blank slate of nothingness, I imagine this as a slate upon which all possibilities exist, but where no one possibility has yet been created. A place (if you can call it such) where a "signature" of every possibility exists prior to creation, and where no one possibility dominates another; a theme I have previously touched upon (Crowther 2014). This is what I identify as the "Omniversal Potential", and putting the concept of "God as creator" aside for a moment, it is this which acts as the precondition of all creation. The act of creation is when a possibility is removed from the Omniversal Potential – from this dark and watery void of infinite possibility – and becomes something apart from it: a "creation"; that is, a possibility created.

In the Genesis narrative, the "Spirit of God" moves across the dark and watery void of the Omniversal Potential, and, guided by a vision of what his universe will consist of, he removes a single possibility so as to construct that universe, uttering those immortal, albeit now hackneyed words, "let there be light". In so doing, the ordered solidness of his new creation (i.e. the original universe as stated in the bible) is revealed. Light thus represents the act of creation here; that is, a possibility previously in the dark, previously only a possibility in the Omniversal Potential, being formed and revealed. The creation of light does not eliminate the darkness which preceded it however, but separates a world apart from it. Likewise, the creation of the lighted universe does not eliminate the Omniversal Potential which lies behind it, and from which it was essentially sourced.

Significantly, the Genesis tale suggests that the possibility which is separated from the Omniversal Potential (i.e. the universe which was formed and revealed) is one that is designed and therefore, limited. And in Eden, the heart of this new creation, God resolves to craft a species that will dwell within and eventually dominate this new world: humanity. But the greed inherent within the human design becomes clear early on, as is hinted in the actions of Eve; the intriguing and tragic antagonist who unwittingly triggers the fall of the human race. It is perhaps unsurprising then that she is now regarded by her descendants as the original sinner, the heretic, and the weaker twin of God's last creation, man. But I've always pictured her in a rather different light: flawed, yes, but also as a bold firebrand who personifies some of our most cherished values. It is this version of Eve which I wish to share.

2 The Torch Bearer: Eden and the Fall

"And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.[9] And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Genesis 2: 9–10).

Between the lines, one can sense the Garden of Eden to be the embodiment of abundance, harmony and most of all, *perfection*. Indeed, when we imagine Eden, we often think of a place where the material and spiritual aspects of life have been harmonised; a Utopia if you will – that grand idea of perfection we dream of (re)gaining. In the Genesis narrative, perfection is embodied in one element: the Tree of Life, which is in reality and in legend the source of eternal life, guarding Eden against the "evils of fear, decay and corruption; a warden of the garden's imperishable state.

However, as Genesis clarifies, the *Tree of Life* has a counterpart; an element of the garden I believe to be one of the most resonant symbols in human history. Hanging over the very edge of creation, over the edge of Eden, stands the *Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*. With its roots extending into

the watery darkness of the Omniversal Potential which lies beyond Eden, I imagine this as the only place in the garden where the laws of this universe can be bent and where perfection can be challenged. And it is here, with Eve standing beneath its branches, that I imagine her story beginning. But I don't want to present Eve as the simplistic woman tempted into eating the tree's fruit by the devil, as is suggested in Genesis. There is no snake, no Lucifer in this version. In fact, there is no source of temptation outside the mind of Eve herself. That mind is an intelligent and enquiring one too. But it is also not quite as we would know it.

Formed from the elements of the garden itself, Eve is not human per se, at least not yet. Though like us, she is a sentient being, I also imagine her as someone who is intimately connected to all other elements of creation, unlike us. This is possible in Eden because here, creations – that is, those possibilities which have emerged from the Omniversal Potential – are not distinctly separated from one another, for this is a false impression of our own universe, as I shall discuss below. Instead, each and every element in Eden is connected to the rest and their experiences shared. This union allows all the different elements of the garden, such as the Tree of Life, to also be constituents of Eve herself, meaning Eve *is* Eden and Eden *is* Eve – they are embodiments of one another. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil however, though sharing a union with Eve, also extends beyond Eden, and so is at the same time also connected to all the uncreated possibilities (i.e. "signatures") of the Omniversal Potential beyond.

Now, though the Tree of Life permits immortality in a limited, albeit Utopian universe, Eve realises that its counterpart is of far greater significance because it allows *all* other possibilities (i.e. possibilities currently impossible in Eden) to be created. This is part of a certain type of liberty I imagine Eve reaching for in the garden; a liberty of perpetual, eternal and unbounded creation which is also in union with herself. This is what I define as "Omniversal Liberty" (Crowther 2014); a somewhat unimaginable condition where every possible creation actually becomes possible, and with the Tree of Knowledge acting as a bridge for Eve; a doorway to other understandings, to other possibilities and to other creations.

Knowing that she is connected to the rest of Eden, Eve understands that if she were to eat from this tree, possibilities previously in the Omniversal Potential would be able to flood into creation *through* her. But what she neglects to comprehend is that these created possibilities would not be those selected by any divine creator, and as such, would include elements which had hitherto been excluded from the original design of the universe. The tree's forbidden fruit, with their blackened and crumpled skins, hint at these excluded possibilities, and I imagine Eve gathering the courage required so that she can stretch out her hand to grasp one. She does of course, and bringing the fruit to her lips, she sinks her teeth into its skin.

But instead of Omniversal Liberty (where all worlds, all cultures, and all visions become possible), Eve is immediately presented with time, with its deadly inclination for linear decay. I thus imagine Eve clutching at her chest as her heart takes its first beat. Falling to the ground, newly created mortality crashes down upon her, and it takes mere seconds for her flawless skin to blemish, and for the golden glint of divinity, which moments ago shimmered across her eyes, to fade and dull. Her once ubiquitous mind is then imprisoned to the body and is opened up to all the limitations which result from this confinement. With her connection to the Tree of Life now severed, she begins to comprehend what humanity will mean to her; that from now on, she will be a subject to all the indescribable terrors (and pleasures) that the term 'mortality' only tentatively implies. And as Eden fades away around her, it reveals an entirely new universe behind it – the wilderness of our own.

3 The Universal Design

In opening a doorway onto the Omniversal Potential, Eve had intended to create a universe where possibilities, previously only "signatures", are able to continually flood into creation. But breaking the protection and equilibrium of Eden's "perfect" state (granted by the Tree of Life) had unforeseen consequences. Emerging from the Omniversal Potential, each new creation now had the capacity to create, dominate, eliminate, and prevent the existence of others, meaning all creations make countless others redundant. This ability is what I define

as the "Universal Design", necessitating every creation to inevitably struggle against creation.

By stepping out of Eden, Eve thus finds herself in a universe of *seemingly* separate entities; something strongly alluded to in Genesis as she becomes aware of her nakedness. This, the awakening of her human-self, symbolises the moment she comprehends her mind as a separate entity from the rest of creation – her connection to Eden has been cut. I thus imagine her impending shame not as a consequence of her nakedness, but instead deriving from her comprehension of this "Universal Design"; fostering a modular mindset and making Omniversal Liberty a practical impossibility. Therefore, Eve's transformation from a spiritual entity into a mortal woman signifies much more than humanity simply becoming a hostage to death, for it represents a metamorphosis of understanding; from an interconnected universe to an irrevocable dislocation of parts.

This is not what Eve had envisioned – of unbounded, connected creation – but is instead a wholly modular reality, with the human mind seemingly predisposed to make likewise modular judgements upon it. Indeed, when we observe any creation, we make a modular judgement, whether consciously or unconsciously, as to what that creation may constitute; i.e. that a particular object has a certain shape or possesses a particular style, etc. In so doing, we work to define it; to separate the creation from the rest and place a boundary around it. This method of separating creation into criteria and categories represents "modular thought"; an example of which is that of names. So in stating my name is "Tom" for instance, I inform you that I am something, and around that I create a mental boundary that others cannot enter unless they share it. Thus, in my mind, and in yours, a module is formed into which I place myself (and into which I am placed at birth) – I am something and you are not.

This is the "Universal Design" within us, as this created possibility, this creation that I be named "Tom", works to include some creations and exclude others, while also preventing other names (that is, other creations), from being formed around me. This is the nature of modular thought, with every individual being placed, by either him/herself or by others, into an immeasurable number of modules throughout their lives, though many remain fluid from birth until death. There are huge, sweeping modules of course, such as gender, and there are smaller ones, like names. But we all belong to them (e.g. family, community, nation, etc.), and though each module possesses and creates a countless number of other modules in their own right, each one also imposes their own expectations on the individuals which are judged to belong to it.

This also demonstrates the ways in which modular thoughts can come together to create others. When we bake a cake for instance, we use multiple ingredients, each one being independent at the beginning, and we use these to create something which we regard as new and independent – the cake itself. An original set of creations come together to create something new. However, though multiple modules may not always conflict, they inevitably can. The bringing together of those ingredients may make a good cake, but it could also make something wholly inedible. It is the same with each of us. And though we all remain highly elusive to any kind of genuinely solid categorisation, when we meet people, we inevitably use modular thought to force them into a series of categories we construct in our minds. Some of these may conflict with the modules which we belong to, and some may not. However, it is this collection of thoughts which nevertheless gives us an impression of that person. But we can never truly capture someone through this method, and this demonstrates the futility in attempting to confine reality to category, even though we nevertheless attempt to do so.

This way of thinking is what I imagine Eve fearing most; that humanity would set a congregation of modules upon creation and that we would ultimately place restrictions upon ourselves, on others, and on the entire cosmos that we are each immersed within. Indeed, modular thought is the Universal Design in action within us; seeking to create, control, eliminate and prevent, as possessing of all creations. But there is a crucial difference here, because through us, the Universal Design (that is, this intrinsic power to create, dominate, and prevent) is granted sentience, and can thus be witnessed, embraced, and inevitably for humanity, "perfected".

The idea of perfection is especially significant for it represents the absolute expression of the Universal Design, requiring all of its powers to be wielded so completely that the

imperfect is not only made non-existent, but remains forever outside the scope of possibility – a "signature" in the Omniversal Potential and never anything more. True perfection – "Edenic Perfection" – thus represents a condition where the Universal Design has been embraced to such an extent that the design itself no longer seems to exist, for there is no more a need to create, control, eliminate, or prevent; the struggle of creation has already been won.

Perfection lies at the heart of the Universal Design. However, as humanity is dependent on modular thought, we are forced to define perfection before we can ultimately work to create it, and to do that we must first forge criteria; that is, we must define what is necessary for perfection's creation before we can relegate everything outside of our selected criteria (i.e. the imperfect) onto the heap of defective culture. The pursuit of perfection is thereby imbued with a sense of singularity, restriction and power; employing the Universal Design to remove identified "weak links", and thereby acting as a limewash over the greater part of human potential. That said, perfection in its fullest and truest form as described above (Edenic Perfection) has never been accomplished – or even approached – because dissidence against criteria has always remained within the spectrum of human possibility. What I mean is that perfection represents a state of creation that has become unchangeable and equilibrious, whereas society and its individuals have always remained capable of change.

To even conceive of such a state, let alone begin creating it, I can only assume that one would first require an absolute understanding and control of reality so as to be able to funnel its desired elements into a state of said perfection, and then, to forever discard the imperfect. We can perhaps see the conception of such an enterprise in the intensely modular nature of scientific thought, which dogmatically seeks a single objective view of the world and demands of us a full understanding regarding the structure of "reality". To do that, science necessitates a full acceptance of the Universal Design; utilising it to define the nature of "truth" and force the scope of perceived reality into bounded mental spaces so as to comprehend it. Indeed, it is clear that "science", as a philosophy of objective reasoning and observation, aims to *attain* a hold on "truth". It can't be denied that with its vast catalogue of modular thoughts, it has marched across the

globe with all the arrogance of an imperial goliath, and for centuries now it has preached itself to be truth's master – its attainer as it were. And as the driving force of modernity, our foremost social ideal has thus come to be that of *attainment*; representing a general move to discard the unobtainable, mistruth, and those who do not (or cannot) attain; to mark them out as weak links in the chains of culture. It is conceivable that through this method of modulating, understanding and *potentially* controlling reality that humanity shall edge closer to perceiving what "perfection" may constitute; that is, closer to creating a kind of "Eden" – a perfect, but selected ideal of independent creations.

But in discarding that which weakens the whole (i.e. the theoretical imperfect), such an aspiration justifies the will to power, and as a result, the control and direction of truth itself. It demonstrates how "perfection" (and the Universal Design behind this goal) seeks to limit the possibility of creation in line with a designed view on the universe. Eve had sought something else however; something which rallies against and even seeks to transcend the Universal Design – Omniversal Liberty; that unimaginable state where every creation becomes possible, where every creation is connected, and where perfection itself has become redundant.

4   The Asperian Design

Through science and through modulation, we divide up the universe. But within us, a remnant of Eden remains aware of union. Opposing the divisive nature of the Universal Design, it intends each element of creation to be linked to the rest. This quality, descended from Eve, is what I define as the "Asperian Design", and represents nothing less than our instinctual move towards the origin of creation, towards that which lies behind perceived reality, behind our thoughts which attempt to bind it, and most importantly, towards that which transcends that instinctual feature of the Universal Design – our will to power.

Found within the subconscious core of many ideologies, religious and secular, the Asperian Design can seem difficult to grasp. This is not because it is elusive per se, but because the Universal Design is always present in the foreground, mask-

ing the Asperian in its evident realness; that is, in its clear presence. One should thus imagine the Asperian Design as a whisper behind the Universal's obvious clarity; an echoing reminder residing within every creation. The mind however, so inclined towards modulation, naturally seeks to capture this when heard, and it is here where the Asperian Design is elusive, because it cannot be held.

Anything which attempts to hold the Asperian within the confines of the human mind simply represents the structures – products of the Universal Design – which we construct around the Asperian to bind it in place, channel its will, and amplify that whisper. But as the Universal Design remains prominently in the foreground (i.e. as the structure; as a method), the Asperian Design continues as a whisper within, rarely breaking through. Indeed, though many of our ideologies seek a state akin with the will of the Asperian Design – that is, a union with God and creation; a union with one another – they each require their followers to approach that union through the tools of the Universal; e.g. by defining sin and seeking to expel it in oneself and in others. The quest for perfection, and its need to restrict creation, thus always remains present.

Now in presenting an idea, seemingly distinct and separate from my readers, a philosopher's duty is to then call those readers to action, because only through that action can the isolated philosophy become an integral part of one's own being. Only then can the original idea be given life, as it becomes life through us. But the Asperian Design presents us with a paradox, because how do you aspire for the unattainable – that is, how do you structure a philosophy for that which eludes structure itself? I am fully aware that in defining steps of progression and creating such a structure around the Asperian Design, I would be pulling the Universal Design over it. I would be modulating the Asperian, which I inevitably do through these very words. But that said, the key to any Asperian philosophy has to be that which lies at the core of this Design: "transcendence" – transcendence of structure, of modulation, of boundaries (mental and physical), and of our desire for perfection. It is important to clarify this term however, for I don't mean "transcendence" in the breaking of boundaries and the setting up of new ones, only to find that

they too will need to be broken. Transcendence here is meant in the Edenic sense, as alluded to earlier.

Returning to the topic of Eden then, recall how all the elements of the garden are at one with Eve. This means she possesses independent thoughts and actions which are at the same time experienced and shared with *all* other creations, thereby allowing her to comprehend her universe as a unified and sentient entity which *is* also herself. This marks Eve as one of the freest beings in history, mythic or otherwise, because in her reality, ignorance is absent. So Asperian transcendence is not about the destruction of boundaries and thenceforth the destruction of that which was binding, but is instead this capacity to both transcend one's own boundaries and then transcend those which surround others, as in Eden. This is at the heart of Asperian philosophy – *transcendence* of self and the other. In so doing, we seek a (limited) state of reality where the "Other" becomes tangible, connectable.

The key to achieving Asperian transcendence has to lie in the idea of "signatures" as I mentioned earlier. To recap and expand upon this abstract concept, I've already stated that every creation represents a possibility emerging from the Omniversal Potential. Before creation, that possibility only exists as a "signature" (a kind of blueprint of the creation), and when it emerges into reality, the creation retains that signature. With this in mind, think of any creation – a tree for example. The tree is fundamentally made up of many creations of course, which, like waves, overlap and underlie others: from the way it sways in the wind, to the shape of each branch, to the movement of each leaf, and to elements beyond human modulation – to the nature of each atom within. The tree is essentially a web of different possibilities with an innumerable series of signatures attached to it.

Significantly, these signatures are all connected because all the creations which make up the tree are linked in the Omniversal Potential before creation even occurred. To explain, let's say that there's a possibility that a certain wind will brush past a certain leaf at a given time. Before creation, this possibility only exists as a signature in the Omniversal Potential. That possibility then emerges into reality as a "creation", and though the wind may remain physically separate

from the leaf, the signature at the heart of this creation connects the elements (the wind and the leaf) in the backspace of reality. It is the same with us.

When I perceive the tree, a creation is formed in my mind (i.e. my mental/physical perception of the tree). Crucially, like the leaf and the wind, the signature of perception acts as a bridge between the tree and the perceiver, because both the "perceiver" and the "tree" are fundamentally linked in the Omniversal Potential before creation even occurred. That is, a signature existed in which the tree would be perceived by myself, and at the same time, that I would perceive the tree. When that possibility emerges into reality, I remain physically separate from the tree of course, but the signature of that creation (i.e. the possibility of perception between perceiver and tree) connects us behind reality. That signature (i.e. my perception) overlaps and underlies those of the tree and myself, and acts as a bridge between us. Whether I am aware of it or not, the tree – or at least those elements I perceive to be the tree – becomes a part of me, and vice versa.

Every time creations come together like this, every time we experience, affect and perceive something else, a signature entwines those elements together. We thus *collect* them throughout our lives, whether we know it or not; attaching signatures to our being; that is, to our overall possibility. This collection of signatures which gather around us, unseen behind reality and fundamentally linking us to all we perceive, is what I call the "Ribbon". It is our knowledge of the Ribbon which distinguishes those who adhere to the Universal Design, and those who seek to understand the Asperian. Indeed, the modular mind, perceiving creations as a series of distinguishable units, would see that tree as a modular entity and comprehend it through the senses alone: sight bringing images, hearing bringing sound, contact bringing touch, and so on; unaware that behind it, signatures link the perceiver to the tree. The Asperian likewise understands the tree through the senses, but seeks to go further. Knowing that the signature of perception is a bridge of understanding, the Asperian attempts to discern the signature's presence, pushing through the limitations of the modular mind and seeking to comprehend the signatures within; those elements which lie beyond words, sounds and images. It is by perceiving the signature that the Asperian comes to understand their connec-

tion to the creation (i.e. the tree) and can thus become aware of all the other signatures which underlie and overlap it. In essence, they seek to gain transcendence of self.

Asperian philosophy is thus one that seeks interaction between self and everything else, aspiring for immersion, clear perception and of course, transcendence. But like the Universal Design, the Asperian Design also has its absolute. This is what Eve had sought in Eden – "Omniversal Liberty"; i.e. a connection to *unbridled* creation. Though this straightforward definition implies its acquisition to be equally straightforward however, the full spectrum of Omniversal Liberty would certainly remain one of the most elusive concepts imaginable, because, like perfection (the Universal Design's absolute), it also requires a full and complete comprehension of the universe. But rather than the Universal Design's gradual modulation and control of reality, Omniversal Liberty would first require an Asperian state. That is, it would require our full transcendence of modular thought, with the distinctions between all creations being blurred in our minds, and with our very sense of self becoming entwined with everything else in our universe. Only then, in this limited state of creation of complete connection, could one conceivably reach beyond that reality and into the Omniversal Potential with all of its "impossibilities". As in Eden, only then can the Asperian state be opened up to those impossibilities.

Of course, one should recall how Eve, who dwelt within said state, reached too far when taking the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Much as "perfection" promises much but would deliver an entirely restricted reality, Omniversal Liberty would present us with that which was presented to Eve – a wilderness. The absolutes of the Universal and Asperian Designs are both temptations towards oblivion – the fruit was forbidden for a reason.

5   Conclusion: The Scattered Seeds of Eden

"Power", defying definition and evoking a complex web of images and ideas, is a key concept of life. I have suggested its root to lie within a Universal Design; the ability for all things to create, dominate, destroy and prevent the existence of other creations. Ushering in a modular state of reality, the human mind is likewise predisposed to make modular judgements upon it. But the mind (the only part of the divine humanity holds onto) is tortured by the prospect that it is a victim of this design – for what deity wouldn't fear the prospect of its own death?

It is this, that our lives can be created, dominated, destroyed and prevented, which compels us to become masters rather than victims of the Universal Design. This is where the idea of perfection becomes pertinent. A goal uniquely pursued by humanity, perfection is that state where creations no longer need to follow the rules of the Universal Design; where the elements of the universe have been re-ordered in such a way that reality becomes unchangeable, equilibrious and eternal, as in Eden. But one needs to use the tools of the Universal Design to achieve that; to make the imperfect not only non-existent, but to forever remain outside the scope of possibility. That requires the mind's gradual modulation of the universe so as to be able to construct a criterion of perfection; creating, controlling and enhancing elements we judge shall form it, while eliminating imperfections and preventing their re-emergence into reality.

This remains the driving force of our age – the illumination, modulation and obtainment of "truth" and its employment in attaining perfection. Throughout this article however, I have implied modulation to be a human defect rather an advantage. Our original sin as it were. This is because, whether trivial or mortal, each modular thought is instilled with the intrinsic power of the Universal Design as each one confines reality (or "truth") into category. Forcing the scope of perceived reality into bounded mental spaces, modular thoughts constrain not only our own minds, but other's too. As Rousseau so famously declared, man is born free and is everywhere in chains. Made up of the modular thoughts we create from birth until death, we are the ones who place those chains upon ourselves and upon others in the ironic hope of freeing ourselves from the Universal Design.

But as this article has also suggested, there are two layers to reality, and the Universal Design habituates only one of them – the "lighted world" as revealed in Genesis; the reality we manipulate and re-order to our will; the universe of parts which inspires modular thought in the first instance. Behind this, and running parallel to it, I have suggested the existence of a darker reality. Instead of a chaotic primordiality though, I have represented it here as an endless series of intertwining signatures; single possibilities constantly being woven into others in the illuminated forefront of reality. What this shadow "universe" means is that every creation, rather than a distinct unit able to create, dominate, destroy and prevent, is at the same time a "Ribbon" of signatures; a collection of interlinked possibilities linking each creation to all the others it interacts with. We ourselves are Ribbons of these possibilities, created and being created, connecting us to all we perceive and vice verse. Our ability to acknowledge this is what I have defined as the "Asperian Design". The real question however, is whether we are able to transcend the modular mind and experience the kind of conscious connection with creation which Eve enjoyed – can we ultimately blur our own boundaries and *become* that which we perceive? This requires further discussion and will be examined in a later article. As one may imagine though, this kind of transcendental experience wouldn't be easy, because much as we are blind in the dark, the modular mind is likewise blind to the darker reality hidden behind the lighted one.

I should point out however, that though I have suggested the human mind to be fallible, as Eve feared and as Genesis implies, it remains one of the most brilliant things our universe can boast of, as I stated at the beginning. This isn't because it can modulate and manipulate reality effectively, but because it may prove to be the one marvel that can acknowledge both the light and the dark. Indeed, though a product of a limited universe, bound by the Universal Design and inclined towards perfection, the mind also has the capacity to look into the Omniversal Potential, gaze upon possibilities seemingly impossible in our universe, and reach out to create them. This means it can imagine that which lies beyond the lighted world, and as long as it can do that, the mind will rally against universal modulation and will deny it its much desired monopoly on "truth". So in conclusion, maybe our exploration into the darkness will be more enlightening that we yet realise.

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Marek Wiesenganger

Education as Spiritual Life – Experience of John Bosco

In this paper, we analyze origins of spiritual life of John Bosco, in particular a story called "a dream" – a story considered by John Bosco himself an interpretative key to his whole life. The story is archived in *Memoirs of the Oratory* – an autobiographical, spiritual, and pedagogical text of Don Bosco. It is clear from the text that there is a direct and essential dependence between fulfilling the mission and recognizing God in the Salesian spirituality. Education is not only social or cultural activity, but a space where Johnny Bosco meets God – a spiritual space as such.

About the author

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1   Introduction

John Bosco (1815–1888) is a founder of the specific spiritual way, the so-called Salesian's spirituality (Viganò 1995). This priest of the Catholic Church founded several religious orders and the inspiration of a wide movement of various clusters. The main mission of John Bosco's life was the education of youngsters, especially the poorest ones (*Saleziánska pastorácia mládeže* 2014). The education wasn't only just any social or relational activity for John Bosco. It was a principle, source and in the same time consequence of a spiritual experience. In general, it is possible to say, that through the education John Bosco experiencing God (Chavez 2014). In this paper, we examine the key story of John Bosco's life. In this story merge two meaning of the education. The first one is education as activity and mission. The second one is education as an expression of the own spiritual experience. This story is archived in *Memoirs of the Oratory*. It is considered to be one of the most important autobiographical, spiritual, and pedagogical text of John Bosco (Giraudo 2011). John Bosco himself considered this story an interpretative key to his whole life. He named it simply "a dream".

2 "A Dream"

Here is the very text: "In this dream, I seemed to be near my home in a fairly large yard. A crowd of children was playing there. Some were laughing, some were playing games, and quite a few were swearing. When I heard these evil words, I jumped immediately amongst them and tried to stop them by using my words and my fists. At that moment, a dignified man appeared a nobly dressed adult. He wore a white cloak, and his face shone so that I could not look directly at him. He called me by name, told me to take charge of these children, and added these words: 'You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love. Start right away to teach them the ugliness of sin and the value of virtue.'

Confused and frightened, I replied that I was a poor, ignorant child. I was unable to talk to those youngsters about religion. At that moment, the kids stopped their fighting, shouting, and swearing; they gathered round the man who was speaking.

Hardly knowing what I was saying, I asked, 'Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible?' 'Precisely because it seems impossible to you, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge.'

'Where, by what means, can I acquire knowledge?'

'I will give you a teacher. Under her guidance, you can become wise. Without her, all wisdom is foolishness.'

'But who are you that speak so?'

'I am the son of the woman whom your mother has taught you to greet three times a day.'

'My mother tells me not to mix with people I don't know unless I have her permission. So tell me your name.'

'Ask my mother what my name is.' At that moment, I saw a lady of stately appearance standing beside him. She was wearing a mantle that sparkled all over as though covered with bright stars. Seeing from my questions and answers that I was more confused than ever, she beckoned me to approach her. She took me kindly by the hand and said, 'Look'. Glancing round, I realized that the youngsters had all apparently run away. A large number of goats, dogs, cats, bears, and other animals had taken their place. 'This is the field of your work. Make yourself humble, strong, and energetic. And what you will see happening to these animals in a moment is what you must do for my children.'

I looked round again, and where before I had seen wild animals, I now saw gentle lambs. They were all jumping and bleating as if to welcome that man and lady.

At that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand her because I did not know what all this could mean. She then placed her hand on my head and said, 'In good time you will understand everything.'" (Bosco 2011, 4).

3 Textual Analysis of "A Dream"

For a better understanding of this story, it is important to distinguish several successive scenes, from which is the whole story composed, that is:

1. Introduction;
2. Apparition, mission, and prophecy;
3. Confusion and problem of identity;
4. Apparition, prophecy, and mission;
5. Confusion.

3.1 Introduction – Known, Old World

The story begins with a description of the scene which is known for John Bosco and ends with a description of his reaction which he considered right. Everything in the description is the same as a boy Johnny Bosco knows: house, yard, boys, even the response of small Johnny to the behavior of the boys. Johnny acts like he accustomed and like he was educated. He wants to finish immoral behavior – fight and profanity – by the way which he was known: power and silencing. Johnny's response expresses his justice: immoral behavior must be punished, it is necessary to discontinue commit evil. This situation is a basic context for following scenes which express absolutely different understanding of introductory scene of the story.

3.2 The Apparition, Mission, and Prophecy

The second scene begins with an apparition of a noble man. It is created by three relate moments, which are disturbing the acquaintance of material, personnel and cultural environment. Firstly, it goes about an unexplained and mysterious presence of a man, whose identity Johnny isn't able to identify. The only thing what he can identify is two attributes: dignified white coat and shiny face. Although both attributes refer to the typical characteristics of divine revelation the Jewish-Christian tradition, small Johnny is not able to identify who the man is.

The second moment which distorts the world known to Johnny is the moment of a new and incomprehensible mission: *"You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by*

gentleness (It. *mansuetudine*) a*nd love. Start right away to teach them the ugliness* (It. *brutezza*) *of sin and the value* (It. *preziosità*) *of virtue."* (Bosco 2011, 4).

The third moment which disturbs known world view is a prophetic sign. This sign is acting of the boys who *"stopped their fighting, shouting, and swearing; they gathered round the man who was speaking"* (Bosco 2011, 4).

The boy doesn't understand either of these moments. He can't address who the man with shiny face and white coat is. He misconceives how he has to fulfil his new mission, which is in the in contrast with the way he was used to acting. He doesn't understand the change of the boys' behavior. His inner tension is increasing. His confusion was turned to his own personality in the first step. Subsequently, he directed to the figure of the noble man.

3.3 The Confusion and the Problem of Identity

We can realize that the story Johnny Bosco considers one of the main interpretative keys of his life is in its essence a radically new spiritual experience and specific spiritual differentiation. The boy Johnny is asking for the identity of the man, who gives him special and new life mission, three times. Three times he verifies the origin of the new life objective. He is aware of the fact the receiving mission is not only a marginal activity but it requires an all-out response of the whole person. Feelings he repeatedly expresses are the typical accompanying sign of God's vocation: the feelings of own inability, unworthiness, a feeling that the task absolutely overcomes him and is not possible to realize it. In such a moment, the only question is basic: who is the one who gives this task.

In this context is special that the boys John didn't understand the link of the man to the prayerful tradition to which he was led by his mother. Despite many signs, he was given by the man, he didn't understand who he is. The tension caused by new educational mission together with new spiritual experience wasn't solved. On the contrary, spiritual revelation continues with a new apparition of a new figure. It goes about a woman, who *"was wearing a mantle that sparkled all over as though covered with bright stars"* (Bosco 2011, 4).

3.4 The Apparition, Prophecy, and Mission

We can see an analogy between the apparition of the man and the noble woman. In both cases, the figures are depicted in a typically religious way. But in either case, Johnny Bosco doesn't recognize the identity of these two persons. Just as in the first apparition as well also here comes to two prophetic signs. Bothe is concerning the boys, who Johnny Bosco wanted to put to silence in the name of justice at the beginning. The boys are gradually changing into wild animals and then into the tame lambs. He repeatedly receives an educational mission whose objective is the inner conversion of the groups of the boys. The whole story is thus moving towards its fulfillment in the final scene.

3.5 Confusion and Promise (Commitment)

The end of apparition creates two moments. The confusion coming from the misunderstanding of the identity of the woman, prophetic transformation of the boys as well as mission. The second moment is the promise that the understanding will come "in good time". So, the whole story doesn't finish by answering the questions but has an open ending. From this point of view, we can consider the whole story as a prophetic sign whose real God's origin will be proved at the time. It is important the verity of the sign will be shown only through obedient submission to the mission, which was revealed in this story

4 Spiritual Life as an Education – Education as Spiritual Life

According to John Bosco is it showing some essential features of the spiritual way in this story. Firstly, the story described by John Bosco joins two aspects of life, educational activity and creating a community with God. John Bosco has a promise that he will recognize the real identity of the noble man and woman. It will be possible only if he educates young by the way he was given by the man and woman. Between fulfilling the mission and recognizing God thus is the direct and essential dependence. John Bosco is meeting God amidst young. The conversion of the boys is an event where the God's power and presence are revealed. That is why the acting of young has a deep prophetic sense. Their acting is revealing God. And this revelation is intended to be given to the boy Johnny.

The story of "a dream" shows also other specific features of Salesian spiritual experience. Johnny is invited to cease such a relationship to God which is based on the strict compliance of orders. His relationship to God doesn't have to be based on the duties and justice but on the glamorous beauty and gentleness. All in dream evokes the impression of surprising beauty: the noble man dressed in decent clothes with the shiny face, the noble woman who has the brilliant coat as a shiny star, the beauty of virtues to which he should teach the boys. This all is in the sharp contrast to the ugliness of beating boys, wild animals or the ugliness of the sin. The same for the education, which he gets as the mission, is not based on the curd commands. This concept of education caused his distancing to the world of youth. That means not a help but hurting. The education given to Johnny as the mission is aimed at the inner conversion, where the commands cannot penetrate. What are two virtues he should lead them to? So, the style Johnny Bosco educates such should they

become: gentleness and love. The form of education is also its content. Note that educational mission also becomes the way of his personal spiritual conversion. The education by John Bosco becomes the space of permanent searching of God's identity. His shiny presence has two sides: blinds and attracts at the same time. The apparition given to John Bosco is also a prophecy about himself. He should become such a noble man and noble woman.

As it is seen, Johnny recognizes God as somebody absolutely new. It is God, who doesn't command but he attracts via his presence and causes changes. This God is strange by the fact he advocates a boy and involves him in his activities. Thanks to that he recognizes not only the identity of youth but also himself. The education isn't only the correction of deficiencies but mainly by finding such a way of life which enables to be a friend of God even his son – as the noble woman said. According to John, a personal spirituality is fulfilled by education. And at the same time, the education is the concrete way and thanks to it we can perceive God's presence.

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Gejza M. Timčák

Yoga Nidrā as a Tool in Yoga Training

Yoga nidrā is a term that has many interpretations – from relaxation to the state of Unity with the Absolute. Various yoga schools developed their own system of yoga nidrā practice. They are all effective, as they all affect the mind in a similar way, though through different mechanisms. In this paper, the yoga nidrā of the Bihar School of Yoga (BSY) is compared with other concepts of relaxation, *pratyāhāra* and yoga nidrā. The BSY booklet inspired by swami Satyananda on yoga nidrā (Satyananda 1978) became a sort of standard procedure in many countries. This is related to other concepts of relaxation and yoga nidrā. Some research results on yoga nidrā are indicated. Notes on mastering the teaching of yoga nidrā are also included.

About the author

Doc. Ing. Gejza M. Timčák, PhD. (1942) is a yoga tutor and author of a number of yoga related books like *Joga 1–4* in Slovak (6 editions), *Joga 1–2* in Hungarian (2 editions), *Yoga 1* in German (1 edition), *Personal Development Strategies in Yoga*, translation of the *Gheranda Samhita*, *Goraksha Shatakam*, *Aparoksha Anubhuti*, *Sarva Upanishad*, *Satkarma Sangrahah* or *Shat Chakra Nirupanam*. On conferences and courses he had countless presentations on diverse yoga subjects. He co-authored books (e.g. teaching materials for Slovak Yoga Association's yoga teacher courses), films (e.g. *Disregarded Possibilities*), and videos (e.g. *Hitting the Bull's Eye*) on yoga. He is a co-developer of the *Savita Yoga* style, president of the Slovak Yoga Association, and chairman of the Association for the Advancement of Yoga. His activities relate also to the European Union of Yoga. He teaches yoga in various European and Asian countries. His email contact is timcak.gejza@atk.sk.

1   Theory

Traditional descriptions of yoga nidrā as we know it presently are rare. In the *Bhagavad Gītā* (5: 24), we hear about *antara rāmāsthatā,* "relaxation". Also in *Bhagavad Gītā* 2: 69 it is written: *"When it is night for all beings, the controlled man is awake; when all beings are awake, that is the night for the sage who sees."*

This implies a state of mind, where the world as we usually see it "no longer exist" – we are not able to maintain awareness, when it happens. In case of yogis, however, awareness can be maintained. Experienced meditators can maintain low theta dominant states and use it also for designing solutions needed in everyday life.

2   Objective Parts of Yoga Nidrā Process

As it was shown in the research at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, yoga nidrā has a special brain response. Apart from sequentially activating well defined areas of the brain, it changes the dominant EEG patterns of the brain (Nilsson 2017).

Tab. 1 shows the main types of EEG frequencies. Tab. 2 shows the correlation of in various states of mind with EEG frequency domains. Fig. 1 shows the shifts of awareness during the process of falling asleep and relaxation plus meditation (Hirai 1972). Delta dominant states can be maintained without sleep only by very advanced yogis, like it was shown in case of swami Veda Bharati (Bharati 2014).

Tab. 1.
The most important EEG frequency domains.

Superbeta ("gamma")	42 – 200 Hz
Beta	12 – 42 Hz
Alpha	7 – 12 Hz
Theta	4 – 7 Hz
Delta	0.1 – 4 Hz

Tab. 2.
The most usual states mind and the EEG responses.

Usual working regime of mind	*Beta activity dominates*
Relaxation, superlearning	*Alpha activity dominates*
Creative visualization, meditation (also SEMS and REM sleep)	*Theta activity dominates*
Immersion into deeper states of meditation (also dreamless sleep)	*Proportion of delta activity increases*
Panics, fear, intensive stress	*Fast beta rhythms dominate (also > 80 Hz)*

Fig. 1.
Transition from beta to delta dominant states in case of untrained and trained meditators (adapted after Hirai 1972).

Beta dominant state	Alpha dominant state	Theta dominant state	Delta dominant state
Usual wakeful state of mind	Unbroken wakeful attention during relaxation or meditation State of comfort *Sleepiness start*	*A state conductive for visual elements of relaxation and meditation* REM states during sleep	 Deep meditation Dreamless sleep

3 Description of Relaxation in Yogic Literature

Classic yoga literature usually defines only one *āsana* – *śavāsana* and the associated mental states. It is only in modern literature where we find the description of the relaxation processes (Timčák *et al.* 2004).

Haṭhapradīpikā
"*Lying supine on the ground like a corpse – that is śavāsana. Śavāsana wards off fatigue and brings mental repose*" – "*Uttānam savavadbhāmau sayanam tacchavāsanam savāsanam srāntiharam cittavisrāntikāranam*" (*Haṭhapradīpikā* 1: 32).

Yuktabhavadeva
"*Lie on the back on the ground like a corpse. This is śavāsana which wards off fatigue and brings mental repose*" (*Yuktabhavadeva* 6: 16).

Gheraṇḍa-saṃhitā
"*Lying on the back on the ground like a dead body is called śavāsana which removes fatigue and gives relief to the mind [citta visrāntikāranam]*" (*Gheraṇḍa-saṃhitā* 2: 19). A dead body does not enable being conscious of it. Thus, in śavāsana one should reach the state when the mind is relieved of the perception of the body.

Haṭharatnāvalī
"*Lying by extending legs and hands due to tiresomeness is called śavāsana. It removes all kinds of fatigue due to the practice of different āsanas.*" (*Haṭharatnāvalī* 3: 77).

Haṭhatatvakaumudī
"*Savāsana follows, for quieting the mind [cittavisrāntau]. One lies on the ground on the back, legs are apart, placing the folded arms on the chest, gaze fixed on the tip of the nose, while meditating on Siva [smāran sivam]. This is śavāsana.*

Practice of śavāsana cures the knots [granthi] caused due to vitiated vāta in the chest [hrt], removes the fatigue of the body and mind arising due to the practice of all the āsanas and exhaustion. This brings wellbeing to the yogi." (*Haṭhatatvakaumudī* 7: 11–12).

Yoga Tarawali
This short work describes, that the *munis* are able to stay conscious in yoga nidrā and thus achieve a special type of yoga nidrā. This yoga nidrā is described by Adi Shankaracharya in *Yoga Tarawali*: "*For the yogi in this extraordinary state, the old patterns are completely cleansed, the state of yoga nidrā arises, and the yogi is totally devoid of any interest in this world.*" (Shankaracharya, verse 24).

Further verses from *Yoga Tarawali* elucidate on this point: "*Through appropriate practice, done steadily when all thoughts and intentions are completely rooted out, when we are freed totally from the web of karma, then the yogi reaches and remains in the state of yoga nidrā.*

Resting in the bed of the turīya state, higher than the other three states; always having the vision of the highest; my dear friend [ātman]! Enter and remain in the nirvikalpa state, the state of yoga nidrā.

When the light of the paramátma glows, the darkness called avidyā is destroyed totally; then the yogi who perceives everything clearly, does not see anything in this world." (Shankaracharya, verses 25–27).

4 Implications of Yoga Nidrā as Given by Yoga Tarawali

Even though Consciousness is the Ground, the Foundation on which our life is based, that what we ordinarily perceive is termed as *māyā* – the perceptive modus in the state of *avidyā* (see *"That which is beginningless, fruitful, open to both proof and disproof, neither real nor unreal, nor real-unreal – nonexistent when, because of the immutability of its own substratum, the cause of change is ascertained, – existent, when it is not so ascertained – thus that which is indefinable, is called māyā."* *Sarvopanishad*, verse 4). Thus our state of existence holds a veil before us onto which it projects a wonderful, and unbelievable perfect "illusion" that mirrors all our needs, desires and aspirations, and induces in us a false hope for their permanent possession. Yoga nidrā of *Yoga Tarawali* promises to realize the highest state of existence.

5 Principles of Yoga Nidrā

The Bihar School of Yoga uses the elements of guided body relaxation as used in westernized yoga classes and elements of archetypal, guided visualization. Yoga nidrā as we know it now, – whichever school of yoga we belong to – usually represent the first step to the state indicated by the *Bhagavad Gītā* or *Yoga Tarawali*. They indicate, that yogic "sleep" is when we are asleep for the world as usually perceived and awake to Consciousness. As shown above, research has shown that in yoga nidrā the brain's activity (EEG) indicated, that the subjects tested by PET scanner were in a deeply relaxed state, similar to that of sleep, during the whole yoga nidrā. The theta activity rose significantly (11 %) on all the twenty-one scalp electrodes. The reduction of the alpha activity (2 %) was insignificant, showing that this meditative state is altogether different from that of the sleeping state and comprises conscious awareness. Furthermore, the state was constant and evenly distributed over the entire brain for the forty-five minutes the relaxation lasted. In the various parts of the yoga nidrā as given by the Bihar School of Yoga (Satyananda 1977), various areas of the brain became active, thus giving a possibility to experience subjectively the states when different areas are becoming active, whilst others are less active.

6 Relaxation and Yoga Nidrā

Systemically, relaxation became a process where the mind is being taught to recognize subtle information from the body and to release tension maintained in the muscular system or the tension/discomfort coming from internal organs and from different *kośas*. Relaxation was further extended to areas, where mental processes and states were worked on. Thus it evolved to what we now regard as yoga nidrā.

7 Guiding Yoga Nidrā

Those *yogācāryas* – yoga teachers that guide people through yoga nidrā should themselves be able to be in the state of yoga nidrā. In order to guide yoga nidrā the yogācārya should be aware of the following: Real yoga nidrā does not flow from his words, but from the support obtained by his being connected to higher continua and beings (or Masters). The acharya should be aware of his own thought and feelings (general and related to the group). He should not willingly modulate on his words and outgoing energy flow any unrelated contents of his mind. He should be able to eliminate also subconsciously occurring unrelated information from his mind. In psychology: *"The therapist is supposed to be a tabula rasa, a blank tablet upon which the patient could project her own feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. These then could be analyzed by the therapist, enlarging the arena of the patient's mind"* (Weiss 1988).
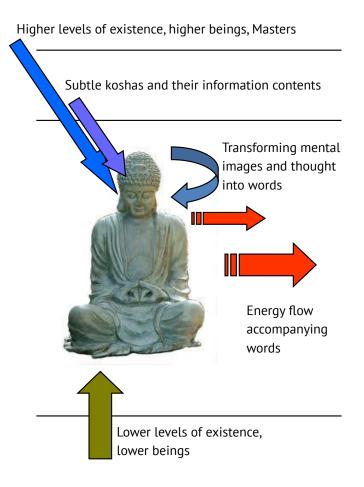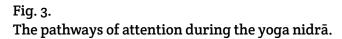
8 Silence in Yoga Nidrā

Aparokṣānubhūti says: *"The wise should always be one with that silence wherefrom words together with the mind turn back without reaching it, but which is attainable by the yogins"* (*Aparokṣānubhūti*, verse 107). Sleep is here called *laya*. The ability to reach this state of noble nidrā needs however, effective yoga sādhana as indicated, e.g., in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (*Adidevananda* 1967).
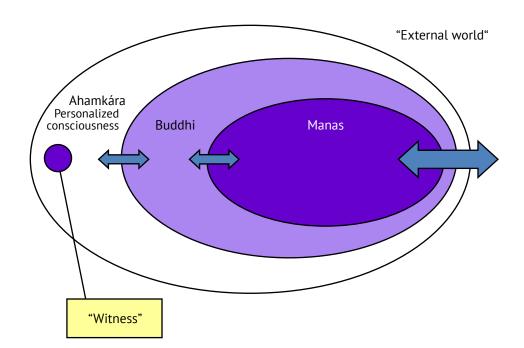
When we realize the depth of the task of guiding a yoga nidrā session, surely we will do the best to train oneself to the task.

Naturally, the best advice is – first realize the *ātman* in us as shown, e.g., by Adi Shankaracharya in *Aparokṣānubhūti* (Vimuktananda 1977). This would mean that we would be able to help to "pull" the yoga nidrā participants towards the Absolute from within. If that is not possible, we have to see that we at least point in the right direction and do not harm the class participants.

Fig. 2.
The information system effective during yoga nidrā sessions
Information flow in yoga nidrā.

Higher levels of existence, higher beings, Masters

Subtle koshas and their information contents

Transforming mental images and thought into words

Energy flow accompanying words

Lower levels of existence, lower beings

Fig. 3.
The pathways of attention during the yoga nidrā.

"External world"

Ahamkára
Personalized
consciousness

Buddhi

Manas

"Witness"

9   How Could We Do Harm in Training People in the Noble Yoga Nidrā?

I can easily happen if we do not take some precautions. Below are a few points to consider. People in yoga nidrā are trusting the teacher and thus open up their mental and energy system to what comes from him. If information pops up in his mind that are disturbing or improper and he identifies with that, one may infuse them into the course participants.

As shown in the *Our Knowledge is Just Drops in the Ocean* documentary, and as proved by episodes of the life of yogis (like Sri Ramakrishna), our past, even if it is healed ("forgiven"), is imbedded in our energy system and thus can be subconsciously communicated – by thought, touch or speech, to others. Thus special training is needed for blocking these information flows from reaching others.

Texts like *Gorakśaśatakam* (Timčák 1991, Brzezinski 2015) says that *prāṇāyāma* is able to "burn up" these inharmonious information sources (*vāsanās*). Other texts mention tapas as the best means, without specifying the details. The Steinerian practice adapted by Popper (Popper 1988) in his preparatory practices train the mind to observe the thought-field and to avoid identification with the undesirable thought or emotions.

Ṣaṭkarmas not only purify the physical systems of our body, but also take away energies carrying harmful information. *Mitāhāra* – if we offer yoga nidrā sessions, we should have a sattvic diet. The basic recommendation would be a vegetarian diet. It could be also vegan or vitarian diet, but it depends on one's constitution, age, climate and motivation.

Aparigraha as one of the *yamas* helps us to avoid the feeling of wanting to own the process of yoga nidrā and may cover the desire to be successful and/or have the admiration or acknowledgement of the class participants. Kindness towards all (without being submissive or too meek) is also beneficial as it cancels any possible negative thought or feeling. It thus helps maintaining constructive states of mind. Realizing the map of our competences (knowing where they end and not crossing over them) is important in case of decision-making regarding the visual/imaging parts of the yoga nidrā.

10   Points to Take Care Before, During and After the Yoga Nidrā

The teacher has to have enough personal experience with relaxation and yoga nidrā. Ideally it means years of training (Bharati 2013). One should then teach others that which we have securely mastered on a yoga teacher training course.

One also has to realize that during the relaxation, the teacher, as well as the participants, enter a state of mind that is more subtle than the usual wakeful state. In that state we are linked to all the participants through an energy and information continuum that even if we would be silent, communicates to all those present our state of being. The teacher of the yoga nidrā usually has a greater influence on the information flow than the rest of the group.

There are a number of points that have to be mastered. To discuss any issues that may need special attention with the participants. It is necessary to take care for possible side effects of the verbally induced mental situations.

- If we feel that there are hypersensitive persons in the group, it is imperative to be very careful about suggestive wording.
- The āchārya has to have the ability to visualize or feel the points that he communicates to the participants.
- It is also important to be thoroughly familiar with the usual effect of the selected archetypal or other image.
- It is not good to use "hypnotic" or suggestive words or voicing.
- Avoid suggesting "full", "total" or other state descriptions that may not be available to the participants and may cause a feeling of unworthiness, may lower self esteem or self image.
- The ability to relax from any personal feeling (attraction, repulsion) towards any of the participants.
- To stay focused and relax from tendencies of mind to wander.
- To communicate the process of yoga nidrā without the desire to influence.
- To attune and stay in a state of *saṃtoṣa* during the process.
- To stay fully attuned to the process of yoga nidrā.

It may happen that one or more persons get into such a deep state of relaxation that could be better called deep meditation. One can find this out when after the end of yoga nidrā the person does not move, but stays in the śavāsana. First check, whether the person is not just sleeping (it has characteristic breathing pattern). One should not get disturbed by this as usually establishing vocal communication signals to a person in deep yoga nidrā regarding the need to bring the yoga nidrā to an end brings the attention of the practitioner into the usual state of wakefulness. A deeper yoga nidrā happens sometimes when the practitioner went to a meditative state and needs more time for coming back. Below are some further notes regarding such a case.
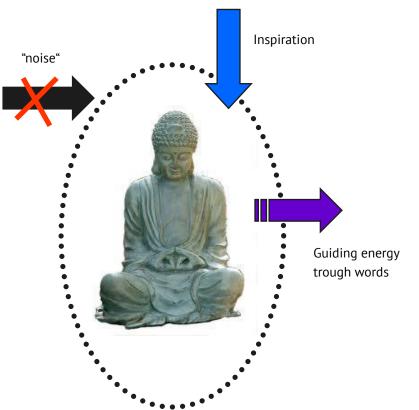
11   Deep Yoga Nidrā

In case of very deep state of yoga nidrā, one is often facing non-ordinary states of consciousness. In delta dominant states of mind, where the breathing nearly stops, the experience from that level is very difficult to bring to the usual level of consciousness.

Further, people, who in delta dominant stages of yoga nidrā, experience the joy of Being and often show unwillingness to return "quickly" to the ordinary level of consciousness, where *ānanda* is more veiled.

If the return to the usual state of being is needed, one can make a gentle tactile contact on a culturally neutral part of the body (e.g. abdominal wall, forehead). This usually brings the attention back to the "outer world". Still, it may also bring a sense of discomfort due to the feeling of being without the ability to have influence on the happenings around the practitioner.

Vocal contact is softer and it serves equally well. We should do this from a culturally acceptable distance. The message could be that the relaxation has ended and thus it would be nice if the person would gently deepen the breath, feel the body, move gently the fingers of hands and feet. One can see the effect of the non-verbal or verbal communication by observing the movement of the chest, abdomen or limbs. Both approaches need time. It is also good, if 2–3 nicely attuned people stay around the person, as he/she perceives the happenings around, but needs time to come to a movement.

Fig. 4.
The full yoga nidrā information flow, where the outer and mental noises are blocked, the teacher is attuned to inner sources of inspiration and thus the verbal guidance is perfect.

"noise"

Inspiration

Guiding energy trough words

12 Obstacles in Experiencing Yoga Nidrā by Participants

There is a number of obstacles preventing yoga nidrā to happen, that usually stem from an inner insecurity of the practitioner, fear of letting go, stress related tension, illness, etc. Below are some of behavioural patterns that have to be resolved before yoga nidrā (even though it may take some time):

- Inability to close eyes (fear of loss of control of happening around the practitioner, curiosity regarding what do the others, etc.);
- Inability to relax (too much bodily or mental stress);
- Cramps (dehydration, fatigue, stress);
- Inability to let the thoughts go (desire to control the process, too busy mind, etc.);
- Falling always asleep (tiredness, lack of mental discipline or – the person is not yet ready for yoga nidrā).

Also, one should go to yoga nidrā class only if one is sure that there is no recent emotional turmoil (negative of positive emotions) in one's mind. As mentioned, these states leave traces in the energy system and during the yoga nidrā could get communicated to others, though without an intention to do so.

What to do, if we are in such situation?

- Have a short relaxation or meditation first;
- Get tuned in and invite a higher help.

13 Additional Training for Making the Yoga Nidrā Experience Deeper

For improving our ability to guide yoga nidrā one can apply a number of yogic techniques, some of which are listed below:

- *Prāṇāyāma* (see, e.g., the Patañjali *Yoga Sūtras*; Bharati 2001, 2013, 2015, 2016; *Gheraṇḍa-saṃhitā*; Timčák 2007);
- *Trātak* (one of the *ṣaṭkarmas*; see, e.g., *Gheraṇḍa-saṃhitā*);
- *Ajapa japa* (see, e.g., Satyananda 1981; *Gheraṇḍa-saṃhitā*).

Some of the mental kriyās of the Bihar School of Yoga (Satyananda 1981) are:

- *Chittákás dhāraṇā*;
- *Antar mauna*.

Some of the applicable mental kriyās of swami Gitananda (Gitananda 1972) are:

- *Bhrūmadhya bindu dhāraṇā*;
- *Ājñā bindu dhāraṇā*.

The Himalayan School of Yoga uses the 61 point relaxation (Rama 2016). The *Vāsiṣṭha-saṃhitā* (Kuvalayananda *et al.* 1969) uses for *pratyāhāra* the practice using 18 vital points with a similar result.

It is beneficial to leave some time for feedback after the yoga nidrā session. When the yoga nidrā is finished, it is good not to forget to thank the Absolute, that one have been able to try to help people in getting some peace of mind or to a state close to refreshed alertness. If you felt inspired during the yoga nidrā, never think that inspiration comes just out of your effort, as usually it comes from higher levels of existence. If one is sincere in one's yoga, regardless the visible levels of success, one is always getting help. Only we are usually not aware who is helping us.

14 Conclusions

Yoga nidrā as we know it now, is a tool that developed from the śavāsana practice and has many other dimensions that have been linked to it through yogic inspiration and homonyms. It enables intensive de-stressing and a preparation for meditation. Its positive influence on the function of brain and mind was proved by research. For the teachers – *āchāryas* – who teach the yoga nidrā it is important to master their mental processes, so that no subliminal mental suggestion flows from their mind to those of the participants.

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Swami Veda Bharati

Communication as Sādhanā

This article deals with those aspects of human interpersonal communication and institutional communication strategies, which are based on the concept of love-filled integration of communication situations. At the same time, it provides a manual of ethic communication of a sādhaka and of a spiritual institution like an ashram. It presents *sādhanā* – spiritual aspiration and practice as a basis for being able to connect to the force needed for effective communication solutions in order to make spirituality an integral part of everyday life.

1   Why A Positive Approach?

There is excessive ungentleness in the world, and display of pride and arrogance. We speak looking down upon the "lesser ones", sometimes gently but that also patronizingly. We do so towards "lower castes" towards "have-nots", towards children, towards "employees", towards people of other nations, religions, skin colors, cultures, languages – but we expect these "lesser ones" to practice humility towards us. This continues till they rebel and we quash the rebellions equally insensitively and arrogantly because, well, "we are the senior ones"!

We shout slogans against nuclear wars without controlling and pacifying our personal angers in daily life – how would we then prevent wars without individual peace in each mind?
At the same time we are always in denial about our individual violence, ungentleness, harshness, personal anger, pride and arrogance. Let someone say, "you are being ungentle", we immediately blurt our defensiveness: "What? I am so gentle! I am so humble!"; "there is no ego in me!"; "angry? who? me? you are imagining!"; "you are always unfairly criticizing me!", etc.

In case of organizations with a spiritual mission, it is good to remember that the employees or volunteers are not doing just a management or administration. They are practicing sādhanā of self-pacification, self-purification, and finally self-perfection. The acts of "management" and "administration" are steps on that spiritual path.

Change has to begin somewhere; even at a snail's pace. Just as one keeps one's spirituality private when interacting with daily routines of business, government and employment situations, but maintains it as a well-guarded treasure, so also one may apply the principles suggested here slowly in the outside world, examining where they may be acceptable without excessive resistance from others.

If one would make the experimentation, one would be surprised at the positive results one would obtain in one's company, offices, with the "employees" and at home with the family. It is sad and painful to see harshness, ungentleness, arrogance in the surrounding environment. On the other hand, someone so deeply involved in solving world problems at such a high level in the very practical life, former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan (2012) says: "*Sometimes you don't have to fight to get your way. You don't have to pick a fight to get them to change their mind, or get them to see things your way. You really don't.*"

This is from a person of such eminence who could not have reached his high station without being extremely practical. When I saw him speaking in the conference of the World Congress of

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Swami Veda Bharati (1933–2015) was a Sanskrit scholar, an Indian sannyasin, and a founder and spiritual guide of the Association of the Himalayan Yoga Meditation Societies International (AHYMSIN). Having never attended any school, he received a BA degree from the University of London, an MA from the University of London, and a D. Litt. from the University of Utrecht. Between 1966 and 1973, he served as Professor of South Asian Studies at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, MN. In 1973, he retired from his academic career and fully committed himself to spiritual practice and service. In 1992, he was initiated into sannyasa by his spiritual master Swami Rama and received the name Swami Veda. In 1999, he was honored by the swamis of India with the title of *Mahamandaleshwar* of the Niranjani Akhada and placed among the top thirty swamis of India.

Spiritual Leaders in the hall of the United Nations general Assembly, what impressed me was his inner stillness and stability derived from deep spiritual values of African traditions. Kofi Annan's statement confirms the results of my own experiments in daily life and communications in my own smaller sphere.

The principles suggested in this article are very practical and easy to apply in one's family life, among one's friends, and, for the most part, in the management and relationships within any spiritual association.

2   The Himalayan Spiritual Tradition

In 4th century BC, the Indian empire, at that time as large as the Roman Empire that came several centuries later, was ruled by the emperor Chandragupta, called Sandrogottos by the Greeks. Chandragupta's prime minister, named Chanakya lived in a small hermitage, following the tradition of the Brahmin philosophers. It was the emperor who would dis-mount from the chariot several miles away and walk to his mentor and minister's hut to receive counsel and advice. The major work of this prime minister, titled the *Arthaśāstra* (Science of Polity and Economy), is a classic in the science of polity. The first few sutras are as follows (Chanakya, verse 330):

The root of comfort and happiness is dharma (virtue).
The root (support) for virtue is polity and economy (artha).
The root of artha is rulership.
The root of (successful) rulership is conquest of senses.
The root of the conquest over senses is humility and discipline (vinaya).
The root of humility and discipline is service to the elders.
Through service to the elders one obtains experiential knowledge and wisdom (vi-jñāna).
Let one complete and fulfil oneself through experiential wisdom.
That one has cultivated and fulfilled the self, means that he has conquered the self.
One who has conquered the self finds all his purposes and goals being accomplished.

The word *artha* incorporates all the worldly affairs that provide the means for living, thus it includes polity and economy, which are considered inseparable in ancient Indian political science. However, we can see from the above maxims that the core of success is in conquest of senses, self-control, humility and discipline imbibed by serving the wise and the elders. Based on this teaching we can examine the modern-day approach to artha and determine where it fails in following these ancient ideals. One can write a very detailed thesis to discuss this approach to modern problems in the business and the political world. How much of self-control and conquest of senses, humility, discipline at the feet of elders and the wise is practiced to train ourselves for success? How much experiential wisdom serves to guide us in our business affairs? What exactly is meant by experiential wisdom? This word, *vi-jñāna*, often occurs coupled with *jñāna* (knowledge) in the texts like the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Shankaracharya translates *jñāna* as theoretical and textual knowledge, and *vi-jñāna* as "experiential wisdom". Here, however, "experiential" does not mean that which we gain from our daily life experiences. It means a spiritual experience, which opens up our intuitive faculty.

This is where yoga and meditation become relevant. It is not possible to learn to exercise self-control and to conquer one's senses without the practice of meditation.

It is also not possible to reduce one's ego, to practice humility, without meditation. It is through meditation that one learns that the elders who have gained intuitive wisdom may be honored. Then, through meditation one gains access to one's own inner gates of wisdom.

What does all this conquest of senses, humility, intuitive wisdom have to do with success in the business world where we always have to push, compete, assert, fight? The wisdom of the ages says that it is not necessary to take such aggressive stance in order to succeed. Here is the story of a Moghul emperor, Akbar, and his wise minister named Virbal. All the courtiers were jealous of Virbal because he was obviously the emperor's most favorite. They asked the emperor why? What is it that he has and we do not have? The emperor promised to answer the question on some other day.

One morning, as the courtiers arrived in the court, the emperor posed a question to them. He drew a line on a board and asked them to "make the line shorter". Well, such a sim-

ple desire was easy to be fulfilled. Everyone tried to get up and rush to the blackboard, and one of them managed to erase a part of the line. The emperor said: "No, no, do shorten the line but do not touch it!"

Well, that was indeed a puzzle. Nobody could solve the problem. The emperor finally beckoned Virbal, to come "make my line shorter without touching it". Virbal quietly got up, took the chalk or whatever, and drew a longer parallel line, like in the figure below:

——————— *the emperor's line*

————————————— *Virbal's line*

"Your line is shorter, your majesty," he declared. In this there is no competition with another's line. Only that one goes deep within oneself, and without looking at somebody else's accomplishment, applies one's total ability to the task at hand. If one is fully restrained, in possession of one's senses and emotions, acts constructively in all humility, learns from the wise, there can be no doubt in his or her "success without competing". We can say much more about the topic but that will make a whole book. Here, we can come to the question about the right system of meditation for accomplishing such a personal self that can successfully guide itself on the path suggested above.

There are many systems of meditation. Which one should one choose? We propose and teach the Himalayan system. None of the authentic traditions of meditation are excluded from the Himalayan system. All of the other major systems are parts that fit in the right spaces in the jigsaw puzzle of the Himalayan system. For example, *Vipassanā* system teaches to concentrate on the breath flow and body awareness, to start with, but does not use a mantra for a focus. The Transcendental Meditation (TM) uses only the mantra and not the breath awareness. Zen has a certain way of dealing with random thoughts. In the Himalayan system, we use all of these, and more, to make the complete picture. Someone trained in this tradition has been taught as to the right place for each technique and where it fits in the larger frame. One of its major strengths of the Himalayan system is that a well-trained teacher is familiar with many other systems of meditation. Starting from the basic steps a teacher may lead a student on a specialized path as needed according to the individual needs. For example, a person needing emotional strength will be advised to concentrate on the cardiac center, whereas an intellectually inclined person may focus on the center between the eyebrows.

It can be safely stated that most the meditation systems are derived from this system. They may be called specialized paths within the single comprehensive system. For example, it is well known that the famous Shao Lin monastery was established as a midway stopping point for the Indian monks travelling on the silk road when they were bringing the meditation tradition to China. The earliest word for meditation from the Vedic times (approx. 2000 BC) is *dhyāna*. The Buddha pronounced this Sanskrit language word in his Pali language as *jhāna*. Travelling to China, it became known as *Ch'an*. The Chinese teachers taught the system to the Koreans who pronounced it as *Son*. The Chinese and the Korean teachers brought it to the Japanese who pronounced it as *Zen*. All of the elements of the Zen school, as also of the Vipassanā or TM are known to the Himalayan dhyāna school but not vice versa.

Who is the founder of the Himalayan system of meditation, historically we cannot say. However, there have been many great names in the last four thousand or more years. These names will not interest an average beginner in the West, so, no need to list these here. Suffice it to give one illustration of this system's antiquity and of the long line of spiritual experience. The modern western scholars surmise that the ancient text, *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* is dated around 14th century BC. This text gives the names of sixty-nine generations of teachers up to that time as to who taught whom. The lineage has continued unbroken to this day. Whatever specialized developments have taken place in the tradition in all of these centuries has been given different names and then they further developed their lore and pedagogy independently. But the main stream continues and nurtures and nourishes the schools, as well as each newly arisen civilization according to its need. It teaches in the language and terminology of any current century, and its contemporary civilization. Its universality makes it so resilient.

To give an example, let us take the most ancient method of breath awareness in the Himalayan dhyāna tradition; it is the basic method in the Tibetan (*Mahayana Buddhist*) meditation, in the Chinese *Ch'an*, Japanese *Zen*, in *Vipassanā* as taught in the *Theravāda* Buddhist meditation system in Southeast Asian countries. It is the *Zikr* of the Sufis, and the most important component of the Christian meditative tradition of *hesychia*, or the practice of stillness and prayer of the heart.

As we have said above, the teachers of the tradition have gathered enormous experience and expertise in the past forty or more centuries, and are able to guide people of all religions, of all civilizations, and of all meditative traditions. If one has been practicing meditation under a different guide

using a different system, the teachers of the Himalayan dhyā-na yoga tradition know how to include and incorporate that method into the larger set of practices. It is considered most important that a meditation guide should avoid creating conflict in a student's mind, and should reconcile into one what on the surface might appear to be two different methods.

What does all this have to do with the maxims of Chanakya quoted earlier?

The Himalayan dhyāna yoga tradition works on a personality in all its different components within the personality that is constituted of spirit-mind- prāṇa-body and their interactive mechanisms, and within the relationship between personalities that constitutes family, society, nation and all smaller and larger interactive social units and their functions like polity and economy.

The meditation changes the way the mind looks at the world and interacts with it. For example, in the basic beginners' exercise the awareness of breath replaces the arising of the random sentiments and negative emotions, the awareness of a word or sound flowing in the mind with the breath replaces the random thoughts.

The first of these, breath awareness, then helps one to interpret the world – whether in the form of one's spouse or a business colleague or a different country – with a more positive sentiment. This, then, brings a positive response from the other and the marital life or a business deal goes ever more smoothly. After a while, with constant self-observation, it makes a person irresistible to others who, then, think of him/her in friendlier, more favorable terms.

In the original ancient terminology, we may say that this will help an establishment develop its business and organizational policies based on the principles of:

(a) *Ahiṃsā*, "non-violence", and
(b) *Maitri* (Buddhist *mettā*), amity towards all beings, based on the principles of *karuṇā*, (compassion, seeing the difficulties of others as one's own and helping them out with that attitude), *muditā* (joyfulness at others' progress in virtue, such as developing positive sentiments that replace the negative ones), and *upekṣā* (indifference to the weaknesses or failures of others, so that one encourages them to discover their own stronger areas of character, capacity and genius).

The second, the use of a single verbal thought flowing with the breath, helps with concentration, not only on a specific task at a given moment but in the overall patterns of life.

The breath awareness practice, coupled with methodical relaxation exercises, changes the common beta brain wave pattern into an alpha wave one; and the focus on a certain sound leads one to the theta brain wave. The dominance of alpha wave invokes in one a non-violent response to a possibly violence-producing situation; whether such violence is verbal or physical, or worse still mental. Mental violence leads a human being to malicious and conspiratorial attitudes and efforts, which can destroy the harmony within a family as well as within a business establishment. Try to get even 5 % of the people meditating in a company and see the human resources invariably improve dramatically within three to six months.

The part of the practice leading to theta brain wave activity of the brain will help the members of an establishment to (a) concentrate deeply and clearly on a given task, and (b) improve imaginative, inventive creativity. Try to get even five per cent of the people meditating in a company and see the productivity of the entire establishment rise within three months. I call this *succeeding without really competing*. The improvements in the psychological profiles of the meditative members of an establishment will diminish the need for embittering, hurtful, frustrating, stress-producing over-assertiveness and negativity among negotiators and work partners.

It has been found that a twenty-minute siesta in the daytime helps with concentration and productivity of the workers. The Himalayan dhyanā yoga system teaches two other ways, which can be even more effective: (1) conscious sleep, which can be taken for three to ten minutes even while sitting on an office chair; (2) frequent two-minute breath awareness breaks, even less time consuming than the conscious sleep.

Many years back in USA, my receptionist called me in my chamber saying that someone wanted to speak to me. I picked up the phone. The caller turned out to be a meditation student whom I had not seen for several years. He said that he had called to thank me. "For what?" I asked. He explained: "As you know, I am president of the trade union of […] industry throughout the state. We were on the verge of a strike. For the last one week, the atmosphere was very hard, confrontational and angry. I remembered your advice from the meditation classes. In the meeting rooms filled with cigarette smoke, as everybody was tense, I used the technique. Every time we came to a deadlock in the negotiations, I counted my breaths for two to five minutes. Every time, I came out with a fresh proposal. Finally, my proposals were accepted yesterday and we were able to avert the strike oth-

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erwise all the people of the state would have been adversely affected. So, I have called you to thank you."

It is thus that comfort and happiness are rooted in virtue, in a virtue like peacefulness of mind generated through meditation. This virtue is further enhanced when one sees that it generates not merely some other-worldly mystical state but shows its effect in the greater success in economy and polity, *artha*, which is rooted in good governance, *rājā*. All of this requires channeling the energies of our senses, which we can accomplish through self-control and discipline. In a meditative society, greater regard will be paid to the elders not only in the family, but also in the society and in a business establishment. The role of a wise mentor will be emphasized, and younger members of the staff will feel happy being compassionately and affectionately guided by the elder ones.

Here, let us give an example from one segment of the economic history of the world. Up to the end of the 17th century one of the most successful economies of the world was that of India. That is why, when the Ottoman Empire blocked Europe's trade routes to India there was such a concentrated endeavor to find new routes to that part of the world (initially leading to the discovery of America). Cicero, the Roman senator, in one of his speeches, lamented the drain of twenty million (what was its value in that century?) Roman coins per year to India to dress the Roman ladies with Indian textiles. Nineteen centuries later, in the 17th century the prosperity continued and India was producing 24,5 % of all of the world's goods. Its currency was the strongest in the world. India has no silver mines, but today's India owns 25 % of the world's silver – by earning it in the international trade for all those thousands of years.

This success was rooted in its meditative tradition, which imparted the qualities of personality that we have hinted at, above, and which, in addition, gave it the temperament that makes people amenable to seek to control the senses, to be humble and thereby seek the guidance of elders and the wise in any area. Today's "guru phenomenon", the idea of service to a spiritual guide, is only a small part of that tradition. This has led to the methods of training a business leader.

The family groups that had made India the millenniums-long success story in business still continue to train their business heirs in the same way as they did two thousand years ago, and three centuries ago, except that computers have been introduced and the MBA degrees are prized – but without losing the ancient time tested family traditions. These include not only the practice of daily meditative prayer but that the apprentice lives in the house of the business magnate as

a family member (in what is known as the *gurukula* system) and learns in humility, with self-restraint, the traditional art. Slowly he is given little responsibility, then some more, then supplied with capital and sent to run an existing establishment or to start a new one. Lifelong, the person maintains an attitude of humility towards his mentors. He may become more successful than them but in their presence, he retains an attitude of reverence. It is a part of the general sentiment that the success has come to him not merely from what he has learnt as a method, but by the blessings of the wise elders.

If, after only sixty-five years of independence India is on the verge of recovering her ancient economic strength, it is because of the personality traits that a meditative inclination generates, leading to positive attitudes, behavior patterns free of frustrations and interpersonal stress, rooted in right relationships. However, lately I notice a major loss of values in India in many public spheres but at the same time its continuity in other spheres.

Japan became an economic giant also by the same route of merging the tradition with modernity, and India is well on her way. That is the Asian miracle.

In other words, we need not limit ourselves to examining the scientific studies done in research laboratories to prove the efficacy of meditation. We better look at the economic history of the world in which the last two centuries of the West's economic dominance are a tiny fragment. History shows the effectiveness and success of the societies in which meditation, but more so the meditative attitudes leading to certain relationships, have been the basis of civilization.

The rate at which the Asian societies have taken to the computer, the internet and so forth from the West without losing their traditional values proves that the Western business has stiff competition coming in the forthcoming decades and centuries. Just as Asia has taken up the West's computer, better that the West takes up Asia's meditation. Taking it merely as a twenty minutes a day technique would not suffice. It is the attitudes generated by meditation that create relationships within the society and within a business establishment. The acceptance of this will ensure the survival of the West in a world where Asia has taken the best of the West and retained the best of the East. Let the West retain the best of the West and take up the best of the East to ensure the continuity of its success. It will help to prove Hermann Kaiserling and Oswald Spengler wrong. To summarize:

- The root of comfort and happiness is virtue. The support of virtue is in economy and polity.

- The root of economy and polity is right governance.

- The root of right governance is channeling the energies of the senses in a contemplative and meditative way.

- The basis of relationships from which such a way emerges, and in turn supports the same, is control of ego in humility and discipline.

- It is the respect to mentors and elders that leads one to re-channel one's ego and inculcates discipline.

- It is thus that one gains experiential knowledge.

- It is knowledge that leads one to cultivate oneself as a person.

Cultivating oneself is synonymous with self-conquest, for, one who has not conquered and learnt to govern just one mind, his own, how would he govern a whole empire?

Such a governance of oneself leads one, naturally and effortlessly, to success in all one's undertakings and desired goals whether material or spiritual.

Meditation is the art and science of self-governance. The Himalayan tradition of dhyanā yoga does not merely provide the technique for meditation but teaches the methods whereby one's meditation practice may be applied to cultivate, enhance and beautify one's personality, leading to very practical benefits in personal, interpersonal and corporate life.

3 Management as Sādhanā

Here we use the term *management* in a very wide perspective of all social, economic, political relationships and interactions. Let us take the subject point by point, as follows. There is a fourfold definition of *puruṣārtha*, purpose of a human. The four aspects are: *dharma* (virtuous duty), *artha* (polity, economy, and social order), *kāma* (desire), *mokṣa* (final spiritual liberation).

Artha and kāma are sandwiched between dharma and mokṣa. The purpose of artha and kāma is thus to support dharma and mokṣa. Thus, too, (a) all economic relationships (pay scales, etc.) among various members of management order, (b) all social relationships such "hiring", "firing". "Management hierarchies and mutual expectations among them" are to be based on this scheme.

Based on this concept of *puruṣārtha*, now we come to general economic interactions. *Prakrti*, all Matter, is a gift of God to the human to fulfil the puruṣārtha. It does not have a price.

What is the price of a glass of water if one is sitting in a boat in a clear lake of drinkable water? What is the price of water in a desert hundred miles from an oasis? Can you actually pay a suitable price for quenching your thirst?

Then there is the principle of *nish-kāma karma*, altruistic action, all action performed without seeking a benefit. As we shall see below, this is not an impossible principle to practice in daily life. It has to do with the mental value we place on our transactions, and not on the act itself. On these principles of puruṣārtha the following thoughts are presented. The principles have to be applied to all our transactions. How does nish-kāma karma work in our buying and selling potatoes in a market place? In our altruistic mental system of economic relationships, the potato seller is making us a loving gift of the product of his labor. This is priceless. He is giving us this gift because we need it. We are giving him some money altruistically because he needs it. So, at mental level, it is not an exchange of "this much" for "that much".

The same applies in an organization (especially spiritual ones). There are no paid employees. They are providing services that are needed. Their needs are fulfilled, in a limited way, in order to enable them to provide a particular set of services. Elsewhere they could be receiving more, or less. It is not an employer-employee relationship; it is an interpersonal love relationship. All family leaders need to cultivate that mental attitude. This is the path of spiritual purity in economic relationships.

Thus, in the relationships within the organizational family of sādhakas (a) authority does not proceed from above (except from the guru), (b) authority does not proceed from the title, position or designation one holds, (c) authority proceeds from below, (d) authority proceeds from one's selfless service, personal temperament of taking care of all, and one's spiritual stature. Others then honor one and create his/her authority over them.

Thus, in a spiritual organizational family no one hold "authority", "power" or "position" in itself. All of us only serve and teach and in doing so must practice humility at all times. "Authority" and "position" or "title" is only conveniences to facilitate the work in a legal world.

- Loyalty is not demanded, it is earned.

- Only a self-controlled leader maintains control.

- Only in the presence of self-disciplined leaders/guides the organizational family remains disciplined.

- Only in the presence of a humble leader/guide, others speak and behave humbly.

- The leader/guide shares with others all that can be shared safely; all work and all information.

- The leader/guide confers all honors that can be conferred on others, without seeking to be honored.

- The leader/guide confers all love that can be conferred on others without demanding or expecting that she or he be loved. Be surprised when you are loved or honored: "Whatever am I being honored for, I wonder? I have done nothing."

- Humility towards "seniors" and "equals" is no humility at all. Humility and self-effacing manner towards the "lesser" is the true humility.

- A sādhaka manager's voice shows poise and mildness, measured tones and measured words, lovingly, even when using effectiveness and firmness.

- The *Law Book of Manu* (Manu, verse 200), the first law-giver, lays the code of conduct that "*Smita-poorvaabhi-baaShee syaat*" – *"One should be a person who always smiles before she/he speaks"*.

- In *Ramayana* (Tulasidas 1650, Shastri 1962), one of the primary qualities of Rama is stated several times as "*Smita-poorvaabhi-baaShee*" – *"Always smiling before speaking"*.

- As part of one's sādhanā one constantly devises ways to implement these principles in practice. The ways devised by two sādhaka leaders/guides need not be identical; each is on his/her own spiritual journey.

- As the parents think of the progress of children in making all decisions, so the leaders/organizers in the organizational family of sādhakas think of the progress of all who are working as helpers.

- One ceases to think in terms of "I pay him", "I am paid by him". The leaders/organizers constantly keep in the mind, "how can she/he make progress both in artha and dharma". This applies to all relationships from sweeper to swami. All "hiring", "firing" and "correcting" is done with this attitude, this concern, within oneself.

- The personal progress made by the so-called "dependents" in the organizational family ensures the progress of the family.

- One trains oneself in communications based on self-purifications and self-pacifications.

- In a spiritual organizational family relationships are long term. One should seek to prolong them as much as possible. Even for generations.

- As heads of the family, the concern of the leaders/organizers is not only for the current "helpers" and "dependents" but also for their future generations. Thus, one thinks of the family happiness and progress of the children of the helpers.

- All relationships should be cultivated thus that they continue for generations. This used to be the tradition in the older societies of Asia but seems to have ceased for the most part.

- All "correcting", by the guides is based following the principles of *hitam, mitam*, and *priyam*. This is one's own sādhanā and is a help in the helper's sādhanā of self-improvement in dharma and artha.

- The leaders/guides thus not only remain conscious but try to keep finding ways and resources to help the progress of helper's family and children.

- Thus, kindliness, self-observation and self-control on the part of the guides/leaders ensure the over-all controlled discipline in the organizational family.

- No communication is undertaken to impress on the "lower rank helper" as to "I am the boss here". Instead, "we are all together, trying to progress together and thereby helping the family's progress".

- Whenever one's self-observation tells us that the recent communication contained elements of showing "position", one corrects oneself spiritually to reduce one's pride.

- The thought of the sādhaka guides/leaders is not "what is the minimum I can pay" but "what is the maximum within my capacity to pay" because any work has no price and it has infinite value.

- The amount "paid" for the same work and capabilities may vary according to receiver's need and giver's capacity.

- All work being given by the helper is selfless service, *sevā*; all help being given by the family guides is selfless *dāna*. There is no principle of equivalence between the two in spiritual economics.

- One does not "fire" anyone; one changes their positions and spheres of service within the family, and it must be done while giving reassurances of love, continued relationship in a different format and with utmost honor conferred on one whose relationship is being changed.

- When a person's position is thus changed, we always need to be very deeply and personally concerned about his/her further progress, especially the spiritual progress. No one should be let go without a discussion and advice on further spiritual progress. Once we are in a relationship, it is not terminate with termination of a "salary" and such; the personal spiritual connection within the family remains deep and eternal.

- One does not make decisions and impose them just because one has the authority to do so. The leader, head of a department or of the family is *primus inter pares*, first among equals. Thus she/he only informs, consults widely and lets the decision come from the consensus among the "others".

- A sādhaka manager humbly consults the "juniors" and listens to them.

- A sādhaka manager invites critique and considers and weighs deeply all points offered in the critique.

- A sādhaka manager does not impose his opinion; she/he only presents his/her views and information and lets the decision come by consensus so that all think it was their decision.

- As in life, so in the organizational family and in the ashram, whatever will be forcibly taken away from you, renounce it beforehand from your own volition.

- Here are some more additional points for personal spiritual practice.

- In all matters, see what excites, what agitates, and avoid that. For example, red is not a good color for communication in writing.

- Avoid that which creates wrinkles in others' foreheads, and in your forehead. The moment one observes wrinkle developing, a negative shadow passing over some-

one's face as one communicated, remedial action should be taken by changing one's emotion and state of mind, and thereby the tone of one's voice, gesture, body-language till the wrinkles disappear.

- Remember that wrinkles on the forehead are signs of wrinkles in the mind, the lines of your forehead are the script in which the history of one's emotions is inscribed.

- It is needed to keep one's mind unwrinkled and thereby unwrinkled the minds of those who are in your presence. It is beneficial to do *saumyā mantra* (Gopālāchārlu 1934) often to pacify yourself and pacify others: "*Saumyaa saumya-taraacehSha-saumyebhyas tvati-sundaree paraaparaaNaam paramaa tvam eva parameshvaree.*"

- Swami Rama in his form as Madhusudan Saraswati (2000) has written in his commentary on *Bhagavad Gītā*: "*Vaktur evaayam doSho yad asyaabhipraayam shrotaa na budhyati*" – "*It is but the speaker's flaw that the listener has not understood his intent.*"

- One of the words for compassion and empathy is *anu-kampaa*. Trembling with, vibrating with (someone). As the musician on a string instrument like sitar plays on the main strings, the sympathetic strings vibrate and tremble. This is the secret of sympathetic and empathic listening and communicating.

- When you note something in someone that is disagreeable to you, even in management and administration, through *anu-kampa* place your mind and heart in the place in his/her mind where she/he is coming from. That person's society, culture, personal background, and how his/her psychology was/is formed. It is in this context that you first address his/her concerns and not condemn. Then explain your reasons, in

a clam and loving voice, for the action you wish to take.

- A self-observant sādhaka will notice that quite often in a conversation or discussion even very minor wrinkles in the mind, emotion, vice and tone, and on face and in body language of the other party are picked up by ourselves and we also develop the same wrinkles, similar tones and responses. This, in modern neurology is an act of "mirror neurons". What others do, we begin to do. When one laughs others laugh. When one yawns, others yawn.

- Results of the self-experimentations in this regard are confirmed scientifically (Chrysikou 2012). A question "is a bad mood contagious?" was answered by Gary W. Lewandoski (2014). We can paraphrase: Scientists call this phenomenon emotional contagion, a three-step process through which one person's feelings transfer to another person. The first stage involves nonconscious mimicry, during which individuals subtly copy one another's nonverbal cues, including posture, facial expressions and movements. In effect, seeing my frown makes you more likely to frown. People may then experience a feedback stage – because you frowned, you now feel sad. During the final contagion stage, individuals share their experiences until their emotions and behaviors become synchronized.

- In the described self-experiments, there is a great difference between mimicry and empathy. I choose my feeling and emotion independently, and not as an act of my mirror-neurons. Any good meditator can learn to do that. These facts of life have been taught by the ancients for thousands of years, and being forgotten in the last century or two of our false ideas of "development", "advancement" and "success". So, I quote modern science just to convince the

people who would not otherwise accept the ancient wisdom, the same reason that I maintain a research laboratory in our Ashram. We are seekers of *svaatantrya*. This word has no exact English equivalent. It may roughly be translated as free volition and conscience coming from the laws and voice of one's own *ātman*, the spiritual self (not psychological conditionings nor as reactions to and from other factors external to us). This is the true meaning of freedom. This is the true non-dependence, independence, not arising as a reaction to external surroundings, situations or others' reactions. We are not reactive but independently active. So, as soon as others' emotional states begin to reflect into us, we dive into our inner resources of relaxation and tranquility and thereby change the tone of the conversation and discussion. The opposite

party's 'mirror neurons' then reflect our state of mind and we both become peaceful and not confrontational. Thus, we arrive at harmonious consensus with others and spread peace.

- Solve the problem the other person has with you.

- In all disagreements, first argue in your mind in a direction opposite to your view and in favor of the opposite person's view. Present to your colleagues or participants in a meeting these two ends of the magnet: your justifications for the other person's view and your own view. Then reconcile the two points of view and create a harmonious conclusion including the best elements of both.

- Do not challenge or condemn a view, situation, act, decision without presenting

a well-constructed alternative that also incorporates the positive points of what you have disagreed with.

- Hold nothing in your mind against anyone. The moment one issue is completed (such as one interview or a session of "correcting" someone), let your mind go into "neutral" with a few breaths, remember the good qualities of that person, and then move on to the next positive step – about that person or about whatever needs to engage you.

- Remember that you are not running management or administration. You are practicing sādhanā of self-pacification, self-purification, and finally self-perfection. The acts of "management" and "administration" are steps on that spiritual path; these are your self-tests.

4 Saintly CEO

One should take constant pains to explain to all in the spiritual family the principles by which the family is being run and the habitual thinking brought from the outside world must be slowly changed by communication and sharing of these and such principles.

These principles may not be possible to practice in the modern government structures or the habitual norms of the corporate world but they can be maintained as one's internal principles, and be implemented in an organizational family of sādhakas where every breath taken and every word spoken is part of sādhanā. The principles that are habitual in the "outside" world, and experiences gained from them, do not apply in such a family.

There are three principles of communication – *hitam*, that is to speak only what is beneficial, and only in a manner that would be beneficial to the listener to the purpose and mission of the speaker; *mitam*, that is measurement in intensity of emotion, tone of voice, and choice of words; *priyam*, that is pleasant in the sense to create pleasant-mindedness in yourself and in the listener(s).

A new category of "saintly CEO", following the above-mentioned principles, is to be promoted in spiritually oriented organizations. Dissentions are generated not as often by differences on policies but more often by modes of communication and tones used. People act, communicate and write habitually by the mode that is common worldwide. They think that is "normal" because they have been presented with no other model. Not having been raised in the current civilization, it may be useful to present a different model, not from Mars, but from Venus.

5 Communication in Administration

The three principles of communication can be applied in administration as follows.

Be gentle in disagreements. Make the unpleasant pleasant first, and only then communicate. Round off the sharp corners, circle the word-squares, change tones to tunes. Sharpen love, blunt the sharpness's. Evoke a YES response.

Let others FEEL that they are leading and you are merely suggesting; that is the way you naturally and easefully receive the honor of being a leader. Lead without leading; command without commanding. Wield authority without authority, which nobody detects that authority was wielded.

In 42 years of the existence of our Meditation Centre no one was fired. People were only relocated after examining the best way they would progress spiritually and would serve our spiritual family better. The same principles are applied in the Rishikesh SRSG Ashram.

It is revealing to check how many paragraphs in our communications are beginning with the pronoun "I". Reduce the incidence of "I". Try to avoid ordering and commanding by a tone like, "do it this way". It is preferable to use, "let us do it this way", "what if we did it this way, what would be the difficulties from your point of view?"

It is also beneficial to avoid expressions like, "this is all wrong". Instead prefer "for such and such reason (give background story if it is not confidential) it would be better if we did it this way instead". Avoid generating the moods like, "why didn't you do it on time?". Prefer, "I am wondering what difficulties caused you not be able to finish this on time? You see, not getting it done could cause such and such harm and discomfort."

6 Notes on "Honest Communication"

In the entire history of the teachings of philosophy and psychology the philosophers have admonished fellow human beings to conquer base emotions and seek to develop a personal self to be as close to the divine attributes as possible. Certain contemporary dominant schools of psychology in the West, especially in USA, are an exception. They seek to justify human weaknesses, blocking human progress in refinement by teaching phrases like: this is the way I am; you have to accept me as

I am (that is, I am not going to refine myself and I feel no need to do so). Justifying anger, harsh words and encouraging confrontational – rather than consensual – behavior.

One of the buzzwords is "honest communication". Hurt others with the belief that it will save you from being hurt. Look somebody hard in the eye and say a loud NO. I, however, come from the school of YES-men (Taoist, Upanishadic) that says: the best defense is non-defense. In such cases, hardly anyone says NO to one who communicates in such style.

The philosophy of making a fast draw, sending in the marines – oops, that is old now – sending in the cruise missiles at everyone you have a disagreement with does not fit into any spiritual ideal. The ideal of sensitive communication is diametrically opposite to the above confrontational view. The sensitive communication, saving the other party's honor and yet having one's position understood is the common way of many cultures even today.

Here an example of a conversation in Asia is given. At a hotel, one speaks to the reception office manager who is from another Asian country: "I am coming back to the hotel in a few days; may I pay all my bills at the end of the second stay, or should I settle the bill for this stay now?"

Manager's reply: "Yes, you may choose to pay now or you may choose to pay when you come back. Well, for us it would be easier if we can keep the bill for the next visit separate."

Having been brought up in the culture of "sensitive communication" rather than so-called "honest communication", one can understand that she prefers one to pay now, and one can do so.

A very common form of communication in Asia and Africa (Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim) goes like this: "You do not have any vegetables available today?"
Answer: "Yes, Sir."
Note that the answer is not "No, Sir".
OR: "May we hold a meeting at your home?"
Answer: "My wife is away but it would be a great pleasure for me to try to arrange the meeting at home."

The listener brought up in the culture of "sensitive communication" understands that the other person is asking to be relieved of the burden of organizing a meeting at his home in his wife's absence. Next day, you call him and tell him – so grateful for your kind offer to host us, you are always so generous. For this time, another member has asked to be given a chance. We hope it would be alright with you if we accept.

Everybody's honor is kept in this way. But it requires humility and the ability to hear the unspoken word. The Master yogis train their disciples into much subtler levels of "sensitive hearing". Such communication is possible only in societies that do believe in non-violence at least to the extent they are able to practice it. It requires a sensitivity of the soul and the heart to communicate in this way.

Speaking of many cultures, here are some examples. The Thai culture is lovable as "anger" is considered bad manners. In the Japanese culture, everyone apologizes repeatedly all the time.

There is enough confrontation among nations, religions, communities – all part of "honest communication", the main cause of the failures of diplomacy of many countries, because often there is failure in working with the people where "sensitive communication" is the norm. Those brought up in these aggressive and arrogant societies do not know how much they show what is perceived by others as disrespect, insensitivity and an attempt to dishonor, or to obtain results by "barking orders". But it is not just one country; we find the same phenomenon in many other lands and communities (to my great disappointment, more and more in India now). Some countries stand out because of their uncontrollable show-off of power.

We wish to oppose nuclear weapons but we pour into the collective mind of the planet the confrontational thoughts and words. We choose to consider the universe an adversary instead of ourselves as partners thereof.

Be not an adversary. One thing I have said often: If you have a problem with someone, solve the problem she/he has with you. Do not demand rights, do loving duties selflessly.

Many have the habit of seeing conflict where there is no conflict; seeing the possibility of a conflict when no such possibility exists. However, *samaadadhati sajjanaah*, the noble ones create a "resolving".

When seeing a conflict among several parties, remain neutral and equally balanced. Do not become emotionally reactive in favor of one or the other. Then find even the least little common ground between/among them and start there. In talking each party let each one feel equal warmth, unconditional love and understanding from you.

"Sensitive communication" is a very fine art, rooted in deep spiritual philosophies. It cannot be learnt in a day. But please make start not by trying to write another chapter in the textbook of the theory of communication. This is not part of the theory of communication but of the principle of non-violence,

non-anger, non-hurtfulness, humility, rejoicing at every opportunity one has to make oneself small.

7   Signs of Spiritual Progress

One of the marks of spiritual progress is as follows: Less problems arise in daily life. If some problems do arise, they fail to create *viShaada*, "sadness", "depression", and *kShobha*, "anguish" in one's mind, as a result of which, in a clearer, undisturbed mind, solutions arise and show shortcuts to one's goals. If you are facing problems, figure out where your spiritual progress is lacking.

The other extremely important part in our sādhanā is the reverence towards women. Our tradition is different from ritual Hinduism and from other religions' taboos in these matters.

According to the *Law Book of Manu* (Manu, verse 200), the first law-giver in the Indian tradition, all parts and aspects of a woman's body and being are pure and sacred at all times.

One of the rules of japa observances in the yogic tradition is: For those seeking liberation and for women there is no time restriction; they may do the practice at any time.

It is believed that prayers offered by women are heard more readily. Women are considered incarnations of Mother Kundalini Shakti. As we are followers of the right-hand Tantra path, reverence towards women is most important. One or twice a year on days sacred to Divine Mother I wash the feet of nine "under-age" forms of Maatri Shakti, nine *kanyaa devees*, and worship them. The tantric rule is that a man should appear in the presence of a woman, any woman, well-kempt, well-dressed, good-mannered. Also, that if a man is passing a group of women standing somewhere or casually chatting, he must pay them mental reverence as he is passing by.

In the *Ramayana* (Tulasidas 1650, Shastri 1962) it is written: Younger brother Lakshmana is sent by Rama to the cave of Sugreeva to arouse him from his slumber and do his promised duty. Lakshmana arrives at the entrance to the cave palace. The message is brought to Sugreeva that wrathful Lalkshmana is at the entrance. Sugreeva asks his wife to go forward and receive Lakshmana and when he calms down, Sugreeva will welcome him: *You go, Tara, because the noble ones do nothing harsh in the presence of women*.

8   If Faced with a Conflict of Choices Between Two Opposites, Have Both – You Will Become a Bi-Polar Magnet

Simply put, as in the Hindi proverb, *"have dono haathon me laddoo" – "sweet balls in both hands"*. The statement as the title of this writing has a sound philosophical basis and practical applications thereof. The truth of the matter is: there are no conflicting or contradictory forces in the universe. All is complementary.

When one would go to swami Rama with a question like: "Maharaji, should I do such and such this way or that other way?" He would look at one and reply in a deep voice coming from the heart, "Yeeesss". That was often his only answer. One had to contemplate deeply and resolve the apparent contradictions between the two choices and arrive at an answer in which the positive elements of both choices would be included. That is how you have it both ways.

Yoga Masters (Masters, not those who are declared to be masters by PR companies) often present the disciples with contradictory choices in daily and practical life and the disciple has to develop the spiritual skill to resolve the apparent contradictions, and reach *samādhāna*, a resolving, bringing together the apparent conflicting factors and parts, and thereby arrive at a holistic reality.

This means:

- to find the positive concealed in the negative;

- to free the mind of the habit of being in conflict, by learning to resolve the conflicts;

- to de-condition the mind of its conditioning, to lift it from habit patterns, to free it from running in set grooves, and thereby;

- to develop fresh insights of positive nature into relationships, communication and events as well as philosophical realities and truths;

- to liberate the mind and consciousness above what Vedanta calls *upādhis*, conditioning produced by our involvement in *māyā*.

This device is only a small part of age old systems of wise sages. The riddles in the Vedas, *ulat-baansiyaan* of Kabir, all such, are part of the same liberating systems. So also, is the vast repertoire of *kōans*, in Japanese pronunciation of Chinese *gong-an* (*pin-yin*) 公案 as taught in the Chinese *Ch'an* school, Japanese *Zen,* Korean *Son*, Vietnamese *Thien*, (derived from Pali *jhāna*, which is derived from Sanskrit *dhyāna*) schools of meditation, especially in the Soto and Rinzai Zen. A *kōan* forces one to come out of set grooves, mental habituations and dichotomous conditionings. For example, the well known kōan: *"What is the sound of one hand clapping?"*

The master forces the disciple not only to study the answers given by previous masters but to find his/her own answer in all-absorbing meditations.

The system is based, among others, on the principle that between two opposites there is a third option lurking, much like the way Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's thesis and antithesis produce a synthesis.

If you cannot decide in which of two companies you should invest your funds, take the best qualities of both and invest in a company that has those combined qualities. This is just a simplified answer. There are CEOs among the disciples of the author, who have followed such advice in making their business decisions and have succeeded.

9 How to Proceed?

How is one to succeed in practicing the principles suggested here?

1. Keep *daily meditation*. It will grant you insights and will verify the factualness of what is presented in these pages.

2. Keep your *forehead relaxed* in all situations, even when running from a fire or ire.

3. Every 2 or 3 hours, do 2 or 3 minutes of *breath-awareness with mantra* (even with eyes open when in a meeting where closing the eyes will be inappropriate) whether sitting, standing or wherever. Do keep doing it. It will change your temperament.

4. *Self-observation*. Observing, taking note, every time one has not quite managed to remain true to the principles (Was there a touch of unnecessary harshness in my tone of spoken/written word? Did I neglect the principle of non-anger, humility? Did I show off authority?)

5. *Sankalpa*. Resolve to do better next time. Not guilt, not self-condemnation, not "giving-up-on-oneself". Just renewed sankalpa.

6. Select one principle you find the easiest to practice, and one principle you find most difficult to practice as totally against your habitual temperament. Start practicing.

7. Devise your own methods to apply these principles.

8. Note your successes in these practices mentally; let the moments of those successes be remembered and serve as inspiration for the future. These successes will show their benefits to you.

9. Do not let these successes become source of pride in you (how much I have advanced, or how humble I am). Let them only inspire you for the future continuity of their applications.

10. When you have changed your temperament, move on to other principles; those will now become much easier.

10 The Example of Two Festivals

Of the many religions indigenous to India, three stand out as the most ancient: Vedic-Hindu, Buddhism, and Jaina. Of these the Jaina religion in the epitome of *ahiṃsā*, "non-violence" at all levels. It is the most pious and most ascetic. Its monks are still today masters of ascetic life. The religion was established a succession of twenty-four founding Masters, *tirthan-karas* (fjord-makers) dating back to lost periods of antiquity. The monks of all three of the above religions wander and then take a period of sojourn at one place during the four months of the monsoons; it is called *chaaturmaasya*, "four months". This is a time for contemplation, meditation, deep study and other observances. This is also the time when they take new initiates.

For Jaina religion, the start of this period is celebrated with great devotion by the laity. It is called *paryuṣaṇa*, "fasting". It is eight days of fasting, sacred readings, select recitations, listening to the monks and so forth. Ninth day is the day of seeking forgiveness. *Kshamaapana* or *kshamaavani* (these are other variations in various state languages of India). It occurs on 4th day of waxing moon in Bhadrapada month, approximately August/September. On this day, everyone grants forgiveness and asks for forgiveness. This includes renunciation of condemnation, judgment of others, irritation, anger. The word *kṣama* is derived from Sanskrit verb root *kṣam*. The verb root means to have capacity, to be capacious. This requires the ability to absorb and dissolve all assaults. The word *kṣama* is one of 21 names of earth in the Vedas. It means for one to be as forgiving, as all-absorbing, as the earth that withstands and forgives all out trampling and digging into.

Here one may quote an oft-quoted Sanskrit proverb: *"kShamaa veerasya bhooShanam"* – *"forgiveness is the adornment of the brave".*

This concept is re-enforced in other human experiences such as:

- in India, Holi festival celebrated as the day of forgiving the year's aggressions and transgressions;

- in Thailand's culture every child is taught that anger is bad manners and the adults follow that in daily practical life and interpersonal relations;

- in Africa, in the training and initiation of spiritual guides in traditional African religions it is essential for the guide to conquer anger – as per my personal investigations;

- There are many such examples in world cultures that we all need to emulate.

The other festival to which should be payed attention is the Nyepi Day of Bali. It is celebrated as the last day of the year in a 210-day year according to the sacred and complex Balinese calendar known as *Isaawarsa* (Indian *Saka era* starting 78 AD). In 2012 it occurred on 23rd March. It is a day of silence, there is no traffic on the streets. The Ngurah Rai international airport of Den Pasar, the capital, is closed for the twenty-four hours. No fires may be lit and the lights must be kept dim. There is no self-entertainment, only contemplation and silence. Most people fast for the day. The *dharma-shanti*, peace of dharma, rituals are performed in the form of listening to scriptures in *kakawin* (classical Sanskrit-related ancient language of the religion) and other contemplative or ritual observances. Next day is celebrated as the first day of the year when people visit each other and grant and beg for forgiveness.

11 Emotions and Ethics – a Yoga Therapy

Historically, in all systems of the Sino-Euro-Indian traditions, as also in the theologies of the three Abrahamic religions, principles of human conduct are universally viewed as emanating from and rooted in metaphysics. From the Vedas to the recent Acharya's, the Buddhist and Jaina and other guides of India, K'ung-Fu-Tzu and Lao Tzu in China, all teachers and saints of the three Semitic faiths, European philosophers from Pythagoras and Thales to Immanuel Kant have all reiterated the same view and have examined the interdependence between the spiritual and the ethical, the way of devotion and the way of conduct. They have all taught the principles of altruism, selfless conduct, and cultivating sublime emotions.

Yoga teaching of *yamas* and *niyamas* falls within the same unified system of metaphysical ethics. In this, according to sage Vyasa's commentary on the Yoga-sutras, *ahiṃsā*, "nonviolence", is the primary *yama-niyama*. The other nine are rooted in it, arise from it and are practiced to support the same. Thus, the violent emotions are seen as part of the *kleśas*, "afflictions", to be purified and burnt. However, in common thinking emotions (*bhāvas*) and sentiments (*vi-bhāvas*) are not viewed as coming within the realm of ethics, the principles of conduct. Neither the essay on anger by the Roman Stoic philosopher Lucio Anneo Seneca, nor the 6th chapter of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* of Shantideva have much meaning in this view.

In European philosophy, the view of metaphysically based ethics remained as fundamental until about a century and half ago. There were many factors that led to the change of views as we can see in the examples below:

- Survival of the fittest as part of the process of evolution (Charles Darwin).

- Sexuality as the primary guiding urge of human personality (Sigmund Freud).

- Utilitarianism to justify capitalism-imperialism (John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham).

- Economics as the primary factor in the development of civilization (Karl Marx as well as the western philosophers of capitalism).

They all created a trend that rejected the philosophies of altruism, the purity of thought and the sanctity in emotions. Self-centeredness and individualism became the philosophy of life for the urban-industrial civilization worldwide. The principles of counselling underwent a change. The principles of *dharma* and *nish-kāma karma*, of *ariyo atthangiko maggo* ("the eightfold noble truth" of the Buddha) became irrelevant. In the practice of American psychology and counselling, "I am I", "you are you", and "permission to be angry" became common stock phrases. Instead of being counselled to undertake confession, *pashchaat-taapa*, "penitence", and *praayash-chitta*, "atonement", many patients have been taught to express hostility, instead of replacing it with self-calming internal devices of more ethical-transcendental nature.

Since there was no need to calm one's negative attitudes, to practice equanimity, to divert the power of anger towards creativity in love, the entire humanity involved in the urban-industrial civilization became prone to a tendency towards an inadvertent self-destruction, a slow suicide. The level of stress rose, the discharge of stress hormones into the neuro-physiological systems reduced the strength of the immune system, weakening the resistance to disease.

A calm mind induces the brain to produce endorphins to cope with challenges from "adversaries" without becoming overtly negative towards them. An angry and disturbed mind reduces the same sources of self-soothing. Infectious diseases, terminated through very welcome modern discoveries, thus gave way to more and more psychosomatic and auto-immune illnesses. Those investigating the cardiac problems now know that much of the cardiac illness is a product of wrong diet. But wrong diet itself is caused by the destructive emotions of greed, lack of a feeling of fulfilment and general inner satisfaction, an inner emptiness and loneliness that one tries to fill not by fulfilling the mind but by overfilling the stomach.

Combined with these inaccurately chosen emotional states, the general angers about life and people, the self-centeredness leading to individualism to loneliness and thus, produce heart ailments.

Further, it is not often recognized that during an episode of *angina pectoris* and heart attack, half is the actual physical condition but the other half is the anxiety factor. "I am having a heart attack", "I am going to die", such fears and anxieties double the strength of a heart attack. Thus, the strength of a heart attack could be reduced by half if the population were trained to calm their anxiety levels by self-monitoring (*aatmaavalokana*) and self-regulation, self-calming, which is the forte of yoga.

Nowadays some practitioners of yoga therapy think only in terms of physical postures, breathing exercises and such. Such postures and breathing exercises are often prescribed like medicines: this posture for this ailment, three times a day.

The true therapy is in *yama-niyama* practices, and in oft ignored system of *chitta-pra-saadana* (*Yoga Sūtra* 1: 33), re-training the mind and emotions so that the mind becomes a pleasant, clear and stable place.

The directions that a society or a system takes with a particular end-goal in mind, science, replaced emotional purification with "survival of the fittest", aggression, training to "NO". Now the same science discovers that the "angry" are more heart-attacked, co-operative communities with altruism have longer life span, than that meditation produces endorphins and holistic behavior, less hostile and aggressive. Thus, the new equation is objective study of symptoms of subjective states or self-preservation shows that it is better attained by not being so self-preserving, employing scientific altruism, merged with meditation together with the reunion of metaphysics and ethics can be called the preventive therapy (Keel *et al*. 2005).

Often a society sets certain goals for itself and starts on its journey but at the end finds itself entirely somewhere else. The modern science stands to support the values that have been established in the urban-industrial civilization – many of those values being destructive of human personality (while many others have been highly beneficial). While the psychologists and sociologists have been extolling the virtues of individualism, there come other findings in sociology and neurology.

Many of these findings support the "old" values. For example, one may have some hidden volitional force available within oneself whereby one may delay the onset of a heart attack. A statistically significant number of heart attacks occur on Monday mornings. One explanation for this is that one did not want to spoil everybody's weekend and waited.

We may have greater control over the timing of our deaths, postponing the same until a wedding, a festival, the birth of a grandchild, or whatever, has passed.

It is now known that the people in those communities are found to live longer on the average where people's attitude is of trust towards other members of the community, and a shorter life span is seen where people have an attitude of hostility or suspicion.

It is also an established fact now that those with a highly angry temperament and attitudes of hostility suffer more frequent and more severe heart attacks than others.

The correlation of eating disorders and anxiety disorders is being fully emphasized in the scientific literature of today.

The role of stress producing hormones (better to say it more scientifically, the hormones that are correlates of the presence of stressful feelings), and of the endorphins in relaxation response and other meditative states, need not be elaborated here.

The good, nonviolent thoughts, the sentiments of amity, produce endorphins (as seen in the researches on Mindfulness meditations). These together reduce the anxiety and stress level, and cut the frequency and severity of cardiac or auto-immune disorders. These, the new findings in endocrinology, neurology and in other sciences, bring us full circle to reject the "struggle for survival", "survival of the fittest" model and reinstate the "survival of the amicable and the loving" model (Grewal 2012).

Altruistic sentiments, the teachings of the *brahmavihārās* (*maitrī–mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekṣā*), as in *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali (1: 33), though originally taught as principles of spiritual ethics, are now seen also as sources of health.

The use of "now" in the last sentence needs to be challenged. The one quarter of *Charaka Saṃhitā* espouses the same philosophy. The *adhis*, "mental diseases" like anger and greed, etc., produce *vy-adhis* (grammatically, variations of *adhis*). Non-anger, therefore, is not only an injunction in spiritual ethics but the present day scientific findings, supporting the

ancient *Charaka Saṃhitā*, show it to be the source of health and longevity. This, the core of yoga therapy, is in the practice of *chitta-pra-sadanam*, making the mind a clear and pleasant place through the observance of the *brahmavihārās* listed above. Not just *āsana*s and *prāṇāyāma*s but the *yama-niyama*s centred in *ahiṃsā* are the true therapy.

They produce endorphins to help reduce our levels of hostility, cultivate amity (meditations of loving kindness and compassion), which in turn generate the same endorphins, slow down our breaths (producing *dirgha-sukshma* state of breath without an effort) so that facilitate expending less number of breaths, and because our life-span (*ayur-daaya*) is measured in the number of breaths, grants us a longer life span, *ayuh*, the first wish of every living being.

This is the ethics of emotions as yoga therapy (Veda Bharati 2010). Perhaps there should be a conference simply on *bhaa-va-sam-shuddhi*, "purification of sentiments" (*Bhagavad Gītā* 17: 16) as the first principle of yoga therapy. May the present pursuits help and guide the seekers to that *saumanasyam* (beautiful-mindedness) and *saam-manasyam* (harmonious-mindedness), which is both the true source as well as the state of health.

12 The Means of Liberating Oneself and Others

It is important to constantly experiment with *Upāya Kaushala Pāramitā*, one of the ten perfections required of an aspiring-to-be Bodhisattva. The perfection in the means and methods for liberating oneself and others. Some of the conclusions are: There is no difference between teaching on one hand and running a family or organization or any relationships or communications even "business" communications on the other. The latter becomes a part of the teaching. This must always reflect the level of realizations one has arrived at with regard to the principles of *ahiṃsā, maitrī*, and so forth.

On the basis of that the author began the difficult task of de-conditioning oneself. This required sifting through all "formative impressions", *saṃskāras*, gathered from the day I can remember myself. De-value and discard those that were not conducive only to the perennial goals, and to the principles like ahiṃsā and maitrī and so forth. Thus, in inter-relationships within the organizational family, fully aware of each participant's shortcomings – as they (just like the author) have not yet reached perfection – one must use the best of each person's qualities, as far as they have reached the desired steps on the path to perfection; not keep looking at

their shortcomings; continue to "make use" of their strengths and valuing and appreciating the services they CAN perform; not judging them negatively; waiting for them to perfect themselves in the areas that still need improvement, and patiently wait, wait, wait, even into many future incarnations as my Master has so patiently waited on my perfection (not yet achieved, alas) for so many incarnations; keeping on trying to design and redesign the organizational family to help achieve these goals, and one must (we also must) continue the self-experiments in *Upāya Kaushala Pāramitā*.

13 Sādhanā

The *sādhanā* suggested in the previous sections cannot be accomplished without deep inner peace and tranquility. For this tranquility to be maintained and further deepened, and made our permanent nature, continued meditations, contemplations and *japa* practices are essential. All this also requires *sankalpa-bala* or *sankalpa-shakti*, power and intensity of resolve.

Before going on further with this, a few necessary hints:

- Before meditation, take a shower (at least for one main meditation of the day) and wear clean and loose clothes.
- The surroundings of your meditation seat should be neatly and beautifully arranged.
- The asana that you sit on should be unrumpled, neatly folded, unwrinkled, clean.
- You may burn some incense if you prefer. Light a candle or a "deepak" if you prefer.

Surrender all your spiritual practices, and expectations therefrom, to the divine guru spirit and the guru(s) of the Lineage.

For developing and strengthening *sankalpa-bala*, one can suggest two levels of mantras, six mantras of *shiva-sankalpa* hymn. The results of the japa of this hymn are mind's pacification, *samādhi* of the mind (*samprajñāta samādhi*), and highest *samādhi*.

It is advisable to memorize these six mantras, or at least the first one of the six. Study, understand, contemplate their inner meanings. If even one mantra is too long, just recite many times: "*tan me manah shiva-sankalpam astu*" – "*may that mind of mine be filled with shiva-sankalpa*". This japa with contemplation is for developing general *sankalpa-shakti*.

In the Himalayan tradition, besides mantras, there are *mahāvākyas*, "Great Sentences". These are short and succinct

sentences even without a syntax structure. They are for contemplation and absorption. One of the highest *mahāvākyas* is *"om kham brahma"*.

Instead of dwelling on your daily mental occupations and conflicts, contemplate this mahāvākya day and night in addition to your mantra. It is not for repeated recitation like a mantra. It is for cultivating your own contemplative inquiry and internal discussion of personally applied spirituality.

Deepen your practice of silence. Even half a day in the week, for total silence. Some days in the month. Undertake silence retreats by going away to a place of solitude and follow the guidelines we have about systematic silence. Undertake the same in a spiritual institution like the SRSG from time to time. Organize silence retreats with other members of your center or other like-minded friends. If care of children can be managed, husbands and wives may undertake such retreats together.

14 Conclusions

The paper suggests that the ancient tradition of kind communication creates a better interpersonal and institutional communication culture than any other one. Ancient oriental examples and described institutional experience has shown the adaptability of such communication policy to any professional environment or to families. The described communication style however needs personal development strategies on the part of the managers, employees, workers, volunteers or family members. The paper therefore describes a way, how to make communication a sadhana. It may lead to *jeevan-muktir asminn evaayuShi – "'living liberated' (enlightenment) in this very life time".*

Acknowledgement

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Míla Tomášová

How Noble the Lord's Prayer is

RNDr. Míla Tomášová (1920–2001) was a Czech mystic and spiritual writer. In the book of essays and spiritual stories *Beyond Time and Space* the author portrays her spiritual experiences, experienced since her childhood, which gradually resulted into a permanent experience of Unity – God in everything. She worked professionally in the field of microbiology. After the fall of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1989 she started to act publicly together with her husband JUDr. Eduard Tomáš. At the end of her life she wrote several spiritual books, either individually or together with her husband.

Our Father, I am calling you with all my heart, with all my being, in the deepest meekness, in the deepest silence of my heart, in the deepest stillness of my mind's reflections and images.

You, who are in heaven, where no human reflection and agitation exists, I am calling you to hallow your name in our consciousness.

You, who are nameless, all names are yours, since all is created only by You, and so every name and every form is Yours, being nothing but Your name.

Only in our consciousness, seemingly separated and so darkened by our ignorance, we learned to discern Your creation as something separate from You and to consider Your eternal calm to be Your heaven, where we placed You in our imagination.

Since we ourselves, by our own will, have seemingly separated from You and also from Your creation, to which we belong, we have distanced ourselves from You. And now I am calling You, our Father – not mine, but ours – the Essence and Primal Cause of everything, let me – and us – realize that we are one with You.

Hallowed be Your name, so that we recognize that it is You.

Your kingdom come, so that the Divine consciousness dissolves the delusion of separation of our individual consciousness from You. In full surrender of myself, in deepest meekness, with all my being, I yield to Your holy will, so that the Consciousness, which is not separate from You and Your creation, is as in heaven, so on Earth.

Nurture our entire life with Your revealed holy presence as with your bread, and forgive us our trespasses of ignorance, since we too forgive our neighbors both their ignorance and our ignorance in them. And do not lead us into the temptation of a new separation from You, but deliver us from the evil of oblivion.

Amen.

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At the same time, the journal provides a forum for sharing personal spiritual experience of spiritual practitioners of various backgrounds elaborated in a form of a scholarly article, essay or poetry. By combining both academic and experiential aspects of spirituality Spirituality Studies aims at providing an original and exceptional multidisciplinary and multidimensional platform for constructive dialogue between a variety of viewpoints, approaches, and methodologies in the study of spirituality.

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