



# SPIRITUALITY STUDIES

Volume 5 / Issue 2  
FALL 2019

*Phra  
Bodhiñāna  
Thera*

*Ajahn  
Chah*





## Donate

Spirituality Studies' mission is to deliver the top quality of studies, articles, educational materials and information related to spirituality in its multiple forms. At the same time, the journal provides a forum for sharing personal spiritual experience. By combining both academic and experiential approaches to spirituality the Spirituality Studies aims at providing a unique platform for dialogue between a variety of viewpoints, approaches and methodologies in the study of spirituality.

There are no submission or publishing charges for authors. However, please consider donating to support continual publishing of Spirituality Studies as an open access journal for free. Your donation will be used for financing running the journal.

## Issue content

Editorial 1  
*Martin Dojčár*

**An Interview with Ajahn Jotipālo: Meditation Leads to Experiential Understanding That What We Think of As Ourselves is Actually Stressful, Unstable & not Really Ourselves** 2  
*Martin Dojčár*

**“Ethics of Three Persons” and Transcendence** 12  
*Andrej Rajský*

**The Influence of Emotions on Spiritual Life in the Discernment of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint John of the Cross** 24  
*Radovan Šoltés*

**Cognitive Science and Spirituality** 36  
*Michal Kutáš*

**Islamic Reproductive Bioethics Knowledge Among University Students in the Czech Republic** 44  
*Monika Závíř*

**The Way of Heavenly Knight** 54  
*Petr Pavlík*

**Ignorance** 78  
*Sandó Kaisen*

### Spirituality Studies 5-2 Fall 2019

Publisher: The Society for Spirituality Studies  
Published in partnership with Monastic Interreligious Dialogue  
and European Union of Yoga  
Available online: [www.spirituality-studies.org](http://www.spirituality-studies.org)  
Editor-in-Chief: Doc. Dr. Martin Dojčár PhD.  
Graphic Design: Martin Hynek  
Contact: [editor@spirituality-studies.org](mailto:editor@spirituality-studies.org)  
ISSN 1339-9578

## Editorial

There is only one function that characterizes consciousness – reflecting or mirroring as Māhāyana sūtras typically describe it. Consciousness reflects what is as it is. It does so both in regard to what appears as an object in an intentional act, as well as regarding the very condition of every intentional act – the consciousness itself or non-intentional consciousness.

However, the mirroring function of consciousness is limited as far as it is reduced to “ordinary” human consciousness, which we usually experience as dim and impermanent. That is why numerous methods and tools have been developed throughout the history aiming at “purification” of consciousness – restoration of its authentic function that, at the same time, refers to authenticity of human being as such: one is fully authentic only when “his” or “her” consciousness functions in the above mentioned sense as the Latin notion of *aut-ens* suggests – distinguished (Lat. *aut*) from beings (Lat. *ens*).

2019 Fall edition of Spirituality Studies thematizes a few of these methods and tools – such as ethics and moral education, discernment of spirits in Christian spirituality, or objectless contemplation in Zen Buddhism – elaborated in their specific contexts with regard to the specific objectives of the particular research studies, articles and essays. All together they provide a reader with a multidisciplinary look at the vast landscape of spirituality in its multiple forms and expressions.

Neither aspects of lived spirituality nor interfaith dialogue are omitted in the current edition of the journal. They are represented mainly by the introductory interview with Ajahn Jotipālo, a Buddhist monk, interfaith promoter and an icon writer. These aspects are also depicted on his icons, which accompany the interview and point to the idea of building “bridges” between spiritualities and religions not primarily through the doctrinal approach, but rather through lived spirituality.



Cordially  
**Martin Dojčár**



An Interview with Ajahn Jotipālo:

# Meditation Leads to Experiential Understanding That What We Think of As Ourselves is Actually Stressful, Unstable & not Really Ourselves

Received July 15, 2019

Revised July 27, 2019

Accepted July 28, 2019

**Key words**

Buddhism, Theravada,  
mindfulness, Buddhist-  
Christian dialogue, icons

**In the interview with Martin Dojčár, Ajahn Jotipālo discusses a set of issues concerning monastic life in the strict Thai forest tradition of Theravada Buddhism along with fundamental Buddhist spiritual practices and his views on interfaith dialogue based on his long-lasting engagement in it.**



Q  
&  
A

Ajahn Jotipālo is a Buddhist monk of American origin ordained in Theravada tradition, who has been actively involved in Buddhist-Christian interfaith dialogue for many years. Jotipālo was staying in several monasteries of his tradition in Thailand, Canada and New Zealand; however, his home monastery remains Abhayagiri – a Buddhist Monastery of the Thai forest tradition of Ajahn Chah in Redwood Valley, California.

The following interview is a continuation of our conversations with Jotipālo on spirituality and dialogue that occurred at the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at Saint John's University, MN, in fall 2018.

**Q** You have been a Buddhist monk for two decades now – since 1999. My first question concerns your vocation: What moved you to join the *Sangha* in the strictest monastic tradition of all, the Thai forest tradition of Theravada? I mean, you made a choice for a disciplined lifestyle based on 227 monastic rules (*vinaya*) of *Vinaya Pitaka* as opposed to the mainstream consumer lifestyle of the American culture with its emphasis on the values of individual success, wealth, and unlimited consumption. The two are in direct opposition: the former promotes detachment; the latter promotes attachment. It was not an easy decision, wasn't it?

**A** First, thank you Martin for the opportunity to reflect on your interesting and insightful questions. It was a pleasure to meet you at the Collegeville Institute last year and I'm glad we are still in contact.

In some ways, it was just luck! I started asking questions about life after a near death experience while trekking in Nepal. It's a long story but in short, I got altitude illness and for about three days I knew I could die at any moment. On the last day of this ordeal, I came to a point where I knew I had the choice of life or death.



**Ajahn Jotipālo** is American Buddhist monk ordained in Theravada Thai forest tradition, who has been involved in Buddhist-Christian inter-religious dialogue for years. As a Buddhist artist Jotipālo also learns from Christian iconography, in particular icon writing. His email contact is [jotipalo@abhayagiri.org](mailto:jotipalo@abhayagiri.org).

## About the author



**Doc. PaedDr. Martin Dojčár, PhD.**, is professor of religious studies at Trnava University, Slovakia, specializing in spirituality and inter-religious dialogue. He is the author of an inspiring book *Self-Transcendence and Prosociality* and Editor-in-Chief of the *Spirituality Studies Journal*. His email is [dojcar@gmail.com](mailto:dojcar@gmail.com).



### Portrait of Neil Fallon

Here is the portrait that only took two hours to paint: One of the potters at Saint John's Pottery asked Jotipālo to paint this as Neil Fallon is his favorite musician.

At that moment, I felt I needed to ask forgiveness from my parents and thus, I was not ready to die. The pain was unbelievable, so I asked to be separated from the pain and I came out of my body. *This experience gave me a strong conviction that something happens to us after the body dies, that there is a continuation. If this is the case, that means everything we do in life has consequences, and I wanted to start living a life based on that understanding.*

It took about five years of reading and studying before I found my first teachers. I started attending day-long meditation retreats with a Zen group and also got interested in Yoga. I eventually quit my job and moved into a large ashram in Massachusetts. It was here that my roommate was a passionate follower of S. N. Goenka. Something happened to me while sitting my first ten-day retreat and I knew I wanted to dedicate my life to a more formal meditation practice.

Being a monastic is not always easy and there are many frustrations along the way, but the same is true for lay life. I guess, at some level, I wasn't looking for the most comfortable path. I was initially looking for a path, where I felt those around me were benefiting and give me confidence to try it out. Fortunately, I noticed the results in myself, and thus was able to continue with the support of Sangha.



**We all need to constantly renew our motivation in order to persevere in what we have chosen. What are the main sources of inspiration for you and what keeps your motivation alive: inspiring individuals, teachings, intensified practices...?**



*Contemplation of death is probably the most effective motivation tool that I use.* It was the fundamental reason I started on this path and it is a reflection that the Buddha encourages us to reflect on daily. When we use this reflection, it eventually dawns on us that not only am I going to die, but so is everybody I know and love, and all beings everywhere. This reflection helps me to "not take things so seriously". It allows me to hold my views and opinions more lightly, and thus reduces my anxiety and stress.



I also have been fortunate to be around several good monastic communities that inspire confidence. My primary teachers Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro have also been great sources of inspiration. I can think of many examples of how their teachings or actions have influenced how I see the world.

**There is a strong emphasis on meditation in Buddhism. In Western societies, we have also been facing growing interest in meditation in recent decades. However, various people approach meditation from various perspectives and with various intentions. What's the purpose of meditation and its place in the whole of human life according to your understanding?**

In a nut shell, to me, meditation is about understanding our minds. Learning how we create our own suffering, and how we can stop suffering. My teachers focus on *mindfulness of breathing and of the body*. These practices allow me to calm down and become present for what is happening in both my body and mind.

Initially, I used a practice of investigating the *Five Khandhas or Aggregates of Clinging* (body, feelings, perceptions, mental activity and consciousness). I would tune into one of these aspects of my experience and watch how they changed and were never stable. *Over time this leads to an experiential understanding that what we think of as ourselves is actually stressful, unstable, and not really ourselves* (Pa. *dukkha, anicca, anattā*). And once we start to get a perception of this, it allows us to stop clinging to views and opinions and allows the mind to question our experience. I often hear myself questioning my own assumptions, *"Is that really true? Do you think you will believe that next year? Might I not have all the information needed to make a judgement?"*

Another important practice has been the *Brahmavihārās* (good will, compassion, joy at other's good fortune, and equanimity). I see this practice as a way to help fundamentally change my world view. I used to be a fairly angry person and wasn't shy about telling people if they were not living up to my expectations – ha! The way these practices work for

me, is that *I will consciously invoke memories of when I felt one of these emotions. Then I will let that memory saturate my entire body and mind. Afterwards I watch and study how that emotion feels in the body*. With practice, and in most situations, you can actually consciously bring up one of these positive emotions. The more you "hang out" in these states of mind, the more likely it is that this will become your default emotion and the way you can interact with your life.

In the monastic tradition I was ordained into, meditation is very important – we meditate as a group usually for two hours a day, and are encouraged to develop our own sitting and walking practice at our private dwelling places. But a significant amount of time during the day, even while doing more intensive practice periods, is spent in "non-meditation". So, our teachers spend a lot of time talking about developing *continual mindfulness practice*.

**The previous question can also be recontextualized in regard to the human psychosomatic structure. In contrast to certain interpretations, where meditation appears as a kind of mental activity, in Buddhism, as well as in the majority of Yoga traditions, meditation is approached on the background of psychosomatic unity of human – in concerns both body and mind. Actually, the two are inseparable and mutually interconnected.**

**The idea can be demonstrated on all fundamental meditation practices of the Theravada tradition – on the contemplation of the Three Characteristics of Existence (impermanence, suffering, egolessness, i.e. Pa. *anicca, dukkha, anattā*), the contemplation of the Four Elements (earth, water, fire, air), the contemplation of the Five Aggregates of Clinging (Sa. *skandhas*, Pa. *khandhas*), i.e. factors that constitute our individuality (form, i.e. Sa. *rūpa*; feeling, i.e. Sa. *vedanā*; discrimination, i.e. Sa. *saññā*; formations of will, i.e. Sa. *samskāra*; consciousness, i.e. Sa. *viññāna*), as well as the practice of four *Brahmavihārās* (good will, compassion, joy, equanimity) as you eloquently described it. However, if meditation is primarily not aimed at providing an individual with particular benefits in accor-**



dance with one's taste, and at the same time, it cannot be limited to a set of techniques applied only in privileged moments of a day, then how is it related to that wholeness of human life? In other words, how can we keep mindfulness in daily life and make it a lifestyle rather than a technique? Or more precisely: What is the connection between the formal and informal practice from your point of view?

**A** Your question, "How can we keep mindfulness in daily life and make it a lifestyle rather than a technique?", that's a good question. If you find the answer, please let me know!

We call meditation "a practice", and there is good reason for that. I think, we all approach practices with a limited understanding of how practices work, how our own minds work, or really what we need to know so that we can stop suffering. The teachers I have studied with, encourage us to investigate, experiment and to a certain extent "play around with" various techniques and practices. But we always need to be truthful about the results we are getting from those experiments. My primary teacher, when somebody asks him, how they should practice with a particular technique, usually answers, "Give it a try and pay attention to the results." "Paying attention to the results" gives us opportunities to make adjustments, for self-knowledge to arise, for a real understanding of what works for us (not just following somebody else's instructions).

It is in this way that the *mindfulness practice* takes hold, as we need to pay attention to how our practices effect every aspect of our lives. It can almost become a game, or we become detectives spying on our minds.

**Q** **There are several points of intersection between Buddhism and classical Yoga (unlike the so-called postural yoga and other non-traditional practices presented as yogic by their promoters). Dhyāna is one of them. In the classical Yoga-darsana of Patañjali, dhyāna is the seventh stage or āṅga of Yoga. The Chinese Chan or Chana, and Japanese Zen or Zenna – concepts central for the Chan or Zen branches of Buddhism come from the same Sanskrit root**

as *dhyāna*. Following the doctrine of Pāli Canon (*Sutta Pitaka*), Theravada tradition distinguishes between the four *rūpa dhyānas* (*Pa. jhāna*).

The very principle of the Yoga-darsana is defined in *Yoga Sutras* of Patañjali as "Yoga is the inhibition of the fluctuations of consciousness/mind" (Sa. "yogaś-citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ"; I.2), and "[t]hen the Seer is recognized as such" (Sa. "tadā-draṣṭuḥ-svarūpe-vasthānam"; I.3).

**By the means of virtue and concentration discontinuity of conscious acts, as well as dim consciousness are eliminated, and permanent continuity of consciousness along with integration of all cognitive acts with/in consciousness is established. In Buddhism, concentration on breath (Pa. ānāpānasati; Sa. ānāpānasmṛti) is considered to be the basic method of concentration. By anchoring the attention on breath, one is gradually becoming aware of one's own psycho-mental processes and contents manifested in the fluctuation of thoughts, psycho-mental states, and finally psycho-mental patterns as impermanent, i.e. as appearing and disappearing. Later on, other methods and techniques may come into play. Is this the reason mindfulness is so stressed by many Buddhist teachers nowadays?**

**A** One of my favorite teachings is the *Seven Factors of Awakening*. The classical approach starts with the development of *mindfulness*. One way I look at this is, at first, we try to be mindful, but we fail (and that is why we are paying attention to results). So, we ask, "Why wasn't I able to be mindful?" This question is the awaking of the second factor – *investigation*. By investigating "why", we might learn more about our habits and patterns, both positive and negative, which then allow us to approach *mindfulness* with more clarity, understanding and hopefully we are able get better results.

When we bring investigation into the practice, this naturally leads to more *energy* in the practice – more interest and more fun. This energy then leads to the arising of *joy*. At this point, there can be a tendency to turn our attention to the joy and stop doing the practices that lead to the arising of the joy (*mindfulness*,

*investigation and energy*). So, it's important to keep mindfulness during the entire practice.

It's good to study this joy and get to know what cause it to arise, and what sustains it (and it's opposite). Once we get to know joy, what naturally arises is *tranquility* (both of body and mind). With all of these factors, it is the previous factor that causes the arising of the next factor, but the next factor needs to be studied, cultivated and perfected, then that factor will automatically cause the arising of the next factor.

*It is only when our body and minds are calm and tranquil, what we can easily enter into states of concentration or one pointed awareness. Again, this state is not the goal but a state we need to investigate and understand. Once concentration has been developed, it naturally leads into equanimity.*

Q

**In more traditional Buddhist doctrines, the stress on concentration and virtue is equally balanced: They both are considered preconditions of success in practice. Why is it important to develop concentration skills on the moral grounds?**

A

Yes, virtue (*Pa. Śīla*) is very important – practice can be very difficult without it! *My understanding is, that without having cultivated virtue, the mind will harbor thoughts of doubt, remorse, shame and guilt, which are hindrances to a concentrated mind.* I've also heard it said that a concentrated mind that is not freed of greed, hatred and delusion will result in super concentrated states of greed, hatred and delusion!

There are two mental qualities that the Buddha called *Guardians of the World*. They are in Pāli, *Hiri*, often translated as "shame to do wrong", and *Ottappa*, "fear of consequences". We often think of shame and fear as negative emotions, but in this case, you can see that there are actions, which undertaken can lead us in a bad direction, and we should develop a wise strategy to avoid following those inclination in our minds.



### The Christ Pantocrator & HH the Dalai Lama

The Christ Pantocrator of St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai is the earliest known version of the Pantocrator type. HH the Dalai Lama appeared on Time Magazine's cover just as Jotipālo was working on the Pantocrator, and he immediately realized how his face was similarly non-symmetrical, so decided to paint these icons as a pair.





### A Firefighter with Saint Benedict as Protector

Jotipālo made a series of paintings using firefighters as the theme not only as a way of honoring their hard work but also as a way to heal from his experience of big fires in California during the last years. These two images he eventually framed as a diptych and gave it to the Saint John's Fire Department.

As a natural result of practicing *Śīla* and developing the *Guardians of the World*, the potential for developing concentration practices will be greatly improved.

**Q** Throughout the academic year of 2018/2019, you were a resident scholar at the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at Saint John's University, MN. On that occasion, you were in touch with Benedictines of Saint John's Abbey on a daily basis. Have you noticed any similarities between the Theravada and Benedictine monastic lifestyles despite all obvious differences in their specific cultural and religious settings?

**A** As you mention, there are many differences between Christian and Buddhist monastics, and we perform very different roles to our lay communities. Despite the differences, it was easy for me to fit into the Saint John's community and I felt 100 % welcomed and supported. One of the focuses in the *Rule of Saint Benedict* is welcoming guests, and I saw examples of this displayed all the time. Right before I moved into the Collegeville Institute, I met with Abbot John Klassen, and we asked him where I should sit in the church. He responded, "With the monks of course, unless he doesn't want to." Well, it wasn't obvious to me that is where I should sit, but it felt nice to be so open-heartedly welcomed.

When you have any intentional community, it probably will be organized in a similar way, like some people need to be in leadership roles, some people who have practical skills tend to look after maintenance, cooking, taking care of guests, teaching new community members... *Some of the "religious" aspects of our communities' intentions were also similar.* Both place a high standard on working things out in communal harmony, having group prayer and group meals, as well as some social activities. Also being in a community where the individuals who live there have asked to be part of that community is important too. Being around *people who are seriously dedicating their lives to a cause bigger than their individual needs and wants is also a significant similarity between our communities.*



**Q** At the Collegeville Institute, you were working on your project “What can Buddhist artistic traditions learn from Christian Iconography”. As far as I know, developing your painting technique was one of its aims, but not the only one. What is the main outcome of your almost a yearlong inquiry?

**A** Okay, now you are asking me questions about my true passions! Ha. Yes, a significant part of the program was for me to explore what would happen if I had the majority of my day available just to focus on creating icons.

At the monastery in California, I had many duties and the monastic schedule made it difficult to find time to keep up a daily practice of writing icons.

Being able to have more space in the day made for a much more even flow of energy. I didn't get as concentrated as I did when I had only a few hours, but the even flow of energy seemed to be more calming and relaxing in general. The number of hours dedicated to writing almost tripled in any given day, and as a result, I went from writing an icon in about two weeks to be able to complete one in a day. Actually, at the very end it took me only two hours to complete a couple of portraits. So, there was a greatly improved sense of comfort with the technique. I could also see a bit of my own style starting to emerge.

One of the bigger questions I was asking before the program started was, “*Is there a way to write a Buddhist icon, so that anybody looking at it can tell the intention of the artist?*” It seems to me now that this is not possible, as painting an icon is called writing because we are dealing with a visual language. And just as I can't appreciate say French poetry since I don't speak French, unless we take the time to understand the language of various religious art techniques, the real meaning behind the works will be lost. At first this kind of saddened me but I realize my first Christian Icon teacher, Fr. Damian Higgins of Mount Tabor Monastery in Redwood Valley, CA, partly uses his icons as a way to talk about his faith. In this way, I can

see that continuing to develop my icons skills could have some benefit.

Having the year to explore icon writing as a meditation technique has given me the incentive to go a bit deeper. I hope to start creating icons from scratch (not just copying existing icons), and hopefully someday get to a point where I might be able to lead workshops on creating religious art.

*Another aspect of my trying to develop my own style of writing Buddhist icons by using an ancient Christian technique is to show that people from different faiths and backgrounds can learn from each other.*

**Q** This reminds me, you mentioned you might be doing an interfaith walk with one of the monks from Collegeville, is that correct? What is your intention behind that?

**A** Father Michael Peterson, monk of Saint John's Abbey, and myself have one monastic camping trip planned for June 2020. We are also looking at the possibility of doing a longer hike in 2021. The camping trip in 2020 will hopefully be two Christian and two Buddhist monks camping together just outside Yosemite National Park for a week. All the monks have participated in monastic dialogue before, and I see this as a way for us to get to know each other in a setting outside of a conference or being a guest at a monastery. I made the joke a few years ago that if we really want to get to know each other, we shouldn't be meeting for conferences, we should go hiking and call it “Monks in the Mountains”.

I've invited Fr. Michael to accompany me on a three- or four-month hike in 2021, doing a large section of the Pacific Crest Trail. I hope that we would create a YouTube channel and post about our walk. The idea is that *I would be reading the Rule of Saint Benedict or some Christian teachings that Fr. Michael suggests, while he, on the contrary, would be studying my monastic rules and reading some talks from my teachers. Afterwards, in the evenings we could have discussions, sharing, and hopefully capture some of the better insights we get from our discussions on*

*tape. I would see the focus would be on what I'm learning about myself, or about my monastic tradition from opening up to the wisdom of a different faith. I think the world needs to see examples of this, and what is a better way than two people of different faiths doing something difficult like a 2000 km hike over an extended period of time?*

*It's easy to show respect and appreciation towards another over a short conference or meeting, but what happens over a four-month journey? Of course, a lot of factors will need to fall into place for us to be able to attempt such a hike, but nothing will happen if we don't start to dream about it now.*

**You have been involved in inter-religious dialogue with Christians, particularly Benedictines. As I know, there is a bond of friendship between you and Fr. William Skudlarek, Benedictine monk of Saint John's Abbey, MN, and Secretary General of the Monastic Inter-religious Dialogue (currently the leading institutional promoter of interfaith dialogue worldwide). It would be interesting to learn what is your take on interfaith dialogue and its perspective based on your own experience?**

Father William has been a dear friend and a source of inspiration for me for a long time. I think we have known each other for almost fifteen years. Our initial introduction to each other was at Abhayagiri when a planning group for a future monastic dialogue was gathering at a nearby monastery and they came to Abhayagiri for a tour. My abbot had told this group that I was planning to do a pilgrimage walk, totally on faith (no money), starting near New Orleans, LA, and trying to walk to Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada (which is about 2,500 km). Fr. William was really intrigued by this and we started emailing each other. We had hoped that if we reached the state of Minnesota, Fr. William would join us, but due to health reason I had to stop the walk before we got to that point. After a few years I was able to regain my health and we did a 10-day, 160 km walk in northern Minnesota, which was a great experience.

*Our friendship has stayed strong all these years partly because I get a sense, we are both inquisitive and our bond of inter-monastics dialogue is not based on wanting to change the other, but to better understand our own tradition. Seeing how other communities function, practice together, how we interact, deal with issues that arise, how we live the teachings that we profess... All these things and more give us insights into our own communities, and how we can become better community members within our own group.*

I definitely see the world through a Buddhist perspective, and I allow that view to shape how I respond in my daily interactions. It is fun to see where I have differences with people, and to realize I don't need anybody else to see the world the way I do to feel secure. It's interesting to watch somebody who I have a lot of confidence in, and who I respect, but see them believe something that seems so alien to me. It gives me great confidence to not trust my own views and opinions, but also to know I don't need to throw out my views either. It's just the way it is.

Another aspect of inter-monastic dialogue is that we are actually fairly new at this, I'm not sure of the history, but world religions have not been talking to each other for so long. *I see our gatherings as a way of building trust and developing relationships. When things do happen in the world, and where different communities need to help find solutions, hopefully some of the ground work has already been done. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often, when asked about how to resolve issues in the world, especially where violence is happening, will invariably say, something like, "In these cases it is almost too late, we need to look for where these situations could flare-up in the future and start laying a foundation to prevent it from happening."* In the same way I hope that is one of ways that interfaith dialogue is providing benefit to the world.



Q

**And what about the intra-Buddhist dialogue? For the last couple of decades, there is growing ecumenical awareness among different Buddhist branches, doctrinal schools and monastic traditions. What is your take of that?**

A

Very similar to how different religions have not really been in dialogue for long, it is also true that the different Buddhist traditions have not really met each other until we all started showing up in the West. When I first got interested in Buddhism, I would often hear people talk negative about “other” traditions, kind of like, “*Our team is the best and you better not trust that team...*” Maybe that kind of talk still happens and maybe I’ve learned to associate with people who don’t think that way?

Personally, I have only attended one or two Buddhist monastic meetings – there is only limited time and energy available to us. But other members of my community have taken the opportunity to learn from and share what we find valuable to other monastics trying to figure out how to be nuns or monks in the West.

This sharing is important as what we are doing is very alien to the West. There are many practical issues where we might be able to act together to form a coalition – like around health care, nursing homes for elder monastics, issues with regards to Visa and Work Permits, etc.

At a deeper level, when we learn more about different Buddhist traditions, we can see clearly that we all have the same Buddha as our teacher, and many of the differences that have developed over the centuries could have been caused by culture. *Seeing where we have similarities or understand why a different tradition does something differently also helps us to appreciate each other and also deepen our faith and understanding of our own teachings.*

**Thank you very much for sharing your insights with us!**



### Our Lady of Guadalupe

The Virgin of Guadalupe is considered the Patroness of Mexico and the Continental Americas. Replicas of the *tilma* can be found in thousands of churches throughout the world and numerous parishes bear Her name.



# “Ethics of Three Persons” and Transcendence

Received September 17, 2019

Revised September 30, 2019

Accepted October 1, 2019

**Key words**

Ethics, moral education,  
transcendence,  
ethics of dialogue,  
virtue ethics

The author of the paper points out the reducing manner of Kantian division of morality to *heteronomous morality* and *autonomous morality*, which is projected also to the advanced reduced dichotomous division of psychological and pedagogical theories of moral education to individual-progressivist and normative-cognitivist ones. Insufficiency of “two ethics” is criticized using three-fold argumentation: a philosophical, a psychological and a pedagogical one. Instead of “two ethics”, a perspective of the “first person”, “third person” and “second person” is suggested, which enables the author to highlight a *dialogical model* of the “second-person ethics” against the *monological models* of the first two types. At the same time, necessity of the transcendental dimension for conceiving morality based on respect to the Other in the midst of a community is justified. The thought-line followed by the author in the submitted study is based mainly on the field of ethics, however, it continually refers to psychological and pedagogical aspects of the researched topic. A conclusion is reached that not the binary approach, but the integral approach to man and their education enables maintaining respect to transcendence and vice versa, openness to transcendence secures conditions for a holistic formation of man.

## 1 Introduction

In spite of the fact that the submitted study unfolds mainly in the field of ethics as a philosophical discipline, its basic research question was born “three steps further”, in the area of theory of moral education. A several years long effort of my team to analyze moral-educational concepts that linger in contemporary pedagogical practice and current scientific discourse (Podmanický and Rajský 2014; Rajský and Podmanický 2016; Rajský and Wiesenganger 2018; Brestovanský 2019) make me state that they divide on *two mutually competing models*: a model of ethics as an effort toward personal profit with the smallest possible impacts on social and natural environment (a progressive-optimistic position emphasizing development of one’s own competences, technical sustainability and well-being) and a model of ethics understood as a socializing and enculturating imperative (a socio-normative position accentuating collective values, equality and principles of political inclusion). Analyzing theoretical (psychological and philosophical) background of these two models we reached an understanding that their mutually dichotomic position may be grasped using Kantian terms such as *a model of autonomous morality* and *a model of heteronomous morality*. Kant’s distinction of ethical worlds to “kingdom of goods” and “kingdom of unconditioned law” (Kant 1788, 28) occurred in the background of the enlightenment competition between *empiricism* and *rationalism* and it maintained fundamental features of these two approaches, including both their strengths and weaknesses. At the same time, however, all forms of ethics that assumed the movement of transcendence as relevant for realization and reflection of human *praxis* were excluded from the game of the concept of morality. Resignation to thematizing of transcendence in ethical thinking caused that morality was stuck in immanence of calculable handling and thus, it hit the question of its own *rai-*



### About the author

**Doc. PhDr. Andrej Rajský, PhD.**, specializes in philosophical-ethical and anthropological areas of research and education. He is a founding member of the *Central European Philosophy of Education Society* (CEUPES), as well as a member of editorial boards of several Slovak, Czech, Polish and Italian scientific journals on philosophy of education. Professor Rajský serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Scientia et Eruditio* and a scientific guarantor of annual doctoral conferences on educational science *Juvenilia Paedagogica* held at Trnava University. He authored and co-authored multiple scholarly books, research studies and articles. His email is [andrej.rajsky@truni.sk](mailto:andrej.rajsky@truni.sk).



## 2 Insufficiency of “Two Ethics”

*son d'être* – may we still speak of morality if aims transcending the manipulatable objectified world were excluded from the reflection of action? This ethical question, hiding a kind of skepsis, resulted from the original pedagogical question: *May we speak of moral education at all if we have limited it only to the ability of social negotiation for the most comfortable individual life without evident negative social and environmental consequences, possibly, if we have narrowed it only to the development of a competence to verbalize rational arguments?*

Educational and moral practice as well as analysis of theoretical discourses suggest that *the dichotomy of heteronomy and autonomy of morality (and moral education) does not provide sufficient explanation of the phenomenon of morality of man in its entire integrality and with regard to realization of life good in its whole in particular*. Both above-indicated models lack openness to transcendental sources of morality. In this study, however, it is not my intention to reproduce classical metaphysical or religious theses that directly refer to theonomous reasoning of morality. *The aim of this research study is to disturb the thesis on binarity of ethical conceptions by including the “third type” of ethics that phenomenologically uncovers transcendence of the Other as a source and necessary condition of morality*. The Other (the other person, Thou) seems to be the path of “return” of transcendence to ethical reflection, but mainly to moral practice [1]. At the level of pedagogical thought, cultivation of virtuous relationality (benevolence, beneficence, help to the other, responsibility for the other, solidarity, prosociality) appears to be the key criterion of the processual and, predominantly, content side of moral education oriented at so-called flourishing life (Aristotle).

Without attempting to grasp the entire spectrum of ethical theories, I have methodically narrowed them to three groups bearing distinctive labels “the first-person ethics”, “the third-person ethics” and “the second-person ethics”. This symbolic grammatical reduction has its philosophical background that is clarified below. Even though this auxiliary terminology is mine, its philosophical inspirations may be found already in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (particularly where it conceives three forms of life: *a life of pleasure, a life of political activity and a philosophical life* [Aristotle 1934, 1095b], where it differentiates between *the perfect and imperfect friendship* [Aristotle 1934, 1155a–1156b]). These philosophical inspirations are also to be found in *philosophers of dialogue* who deal with the “problem of the third” in ethics (e.g. Lévinas 1997c, 189 and the following).

Immanuel Kant, in his groundwork of *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) placed autonomy in a radical contrast to heteronomy. He considered such *morality heteronomous* that is governed by external or affective motivations (e.g. lust or sympathy), or social expectations. The *autonomous morality*, on the contrary, is governed by reason and has to be forced by obedience to general law. Kant’s distinction of morality and ethics to these two kinds reduced the criterion of morality to rationality and obedience to general rules, while each conditioned (heteronomous) morality is, according to this key, beneath man. I suggest that ethical dichotomy, outlined in the introduction, cannot grasp and explain richness of human moral action, and it even dehumanizes it in the end. I offer three kinds of arguments to support this assertion – a philosophical, psychological and pedagogical one. In the following part, I would not like to offer a broad outline of argumentations, my intention is to suggest their layeredness and interdisciplinarity.

*Philosophical argumentation* against the disunity of ethics by Kant may be led in several lines, I state only some. The notion of autonomy has several meanings; in Kant’s writings, too, shifts in meaning can be found, and he admits himself that the notion is full of paradoxes: autonomy (sovereignty, independence) of an acting subject is in perfect accordance with the will of Nature (Providence) only in enlightened individuals who, at the same time, have a great power of realization. The French revolution, however, showed Kant that abuse of power may easily occur with justification of a higher moral order: the autonomy of the powerful slips to despotism, the autonomy of the weak ends in blood. This condition may be transferred to everyday life “in peace and freedom”, where the moralizing superiority of some uses moral arguments on the expense of the others in political or common interpersonal communication. In general, it may be stated that narrowing of morality to the question of mandatory power appears to be particularly problematic, which has also been expressed by the author of the paper in a semantic manner through differentiation between the so-called hypothetical and categorical *imperative*. Acting in accordance with the law needs to be therefore forced internally (but also externally), which means that the morally good identifies with the obedient, based on duty. Other limits and problematic points are pointed out further, in the part 4 *The Third-Person Ethics*.



*Psychological argumentation*, weakening the division to heteronomous and autonomous ethics, is directed mainly at the cognitivist paradigm that can be found in the background of founders of the so-called moral psychology (e.g. Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Elliot Turiel and others). The cognitivists directly followed Kant's normative ethics (*ethics of rules*) and held the relationship of a subject to rules for the key distinguishing criterion. Based on the development of a relationship to rules, Piaget, for example, created a theory of moral development of children and differentiated *two stages of moral judgement – heteronomous and autonomous*. A child keeping the rules not because of a reward or punishment, but because of their own acceptance of the implicit justice in them is the aim. A more differentiated conception of *six developmental stages* in three levels by Kohlberg is also well-known, nevertheless, the relationship to norms, measured predominantly as an ability of moral judgement, is also definitely set. Criticism by psychologists is oriented mainly against the thesis of universal validity and consecutiveness of stages, against intellectualization of morality (what went through the process of cognition and justification in a subject is morally good) and against crowding out of the affective and social motivational structure from the moral decision-making process (Vacek 2013, 42–45).

An important critical place is also the separation of cognitive powerfulness from the very action, known in psychology as “knowledge–behavior gap”, or “attitude–behavior gap”. Kohlberg's thesis “*he who knows the good chooses the good*” (Kohlberg 1981, 189) does not hold. Augusto Blasi (1980, 1983) reported that moral reasoning only accounts for 10 % of the variance in moral behavior (Walker 2004). Eventually, several theoreticians (Carol Gilligan, Sam A. Hardy, Gustavo Carlo) blame cognitivists for *monocratic ethics* based solely on the value of justice (or, accordance with the norm), which ignores a *pluralist model of ethics* integrating several sources of morality (besides rational consistency, for example, care for others, sensitivity to interpersonal relationships, etc.). Moreover, concepts based on the autonomous-heteronomous duality of morality do not notice contextual and situational factors, automatism and hidden impacts of man's action.

*Pedagogical argumentation* partially holds on to the criticism of cognitivism, but at the same time, it transcends it. An educator and teacher have the entire student's person in front of them, including emotional capabilities, inner desires, social context and real action, to which creation of their identity is related. With respect to the importance of rational faculty in moral processes, it is not possible to reduce moral education

to moral schooling (incitation of cognitive competences). It may even easily happen that “*the worse notorious liar in the class will write a great treatise on the destructive power of a lie*” (Buber 2016, 65). After all, even a man who cannot denote individual principles or values, is capable of moral action; they might not be able to justify their decisions, however, they may be sensitive to good contained in the act and they may carry it out. Moreover, in the contemporary post-duty world of the Western man, the sense of universal validity of truths and values is absent. “*A man for whom no unconditionally valid values exist in the universal sense is impossible to be educated to an approach that prioritizes unconditionally valid values over all other values*” (Buber 2016, 76). Effective moral education does not lay duties, it points out the attractive beauty of good, fundamentally engaging all the involved in the educational relationship.

The division of ethical systems and the associated educational conceptions to heteronomous and autonomous ones is not sufficient for understanding morality of man in its entire complexity and, above all, it disposes the acting subject of the challenge to transcend, which is a deep inner motive, guaranteeing human dignity to man. Therefore, *instead of the binary conception of two ethics, I propose a conception of “three ethics”, from which “the second-person ethics” includes the dimension of transcendence as constituting meaningfulness of the very morality and moral education.*

### 3 The First-Person Ethics

The “first-person ethics” (I–ethics), as understood by the author, means *every ethical theory and moral practice included in it that explicitly and in a program manner, or implicitly and in a sophisticated manner assumes that the final aim and main criterion of person's decision-making is their own individual interest.*

A set of ethical theories that includes this type of thinking oriented toward the profit of “I” is contained in many currents and schools dating back to the beginnings of the European philosophy up to present. It embraces explicit *philosophical egoism* (e.g. Thomas Hobbes, Max Stirner), *hedonism* focused on one's own indulgence (Epikuros, Michel Onfray, David Pearce), classical (Jeremy Bentham, John S. Mill) and contemporary *utilitarianism* (Peter Singer), but also post-modern *individualism* and post-duty *narcissism* (Gilles Lipovetsky 2008, 2011). At the beginning of the modern times, an opinion was spread that human nature is naturally egoistic and as such



should serve organization of the society and state (e.g. Nicolás Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 1513). Similarly, Thomas Hobbes claimed that man is fundamentally an egoist, “a man is a wolf to another man” and every expression of self-sacrifice and care for the other is only a hidden behavior following one’s own profit (*Leviathan*, 1651). Empiricists and naturalists assert that morality is not a spiritual or rational matter, but it emerges from empirical necessity, mediated by affects and feelings. The task of ethics is to describe these procedures and explain self-keeping and hedonistic mechanisms of human action. Perhaps, the best-known confessor of egoistic ethics was the anarcho-individualist Max Stirner, who attacks all general spiritual norms in a polemic manner in his fundamental work *The Ego and Its Own* (1844). State, morality and religion and all forms of sociality, according to him, restrain an individual from their own development. The only criterion of action should be the justification, “because I like it”. Stirner states that his philosophical stream is egoism. “The Unique” (*Der Einzige*), however, is not a man as such, but an individual, an unrepeatable and irreplaceable being that must not be enslaved by purposes and aims that are not desired by the Unique and that would mean loss of domination over themselves. The Unique is not good, nor bad; they are freed from every evaluation and every structure, they are the center of the world and existence of the other, accept rules of the other only if they consider the rules beneficial for themselves, otherwise they create their own rules. The Unique is really themselves only when they freely limit their own freedom for their own aims, for instance, entering an interaction with the other, which means undergoing certain sacrifice, however, it is focused on a greater own profit that cannot be otherwise reached.

According to utilitarianists, every thinking and acting subject calculates advantages and disadvantages of their own actions and acts in order to maximize their own benefit or delight. Already the ancient philosophers of Athens rejected *hedonism* (morality of searching for delight and avoiding stress) and *utilitarianism* (morality of increasing one’s own and social benefit) as imperfect forms of life, which do not fulfil human yearning for good. Plato’s Socrates, in the work *Republic*, describes that part of soul he called “lust”, despite its manifoldness, according to “*the biggest and strongest in it. For we called it the desiring part on account of the intensity of the desires concerned with eating, drinking, sex, and all their followers; and so, we also called it the money-loving part, because such desires are most fulfilled by means of money*” (Plato 1991, 580e). People focused on themselves and their profits will never rise themselves really “above”, “*but like cattle, always looking downward with their heads bent toward the ground and the banquet tables, they feed, fatten, and fornicate. In order*

*to increase their possessions they kick and butt with horns and hoofs of steel and kill each other, insatiable as they are.*” (Plato 1991, 586a).

Plato, in *The Laws*, rejects extreme self-love as follows, “*but of all faults of soul the gravest is one which is inborn in most men, one which all excuse in themselves and none therefore attempts to avoid that conveyed in the maxim that ‘everyone is naturally his own friend’, and that it is only right and proper that he should be so, whereas, in truth, this same violent attachment to self is the constant source of all manner of misdeeds in every one of us*” (Plato 1961, 731e).

Rejection of selfishness in favor of generosity can be found at several places in texts where Plato and Aristotle declare the value of friendship. Aristotle highlights unselfish love that “*has nothing to do with the example of relationship of debtors and creditors*” (that is, reciprocal advantage), because “*benefactors love those they have benefited, even if they are of no present or future use to them*” (Aristotle 1934, 1168a–b).

The contemporary French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky believes that we are citizens of a contradictory culture, where the principles of modernism and democracy, hedonism and the growing consumption, radical individualism and narcissism are being molded together. Art records changes in the moral code of a society spontaneously. The ethical sovereignty gets into conflict with the absolute duty, while sexual liberalism leads to promiscuity, or put in other words – to Eros with a changeable geometry. “*The demand for ethics doesn’t remain limited only by the areas that call for responsibility. It crystallizes in the same manner also in the sphere which embodies the ephemeral and spectacular present time the best – in the media. Just as the demand for ethics of future followed from the new possibilities of techno-science; similarly, the polymerous power of media and extravagances of printing press enlivened the need for the ethics of current affairs.*” (Lipovetsky 2011, 309). Lipovetsky sees behind the so-called “honesty” of the postmodern man an acute *hedonism* (the ideology of sensual lust), which has become, under the influence of mass consumption, the central value of our culture. *Postmodernism* began at a time, when new forms of unrestrained behavior no longer evoked outrage and any form of the search for sensual stimulation was publicly approved. Postmodernism manifests itself in democratization of hedonism, in general sanctification of novelties, in ending the conflict between the values highly regarded and the values experienced. The process of individualization, which he calls “personalization”, “*has fronted personal actualization and the respect to subjective particularity and a unique individuality as a fundamental value... The right to be absolutely yourself and to enjoy as much*



as possible... is just the backmost manifestation of the individualistic theory." (Lipovetsky 2008, 11). The hedonist of today is closed up in their individualism and without any transcendental support they remain alone, vulnerable and resigning. Hedonism and utilitarianism in education are manifested by adjustment to an individual fight for "survival", to which emotive, affective and social relationships are subordinated. In this process, the only valued thing is the one that contributes to fixation of one's own material and social position, the so-called "high aims" of the classical humanistic education (general development of personality, cultivation of the culture of spirit, keeping the received heritage, humanization of the world, transcending one's own boundaries, knowing for knowing...) have become almost outdated. Increasing the possibilities of one's own protection against attacks of the calculating society is what is wanted. Moral education is in this sense reduced to so-called healthy lifestyle and pursuit of profit with the least harmful impacts on social and natural environment possible.

## 4 The Third-Person Ethics

The "third-person ethics" (It/They-ethics) may be understood as *all ethical conceptions that due to the fear of egoism of the more powerful defend the rule of meta-individual rules, external (political, social) or internal (moral) law*. This set of ethics include all *deontological* (Immanuel Kant) and *social-normative or contractualistic* (Jean Jacques Rousseau, Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, John Rawls and others) theories of justice and morality.

In a "liquid" society amidst the "liquid" rationality and morality (Zygmunt Bauman), among narcissists and individualists in us and around us (Gilles Lipovetsky) it seems that the only way to "survive" is to reach a state where all would follow the same rules. To succumb to laws and norms set by an external lawgiver – may it be a collective mass and its conventions and trends – means to commit the individual decision-making rights to an external authority, let them lead, obey and require obedience. It all secures mutual protection of lives, properties and rights. At the cost of limitation of one's own maneuvering space, freedom and self-will of individuals. In the name of security and order, we wistfully accept normalized schemes of behavior in order not to remain in an anomic space of the "jungle", where the more powerful and careless steal the most for themselves at the expense of the weaker and the more caring ones. Education to good morals would then mean a guidance to norm-forming and socially acceptable behavior.

According to Kant, he who follows moral rules because of pure awe to the law and not because of his own benefit, acts morally right. Kant reacts with his rationalistic conception to skepticism of empiricists (John Locke, David Hume and others), according to whom, morality is identified with the necessity of natural laws and thus, follows principally irrational emotions. Kant strives to "free" morality and at the same time, freedom of man from the world of natural determinism. Moral imperative does not describe human motivations and circumstances of action, it is not a description of a state, but it commands to act with respect to higher, meta-individual aims. Thus, ethics becomes a rational science and an individual may bring in moral judgements based not on their individual experience and conscience, but based on an objective rule, valid for everyone. The highest sovereign who dictates how man should behave is their own reason, deducing instructions from the universal law. The ethics of rules reflects the enthusiastic enlightenment belief that man is capable of governing their civilization fairly, without a reference to transcendental matters.

On the other hand, this enthusiasm is not followed by moral practice. Kantian tradition separates ethics from morality in the sense that it sets what is right and obligatory, but it does not ask about what is good for life. Good and good life "dropped out" of the perspective of the ethics of duty. Abstract ethical thinking is, therefore, separated from real moral action. The second problem of the ethics of rules is exclusion of "moral feelings" from the horizon of ethical practice. Any emotional motivation or intuition of good or evil does not have a place in the "pure" deontological ethics. Passions and affects are bearers of immorality. Critics of the period such as Moses Mendelssohn, or later Friedrich Nietzsche blame this ethics for stiffness, abstractness and destruction of traditional moral patterns. Max Weber, in a reaction to Kant's "ethics of thinking", proposed "ethics of responsibility", while its task is to take the context of action into consideration, too (Sokol 2014, 107). The lack of regard to situation and context is another weakness of the ethics of rules. A decision of man based on rational consideration regardless the circumstances, outcome and consequences, leads to cynicism and unreal titanism. After all, the exclusion of the pursuit of happiness from the morally right action is also problematic, as if the desire for happiness (in the *eudaimonic tradition*) was an expression of selfishness. Perhaps, the best-known reservation against the ethics of impersonal law is the reduction of good action to action according to duty, which resulted in historical depravedness, as pointed out by Hannah Arendt in the work *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (orig. 1963). The Nazi criminal, the architect of the "Final Solution", Adolf Eichmann defended himself during the investigation of the consistent slaugh-

ter directed by him that “his whole life was lived in accordance with Kant’s moral precepts and particularly in accordance with Kant’s understanding of the concept of duty” (Arendt 2016, 185). He read Kant’s *The Critique of Practical Reason*, he followed it and even though Kant did not directly identify moral principle of will with the principle of state lawgiver, “common people and households” interpreted deontological ethics in this manner. “Whatever was Kant’s role in formation of mentality of a ‘common man’ in Germany, there is no doubt that in one sense Eichmann really acted in the spirit of Kant’s principles: A law is a law, there can be no exceptions” (Arendt 2016, 186). Eichmann is a symbol of blind obedience and consistent discipline of all who govern their actions in their everyday life following the norms of superior organization, or a state. David Rybák points out that in Eichmann’s case it is not a fatal fail of an individual, but an expression of “being inbuilt in a machinery in which it is much easier to go with the process than to oppose it” (Rybák 2019, 169), which is a typical example of a contemporary technocratic man. The abstract deontological ethics in transformed in common practice to a simple ethics of obedience to rules that were posed by a “third person”. Thus, the ethics of social contract and state-guaranteed social justice (equality) belong to the category of the “third person”.

Paul Ricoeur criticizes the ethics of obedience for absolutization of normativeness, that is, conditioning an action by the means of accordance with the norm regardless of possible good that could or could not have been reached by the action. Ricoeur asserts that teleological ethics, ethics aimed at “good life” should have primacy, while morality of rules is its mediating part. He expresses his integral theory of morality in a well-known thesis, “focus on ‘good life’ with the others and for the others in just institutions” (Ricoeur 2016, 190). I will return to this thesis of Ricoeur in the following subchapter. At this place, I would like to note his brilliant critical observation of Kant’s deontology, which contests its own coherence in the second formulation of the moral law. Kant’s reference to “final purpose”, or “self-purpose” of the second person [2] poses the theme of difference, discontinuity, plurality and singularity (otherness of the other), in contrast to own conception of moral autonomy and universality of rules (Ricoeur 2016, 246).

Cognitivist psychologists such as Lawrence Kohlberg, James Rest or Theodor Lind, following Kant’s deontology, consider universalistic, duty morality relevant. Justification of our deeds within conventionally accepted morality is referred to the authority of the external rule. Identification of moral-

ity with an unconditioned action according to the general categorical imperative, however, hits often everyday experience, which is not “black and white” and includes variety of aspects, perspectives and accents that influence the decision-making process. They cannot be rejected with simple reasoning that they are ungeneralizable and often do not fall within the category of rational justifications. The philosopher John Rawls, who follows Kant’s morality, points out that some dilemmas are unsolvable through the duty ethics, or on the contrary, they may have several acceptable solutions (Rawls in Krámský 2015, 104).

The same objection may be made against psychological research tools that evaluate maturity of moral development of respondents based on their responses to given moral dilemmas. Monologicality of deontological ethics is particularly problematic – to respond to ethical dilemmas, an isolated conscience of an individual without communication with the others is sufficient in order to make the “right” decision. This approach may be critically denoted as “transcendental solipsism” (Krámský 2015, 106, 110), which ends in the loss of interpersonal trust and possible ideologization of morality, moreover, it may even lead to dehumanized ethics (Krámský 2015, 134–142). The absence of “the other” in the horizon of clarification of ethical criteria closes the cogitative reason to immanentism of uncommunicating monads. In spite of the fact that Kant wanted to save the relationship of man to the noumenal through “practical reason”, he deprived it of the most natural source of transcendence – “the other opposite me”.

In contemporary scientific discourse on moral education, a cognitivist paradigm according to which the focus should be particularly on ethical education, development of cogitative and reasoning competences, however, at the expense of integral guidance of students to good, prevails. Education to keeping rules and to cultivation of moral-cognitive abilities is at risk of stopping at the level of verbalism, perhaps with a developed ability to denote moral phenomena and reason appropriate solutions, but without the ability to interiorize one’s own theses and integrate one’s own belief to moral action. The risk of incongruent moral education was noted, for example, by Martin Buber, when he criticized Kerschensteiner’s thesis on character education according to deontological ethics: “This understanding of character as an organization of self-control by means of accumulation of maxims... enables understanding powerlessness of modern education in regard to sickness of man... This understanding cannot provide a sufficient base for building of true character education” (Buber 2016, 78).



## 5 The Second-Person Ethics

The “second-person ethics” (Thou–ethics) is *an ethical conception and a theory of ethical education based on it, which considers the relationship to the Other for the crucial momentum of moral action*. The Other – “Thou”, standing face to face “I”, is a permanent source of my disturbance and appeal to my moral responsibility. Being of the Other precedes my own action and it is a challenge so that “I” “care for them”. The set of ethics of the “second person” includes philosophies of dialogue, communication and social bonds (Emmanuel Lévinas, Martin Buber, Jürgen Habermas, Karl Otto Apel, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur and others), which consider the moral perspective crucial for communicative action, but also ethics of “good life” (Aristotle, representatives of contemporary *virtue ethics* and *ethics of care*), for which holds that moral virtue is constituted in a relation to the others. These conceptions are followed by programs of *prosocial moral education* or *moral character education* (Brestovanský 2019). For my study, the moment of transcendence of the Other (Thou), which penetrates moral attitude of the acting subject, is ultimate. Particularly, the ethical conception of Emanuel Lévinas is focused on.

A quotation by Hannah Arendt aptly illustrates Aristotle’s understanding of friendship: “*Love in the broader sphere of human affairs corresponds to a personal relationship that may be best described as ‘respect’. Respect is like the Aristotelian ‘philia politiké’, a sort of ‘political friendship’ that does not require proximity and intimacy. This relationship is an expression of respect for a person*” (Arendt, 2007, 316). Civic friendship is a virtue of broader co-existence, in which respect for the other person is a cultural condition for the pursuit of a good life. However, this quality of co-existence with others in a community has its origins in an elementary relation to the Other, the close one, a specific “Thou”, with whom “I” develop a deep and unique story of friendship. The basic *relationship* between “I and Thou” is an operative symbol, an effective sign and a starting point for all positive social relationships, marked by the nature of unity, generosity, respect and mutual responsibility.

Who is a friend, a neighbor, the Other, to whom “I” turn my goodwill? Who is the Other? The Other is above all different than “I” and at the same time, different to everything else. Lévinas understood that in identification of the Other, their existence needs to be differentiated from “the same”, the entire, anonymous, total and general being (there is, *Fr., il y a*) that covers everything with its non-differentiatedness and impersonality. When we turn to the Other, we turn to an “alien”, to something and someone that does not belong

to the familiar, obvious, own country dominated by me. An active movement to the Other suggests a movement “elsewhere”, outside one’s Self, into *terra incognita* in the strongest meaning of the word. “*The Other we metaphysically crave for, is not ‘other’ like the bread I eat, place I live in, country I dwell in, like sometimes I am for myself... Metaphysical desire heads toward something completely different, absolutely different*” (Lévinas 1997a, 19). The desire for the Other is not based on a need, since a need is a state in which a human person lacks something, i.e. they are incomplete, thus, they are existentially nostalgic for something they at least partially know in advance (the other as an alter ego). However, the metaphysical desire does not crave for a return, but for something completely different, something we have never contained. If we talk about love as of saturation of some noble hunger, then it is not real love. Real love longs for something that transcends every fulfilment and deepens the desire itself further. It is a desire for the radically heterogeneous. Realization of this existential desire paradoxically increases the distance between us, since it reveals authentic exteriority, difference, unicity of each Thou. The difference of the Other is the difference of the noble, the highest, the infinite, the invisible. The metaphysical desire for the absolutely Other “*presupposes unselfishness of goodness*” (Lévinas 1997a, 21).

Does it mean that radical separateness of the Other can cast us into solitary confinement? That non-transferability of the Other to “the same” condemns our existence to eternal isolation, slavery of the “teeming” totality of being (there is)? Lévinas shows that such a fatal fate would impend man if that being was a primal state, a gift of the vicious world in which we as subjects would suddenly find ourselves. According to him, on the contrary, the shapeless teeming, the anonymous depth of a night (Lévinas 1997b, 47 and further on) are not primal, but a unique relationship is, not the being (Ger. *Sein*) of the existent (Ger. *Seiende*), but the relationship to someone who is the existent. Ontology is not primal, ethics is. Ethics means questioning spontaneous egoism of “the same” by the presence of the Other. “*The strangeness of the Other – their irreducibility to Me, my ideas and my possession – occurs as questioning of my spontaneity, as ethics*” (Lévinas 1997c, 28). Transfer of the Other to “the same” is then the essence of immorality. By neutralization of the Other, I catch the existent (*Seiende*) in what they are not existent – alien here, what betrays them in the horizon of “being at all” (*Sein*), in the horizon of things where they are lost and shown, caught, becoming a notion. Conceptualization means suppression and appropriation of the Other, power transformation of the Other to “the same”. *Cogito* (En. “I think”) finally means “I can”



(meaning “I have the power to state”), that is, depredatory appropriation of what is. Ontology is actually philosophy of power, it is “egoistic”, impersonal, inhuman, without respect to dignity and eventually, it is unjust because it violently transforms the Other to “the same”. The opposite of neutralization is transcendence, confirmation of “to be different” in the person of the Other. Relationship to the Other, by definition, is not reversible. Its mutual changeability would connect “I and Thou” to one system – “We” – that would destroy the radical difference of the Other. Transcendence to the infinite is the only possible ethical relationship to the Other. The very radical difference of the Other, however, is possible only when Thou is the Other in the relationship with an element whose essence remains a starting point, it serves as an entrance to the relationship. This element that remains in the starting point of the relationship is “I”.

What does it mean to be “I”? In particular, “I” means to have an identity, or rather, to be in a process of constant finding of one’s own identity across everything that happens to it. “I” is the original self-creation of identification. It is identical in its transformations, it has a structure of a subject, the first person. “I” blends with “itself”, it is the same against all difference, it cannot abandon “itself”, it is not someone else. Identification of “the same” in “I” does not occur as clear tautology “I am I” (as  $A = A$ ), but as a result that it exists in the world in the way of dwelling, that is, like at one’s home (Lévinas 1997c, 23). I am at home in the world, because the world offers (things) or resists (persons) my ownership. Ultimately, the encounter of “I” and the irreducible diversity of “Thou” creates own subjectivity of “I”.

How does the ethical relationship, the relationship of transcendence to the Other take place if its aim is not adjustment, establishment of collectivity “We”? Is such a relationship to “Thou” possible in which its radical exteriority against “I” would be kept at the same time? If an authentic relationship cannot be a representation, since the Other would dissolve in “the same”, the Other needs to be accepted as different, that is, the distance suggesting difference of the Other needs to be kept. Their difference precedes every initiative, every imperialism of “the same”. “I” and the Other do not create a number, the collectivity “I–Thou” is not the plural of “I”. “To accept the Other means to accept their hunger. To accept the Other means to give. But to give to a sovereign lord, the one we address ‘You’ in the dimension of Majesty” (Lévinas 1997c, 59–60). If the Other is to be preserved in their inviolability, “I” cannot exercise my power, which “I” exercise over the world, over them. What is the possible nature of the relationship

to the Other? Lévinas replies that it has the nature of a dialogue. The dialogue, however, cannot be explorative, revealing, but purely relational, it should be immediate revelation, manifestation of sense, presence that cannot be reduced to intellectual opinion. In a dialogue, “I” comes out of its ipseity, beyond every totality, like face to face. This movement, however, is by definition irreversible. “I” performs it as a breaking movement of transcendence, not as thinking of the Other but as one’s own acting walk. When “I” finds itself in a dialogue with “Thou”, it assigns the Other a right over my egoistic being and apologizes for it. Egoistic thinking resides in speaking, ethical attitude to the Other in responding to their calling, or revelation. The Other manifests themselves to the first one, reveal their face, their presence. “Face speaks. Manifestation of face is already a dialogue. The one who manifests themselves... decomposes the form they offer in every moment” (Lévinas 1997c, 50). The Other, through their naked presence, calls, begs, requires. It is a look of a stranger, widow and orphan. Encounter with the Other is a shock, their silent face causes upheaval and challenge. It evokes in “I” consciousness of unique responsibility, it is a permanent and unfulfillable challenge for the unstoppable “I” so that it attempts to cross the abyss to the separated “Thou”. Subjectivity of “I” is fully created only after acceptance of this challenge, taking the position of responsibility to the Other.

The philosophy of metaphysical desire for fulfillment (which never takes place) and its realization through responding to the call of the Other resembles rather Kantian deontology, except that this desire is not determined by the autonomy of will but by heteronomy of face of the Other. Instead of the imperative of a universal moral law that commits, commands and forces, in the ethics of encounter with the Other morality is determined by the appeal of responsibility, which unconditionally binds by the heteronomous law “Thou shalt not kill!”.

If Kant’s ethical concept deals the term “virtue” as a disposition of a moral subject to act in accordance with an objective coercive principle, Lévinas’s ethics would, for such disposition, call openness to the Other, willingness to acknowledge own commitment to them, readiness to accept responsibility for them. The acts of recognition of the Other (reverence), respect for their uniqueness, responsibility (non-indifference), care for their lack, unconditional giving (high-mindedness and generosity), acceptance of the Other in their exteriority (patience), love (non-violence), justice (non-abuse of power) would be then included in the register of “acts of virtue”.



Moral character education respecting dignity and unobjectification of a pupil is principally dialogical. It is highly demanding on character and pedagogical approach of the teacher. According to Martin Buber, "the mission of an educator" contains three presuppositions of education: 1. *humility* – awareness of the fact that the teacher is only one of several elements that influence formation of a pupil's character; 2. *responsibility* – the will to impact the entire personality of a pupil, particularly by the example of being that the teacher represents themselves; 3. *trust* – the only authentic path to a pupil that enables to educate their character to complexity (Buber 2016, 67). A pupil needs to accept the educator as a person whom they can trust, who does not handle with them and teaches them to ask questions. Martin Buber believes that an effective teacher does not dictate answers but creates a space for an "educational encounter". *"His look encounters a face that captures his attention. It is not pretty, nor particularly intelligent, however, it is a real face, or rather a chaos that gives rise to cosmos of the real face and he reads a question from it: Who are you? Do you know something that relates to me? Do you bring something? What do you bring?"* (Buber 2016, 80).

The task of an educator is not limited to the system of maxims, nor the system of habits that they teach pupils, but it resides in the ability to react "wisely" to a unique situation among unique persons. This "wisdom" was called *fronesis* by the Greeks. Pedagogical *fronesis* may not be closed to a system of principles, rules or transcendental deductions, it cannot be narrowed to "brightness" of a calculating reason. Practical wisdom of a teacher, in an "encounter with the Other" (*erzieherische Begegnung*) touches the sacred, the ungraspable, the transcendental.

## 6 Conclusion

The submitted study is aimed at analysis of basic ethical and moral-educational discourses indicated in Kantian philosophical and psychological-pedagogical terminology as heteronomous and autonomous, while the criterion of examination of the relationship between morality and transcendence was applied. The grammatical structure of "three persons" was used as a methodological aid, which, as I discovered while studying texts, responds to Ricoeur's triad of key words: *describe, prescribe and narrate* (Ricoeur 2016, 346). *My original thesis on inappropriate reduction of moral models to the dichotomy of the "first-person ethics" and the "third-person ethics" was proved.* If we stuck to these two models, we would be imprisoned in moral immanentism, and also, we would deprive the complex moral praxis of man of its funding dimension, which is the relationship to the appealing transcendence of the other Thou. *The model of moral education the core of which is cultivation of the relationship to the Other in the context of a community appears to respond the best to the requirement of a holistic and multidimensional formation of character. Counter to monological ethics of the "first person" and the "third person", dialogical ethics of the "second person" emerges and integrates and includes both previous ones, however, in an appropriate functional structure* (cf. Maritain 1943, 88; Ricoeur 2016, 321–322; Krámský 2015, 148-149; Brestovanský 2019, 206 and others). The integral approach to man and their education enables to maintain respect to transcendence and vice versa, openness to transcendence secures conditions for a holistic formation of man.

## Acknowledgement

The paper originated as an outcome of the project VEGA No. 1/0056/19.

## Notes

- [1] A genetical connection between the movement of self-transcendence and prosocial morality (focused on a dialogical relationship to Thou) was described and heuristically backed up by Martin Dojčár in his publication *Self-Transcendence and Prosociality* (2017).
- [2] *“Handle so, daß du die Menschheit sowohl in deiner Person, als in der Person eines jeden andern jederzeit zugleich als Zweck, niemals bloß als Mittel brauchst.”* (Kant 1785, 429). Translation: *“Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your person or in the person of any other, never simply as a mean but at the same time as an end.”*



## References

- Arendtová, Hannah. 2016. *Eichmann v Jeruzaleme: správa o banalite zla*. Bratislava: Premedia.
- Arendtová, Hannah. 2007. *Vita activa neboli O činném životě*. Praha: Oikoymenh.
- Aristotle. 1934. "Nicomachean Ethics." In *Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 19*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Accessed May 9, 2019. [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu).
- Brestovanský, Martin. 2019. *Hodnoty, vztahy a škola*. Trnava: Typi Universitatis Tyrnaviensis.
- Buber, Martin. 2016. *Řeči o výchově*. Praha: Vyšehrad.
- Dojčár, Martin. 2017. *Self-Transcendence and Prosociality*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1785. *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. Akademie-Ausgabe der Gesammelten Schriften, Band IV. Accessed May 9, 2019. [korpora.zim.uni-duisburg-essen.de](http://korpora.zim.uni-duisburg-essen.de).
- Kant, Immanuel. 1788. *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*. Akademie-Ausgabe der Gesammelten Schriften, Band V. Accessed May 9, 2019. [korpora.zim.uni-duisburg-essen.de](http://korpora.zim.uni-duisburg-essen.de).
- Kohlberg, Lawrence. 1981. *Essays on Moral Development: Vol. 1. The Philosophy of Moral Development*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row.
- Krámský, David. 2015. *Filosofické základy psychologie morálky*. Liberec: Nakladatelství Bor.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1997a. *Být pro druhého*. Praha: Zvon.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1997b. *Existence a ten, kdo existuje*. Praha: Oikoymenh.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1997c. *Totalita a nekonečno*. Praha: Oikoymenh.
- Lipovetsky, Gilles. 2008. *Éra prázdnoty: úvahy o současném individualismu*. Praha: Prostor.
- Lipovetsky, Gilles. 2011. *Soumrak povinnosti: bezbolestná etika nových demokratických časů*. Praha: Prostor.
- Maritain, Jacques. 1943. *Education at the Crossroads*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Plato. 1991. *The Republic of Plato*. Translated with Notes and an Interpretive Essay by Allan Bloom. Basic Books. Accessed May 9, 2019. [www.khamkoo.com](http://www.khamkoo.com).
- Plato. 1961. *Laws*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Accessed May 9, 2019. [ryanfb.github.io](http://ryanfb.github.io).
- Podmanický, Ivan, Andrej Rajský et al. 2014. *Prosociálnosť a etická výchova: skúsenosti a perspektívy*. Trnava: Typi Universitatis Tyrnaviensis.
- Rajský, Andrej, Ivan Podmanický et al. 2016. *Človek človeku: k prameňom etickej výchovy*. Trnava: Typi Universitatis Tyrnaviensis.
- Rajský, Andrej, Marek Wiesenganger et al. 2018. *Pomoc druhému na ceste cnosti: k filozoficko-etickým aspektom prosociálnosti*. Trnava: Typi Universitatis Tyrnaviensis.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 2016. *O sobě samém jako o jiném*. Praha: Oikoymenh.
- Rybák, David. 2019. *Étos a světy dějin*. Praha: Karolinum.
- Sokol, Jan. 2014. *Etika, život, instituce: pokus o praktickou filosofii*. Praha: Vyšehrad.
- Vacek, Pavel. 2013. *Psychologie morálky a výchova charakteru žáků*. Hradec Králové: Gaudeamus.
- Walker, Lawrence J. 2004. "Gus in the GAP: Bridging the Judgment-action Gap in Moral Functioning." In *Moral Development, Self and Identity*, edited by D. K. Lapsley and D.N arvaez, 1–20. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

# The Influence of Emotions on Spiritual Life in the Discernment of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint John of the Cross

Received July 5, 2019

Revised July 12, 2019

Accepted July 14, 2019

## Key words

Ignatius of Loyola,  
John of the Cross,  
spirituality, emotions,  
discernment of spirits

Spiritual life must be seen as an integration of physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions. Neglecting an integral approach has resulted in many misconceptions and problems among Christians. The presented paper introduces the notion of spiritual discernment that reflects the role that emotions and God's grace have in creating a more profound relationship with God. The paper outlines the principal themes of Ignatius of Loyola and John of the Cross, whose personal experience with spiritual life became a lasting inspiration in spirituality in the Christian West. For both Ignatius of Loyola and John of the Cross, understanding emotions and their place in spiritual life played a major role in their effort to retain some realism. In Christian spirituality, this is a very important precondition for attaining interior freedom and maturity.



## 1 Introduction

Emotions constitute an essential element of our everyday reality and play a significant role in both physical and cognitive life. Damasio (1994, 158) argues that one cannot consider the brain or mind activity separate from the bodily activity. What we have in mind here are not only the emotions of which we are conscious, but also the so-called “basal emotions” that accompany the constant experience with our own body. They are also the source of information for our mind to process and appraise. It may seem that the Self is a product of the mind alone and that the way we perceive ourselves originates in our mind. In fact, we use information sent from our whole body. Therefore, it is impossible to separate purely cognitive functioning from the functions of the body (Barret, Dunbar and Lycet 2007, 376–378).

These findings must be applied to a spiritual life, too. In Christian spirituality, reflection on emotions can be found in “the spiritual discernment”, as one of its key concepts. We discern mainly when we immerse in our inner selves in a quest to understand ourselves, our hidden motivations, both positive and negative, and the callings to change our lives.

Christian Western spirituality adopts a more analytic approach than the Eastern one. That is why we can encounter different stages of personal transformation and improvement of one’s spiritual life. Most commonly, we talk about the stage of *purification, enlightenment and union*.

These stages represent both the level of perfection as well as the ability to work with our own emotions and inclinations, to which we become more resistant and make them a part of the ultimate goal of our spiritual lives. Emotions play a crucial role here, particularly in the stage of purification. Being able to reflect upon one’s own emotions is essential to the experience of spiritual discernment.

In the process of discernment, we try to understand the emotional movements within our souls and the desires that bring us closer to more profound spiritual life. Ignatius noted that our motives are provoked not only by our own decisions, but



### About the author

**ThDr. Radovan Šoltés, PhD.**, serves as Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the Faculty of Greek Catholic Theology of University of Prešov. He has a long professional record in Christian social ethics and spirituality studies conducted at the crossroad of religion, philosophy and psychology. He authored numerous books and articles and is available at [radovan.soltes@unipo.sk](mailto:radovan.soltes@unipo.sk).

also by the movements that occur in our mind without us initiating them. There is nothing extraordinary about that, though. It can be argued that what is explained here could be just an activity of our mind on a more or less conscious level. What puzzled and surprised Ignatius was the fact that these impulses always occurred in certain contexts associated with advancement in spiritual life. Reflecting upon these emotional states and the effects they have, Ignatius recognized that the path God wants us to take becomes clearer (Lonsdale 2003, 93).

*Discernment involves thoughts and emotions that spring from within.* It is up to us to recognize which of them should be given consideration and which should be rejected. We are all conscious of them when experiencing sadness, joy, fear, anger, freedom, discomfort, peace, affection, aversion, etc., but we do not always give them our full attention. Once we truly understand these movements, we get to understand ourselves better and move closer to maturity.

In this paper, we are going to outline the link between emotional experience and spiritual life as presented by Ignatius of Loyola and John of the Cross. At the same time, we are going to provide a psychological and religious view on spiritual discernment. The author is fully aware that the topic is rather broad and goes beyond the scope of this paper. Since reflecting upon emotions in the spiritual life has become rather relevant today, the paper attempts at showing a possible way of discerning the emotional from the spiritual as presented by St. Ignatius and St. John. We based our analysis on *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the essential works of John of the Cross, notably *The Dark Night*.

## 2 A Brief Exposition of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint John of the Cross

The 16th and 17th centuries in the history of Western Christian spirituality gave us several prominent spiritual figures. Spain, a birthplace of two great mystics, Ignatius of Loyola and John of the Cross, has definitely earned its place in history. Ignatius focused more on practical application of contemplative experience, whereas John made use of his theological education.

This period saw a certain shift not only in spiritual life, but also in the realm of science and education in general. The Enlightenment philosophers later termed this milestone the modern age. Among others, Ignatius and John contributed

significantly to the development of spirituality, especially for their ability to grasp and explore their spiritual experience on the intuitive psychological level of that time in a manner, which is still inspiring today.

**Saint Ignatius of Loyola** (1491–1556) was born into a noble Basque family. A tragic injury halted his promising military career as a knight in the service of the Navarra king. Ignatius underwent a religious conversion and gave himself in an unselfish service to Christ and the Church. He is known as a founder of the *Society of Jesus*. His seminal work *The Spiritual Exercises* emerged gradually during his religious conversion. The set of spiritual exercises is a method that can be instrumental in reforming one's spiritual life. In this context, Ignatius introduced the rules for the discernment of the interior movements that we will discuss later in this paper. Other essential texts of Ignatian spirituality are Ignatius's autobiography *A Pilgrim's Journey*, *The Spiritual Diary of St. Ignatius*, *Letters of St. Ignatius*, *The Jesuit Constitution*, and *The Directory of the Spiritual Exercises*.

**John of the Cross** (1542–1591) was born into a poor Spanish family. His life was greatly affected by the encounter with Saint Teresa of Avila, who talked him into becoming a founding member of the reformed – discalced (barefoot) Carmelites. The Calced Carmelites did not show much understanding, though. On the night of 3 December 1577, they took John captive and incarcerated him in Toledo. They wanted to make him renounce the reform. John's incarceration, full of great physical suffering and mental anguish, lasted nine months. All of John's major works were written in that period, namely four books in which he commented his poems about souls longing for the union with God: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night*, *The Spiritual Canticle*, and *The Living Flame of Love*. John's minor works include *Sayings of Light and Love* and *Letters*. Although *The Dark Night* was written later, it reflects John's own spiritual experience. He interpreted his experience with desolation as a process of purgation from ideas and emotions oriented on benefit and not on our love for God.

## 3 Dealing with Emotions in the Rules of Ignatius of Loyola

The notion of *discernment* is often linked with the prompting of the good and evil spirits. The Desert Fathers described their experience with discernment in the similar vein. At the same time, the Fathers acknowledged that the bad thought does not necessarily mean the prompting of the evil spirit.



First of all, it is necessary to clarify exactly what is meant by terms such as *the good spirit, the evil spirit, interior movements, the enemy, or the enemy of human nature* used by Ignatius of Loyola in his rules, especially those concerning the relation between emotions and spiritual life. Given the limited scope of this paper, we will focus on the first four rules.

The easiest option would be to reduce the issue of discernment to the prompting of the good or evil spirits and associate them with demons or good angels or even with God's spirit. The idea of discernment is far more complex. The simplified interpretation, prevailing in folk piety, has it that the good and evil spirits wage the battle for this world, while the human person is being omitted. We can then ask, "*Where in all this are our spirit, intellect, and experience?*" In his teaching on discernment, Ignatius focused on better understanding of our own desires, inclinations, and plans that have an effect on our spiritual life and our view of God and the world around us [1].

Ignatius' rules for the stage of purification concern mostly managing the emotions we encounter while advancing in our spiritual lives. When Ignatius talk about managing our emotions, he does not mean only the positive emotions in consolation, but mainly understanding the negative emotions that evoke different desires and motivate us to act in a certain manner. We should not undermine the importance of emotions, but at the same time, we must not let them become a decisive factor in our decision-making and actions in spiritual life.

Karl Rahner thinks modern people have a problem distinguishing between psychological and spiritual life. Living life spontaneously, they will hardly be able to discern something they have discovered in their consciousness as a true work of God and understand His motivations. They are more likely to seek explanations in hormones, impacts of weather, genetic factors, echoes of the subconscious, complexes, and thousands of other things instead of accepting that they experience the work of God, His angel, or the Devil (Rahner 2007, 133–134). Naturally, psychology has its important place here, too. It needs to be said, however, that discernment is about experience with different interior movements that come from situations related to advancement in spiritual life.

Speaking about temptation, we mean thoughts and movements that distract us from our life purpose of being in relationship with God. Temptation does not present itself as something evil, but rather under the appearance of something good and attractive. On the other hand, we somehow sense that the attractive does not always mean good and

right. The first rule of Ignatius explains this inner conflict (Ignatius of Loyola 1968, 314):

*In the case of those who go from one mortal sin to another, the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures. He fills their imagination with sensual delights and gratifications, the more readily to keep them in their vices and increase the number of their sins. With such persons, the good spirit uses a method which is the reverse of the above. Making use of the light of reason, he will rouse the sting of conscience and fill them with remorse.*

According to the tradition of the Fathers, human nature participates in the Divine life. To live in harmony with one's human nature means to pursue the ideal of spiritual life. It is in human nature to enter into communion with God and transcend oneself towards Him (Mikluščák 1996, 24). It is the aim of the enemy to break this communion, which is only possible if one focuses too much on himself or herself. It is understandable that those who are self-absorbed seek satisfaction in fulfilling their different desires, while ignoring the deeper moral judgement and consideration of faith. The action of the "evil spirit" is therefore linked with everything that makes us lose faith, hope, and love (Ignatius of Loyola 1968, 317). A person who decides to reform one's life or improve its quality is going to be confronted with various thoughts that could inspire and sway them in different directions. These thoughts also penetrate into a somatic life and can induce the states of consolation, peace and joy, and even frustration or discomfort.

Ignatius believes that at this stage, the "evil spirit" affects mostly our emotional being and is ready to offer all-rational reasons to justify such actions. According to Marko Rupnik, the "evil spirit" finds every pretext to ensure us that we are on the right path. What prevails is the impression of seeming pleasure from sin. The "evil spirit" stirs our imagination and prompts our rationalization and justification into thinking that the way of life we have chosen is right and not as immoral as we might have thought and that we actually need it (Rupnik 2001, 80).

It is important to acknowledge that Ignatius believed that temptation enters into an already flowing stream of thoughts, reflections, emotions, perceptions, and motivations utilizing the contents from the various means of culture, media, art, etc. This day and age provide us with a plethora of stimuli that foster the mentality of sin. We live in a culture that places a great emphasis on an individual and his or her needs at any cost; it is a culture governed by the rules of economics and finances resulting in aggressive attitudes to-

wards one another; it is a culture with a prevailing dictate of fashion and keeping up with media trends, etc. (Rupnik 2002, 60). From time to time, we can pause in our routine way of life, feel regrets, and even enter into the sacrament of reconciliation. After a short while, however, many of us return to the way of life we are accustomed to.

In the phase when a person “*goes from one grave sin to another*”, the evil spirit plays with *emotions*, while the good spirit takes care of *reason* in order to detach it from the emotions and create discomfort, we call *remorse*. *Peace* and *discomfort* are states somewhere in-between reason, will and emotions. *Peace* can be defined as a state in which our emotions and reason are in harmony, working together towards one common goal. On the other hand, *discomfort* arises when emotions and reason are in conflict working towards separate goals (Rupnik 2001, 77).

We are all familiar with a situation when our desires get into a conflict with rational judgement telling us, “[a]lthough it is pleasant, you know that what you are getting yourself into is not going to be good...” Surely, at times discomfort can even be provoked by contrasting thoughts. Important is to acknowledge that we all have a natural tendency to seek peace and follow the alluring movements that might not lead us to the good, even if they help us rid ourselves of the inner conflict. We often refer to it as rationalization of will when we come up with all the reasons that justify our behavior and action. Naturally, we can be very resourceful in finding enough arguments to justify our decisions or actions. In fact, we are somewhere between two poles of our being. We constantly need to discern where we are in our life and where we are heading.

In the two following rules of discernment, Ignatius shows us what is happening in the soul of a person who has decided to enter into the relationship with God and helps us make sense of it.

The second rule explains how “[i]n the case of those who go on earnestly striving to cleanse their souls from sin and who seek to rise in the service of God our Lord to greater perfection, the method pursued is the opposite of that mentioned in the first rule. Then it is characteristic of the evil spirit to harass with anxiety, to afflict with sadness, to raise obstacles backed by fallacious reasonings that disturb the soul. Thus, he seeks to prevent the soul from advancing. It is characteristic of the good spirit, however, to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and peace. This he does by making all easy, by removing all obstacles so that the soul goes forward in doing good.” (Ignatius of Loyola 1968, 315).

While the characteristic of the evil interior movement is to break the unity between a human being and God by raising doubts, the good spirit affects our emotional life when we experience peace, joy from a prayer, or love for God. We perceive our life as full of hope and purpose. Ignatius refers to this positive experience as *consolation*, which can also manifest itself through tears. The third rule describes consolation as follows (Ignatius of Loyola 1968, 316):

*I call it spiritual consolation when an interior movement aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrows for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to praise and service God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.*

However, it is important to note that consolation can be linked with some problems that can arise at the beginning of someone's spiritual life. At this crucial time, consolation might be perceived as a criterion for assessing the quality of the spiritual life. It needs to be pointed out that one must cautiously distinguish the time of consolation and its previous cause. Moments of *natural consolation* that come from listening to music, singing, a thought we heard in a sermon, natural beauty, watching sunrise or emotional religious events occur in our lives quite often. *Divinely effected consolation* must not be confused with the consolations when a believer experiences beautiful moments of joy that accompany his or her faith but do not inherently come from that faith. In this sense, consolation *is caused* by some external impulse [2].

For Ignatius, consolation is first and foremost the *consolation without any previous cause*, although he does not undermine the significance of *natural consolation* in our spiritual life, provided that it leads us to the good. The *divine consolation* is always coupled with the increase in hope, faith, and love for God. It must always be reflected in the context of relational orientation towards God.

We must bear in mind that for Ignatius, consolation is not the goal of spiritual life. Nor it is the assessment criterion of the spiritual life quality. It could even become a problem. When our interest is limited to seeking consolation, we might later



consider its absence and the state of *desolation* as our failure or even detachment from God. John of the Cross examined this theme in more detail. Today, we can see some renaissance of the teaching of the Messalians who equated consolation with the state of grace and desolation with the loss of it. It was a rather confusing concept with regard to spiritual life. Different Eastern synods denounced this Messalian heresy (Špidlík 2005, 38).

From psychological and spiritual perspectives, spiritual life cannot be a state of permanent spiritual euphoria. After all, the experience of many mystics proves just that. In the state affected by emotions, one cannot be free enough. Strong positive movements awake grand resolutions, which often turn out to be impossible to fulfil once the motivation built on emotions fades away.

The fourth rule revolves around the theme of *desolation*. Desolation is nothing extraordinary; it belongs to every person's spiritual experience and Ignatius describes it as follows (Ignatius of Loyola 1968, 317):

*I call desolation what is entirely the opposite of what is described in the third rule, as darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord: because as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts which come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts which come from desolation.*

Desolation can result in emotional abatement, feelings of helplessness and despair. The feelings of spiritual abandonment and loneliness are painful inner states of spiritual desolation. It may seem to us that God has forgotten about us or that He does not care and punishes us instead (Królíkowsky 2010, 40). The enemy turns this emotional turmoil, our painful wounds and stressful situations to his advantage. There are times in our lives when we cannot say that we are well. Yet we are not aware of our relationship with God being disrupted by sin or neglect of our spiritual life. In other words, when we do not feel content, we often do not understand why we feel this way – and that is how we experience desolation. Desolation can provoke aversion towards the advancement in spiritual life and spiritual activities in general.

Since we have decided to take God seriously and are not easily consumed by desires that could lead to sin, the enemy's tactics is to shift the focus of attention from per-

son's emotions to reason. Giving rational justifications, the enemy questions the atmosphere of trust in which the relationship between God and a human person flourishes. Reason is confronted with different constructs, which always revolve around thinking: how am I going to feel? What am I going to do? It is always about caring for own "Self" (Rupnik 2001, 84).

Desolation, nevertheless, can have a natural character too. It may also be linked to our physical or mental weakness, e.g. when we feel overloaded and exhausted or experience failure. Negative feelings of being lonely, of self-doubt and detachment from God follow easily. This state of abandonment is not a sign of failure in one's spiritual life. These states carry an element of risk, though. In this "chaotic" inner turmoil, one tends to rethink previous resolutions and his or her relationship towards God and the others and, in an extreme scenario, thinking – *I am done, there is no point of moving further*. In time of desolation, one might think that this state will last for a long time and that the time of consolation will never come. This can sometimes lead to a state of depression. All those who decided to work on their spiritual life, including Ignatius, experienced such states of crisis. From his own experience with spiritual guidance, Ignatius knew that exercitants engaged in spiritual exercises had the same experience. Ignatius insists that the time of desolation is never the time to reverse previous good decisions (Ignatius of Loyola 1968, 318).

It is therefore necessary to discern between the desolation arising from psychological distress manifesting itself in frustration, or even depression (here, the concerns about being tried by the evil spirit are not right) from the desolation connected with our spiritual life caused by our own lukewarmness and feelings of being separated from God. It can also be a result of the crisis in our relationships, and breakups.

Ignatius says that one cannot be just carried away willfully by various movements. Emotions are unstable and affected by our physiological setting at any given moment. Thomas Green argues that ninety percent of our problems seem easier after a good night's rest. If we leave our decision for the next day, we often learn that we no longer react to a certain problem, situation, or temptation as dramatically as the day before (Green 2001, 129). Surely, it is not an easy task to do. In situations when we experience great emotional movements within our souls that prod us into doing/or not doing something about which we know or perhaps suspect that it might not be good for us, it is advised to refrain from making any decision in that very moment. We are not free enough to do so.

## 4 Working with Emotions in Spiritual Life According to John of the Cross

John of the Cross, just like Ignatius of Loyola, applies the knowledge of psychology of his era to spiritual life. The mystical path to the Divine union is a transition from “a prison” of dissipated inclinations towards the inner spiritual freedom. We are transitioning in spiritual pain that accompanies the withering and dying of an old man. John of the Cross says that on his path to God, a mystic is *passively* immersed into two arenas of the “dark night” being purged from *emotions* (*the night of the senses*), through which he had perceived life and experienced the joy from God’s calling, and from the *desire* in spiritual life (*the night of the spirit*). Embarking on the spiritual journey of faith and deeper relationship with God entails *interior conversion*. This conversion, evoked by God’s calling, enkindles a strong desire for God. Therefore, faith is often accompanied with consolations; the human often finds pleasure in ascetic actions that he or she may not have before (or even after) considered important. But one must be vigilant, since these experiences pose a risk of becoming the main criterion determining spiritual life. Spiritual growth thus requires a transition into another phase of spiritual life, but people are not equipped to do so on their own. In the words of John of the Cross, “*how greatly they need God to set them in the state of proficients. This He does by bringing them into the dark night.*” (John of the Cross 1959, I, 7, 5). Since the relationship with God is realized through both the emotional and rational dimensions, one must be purged on a sensual as well as spiritual level.

John does not limit the process of transformation to *the dark night*. Entering the dark night requires conversion and active work on one’s moral life. When John speaks about a change, he means an utter transition from the spiritual prison of sin through conversion, which is accompanied with active work on one’s spiritual life, through deadening, towards strengthening the virtues of faith, hope and love for God. John refers to this as *the active night* and elaborates it further in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. Important is, however, that the conversion and the alleviation of one’s sins is not the end, but only the beginning of the “ascent of the mount”. At this moment, in the so-called *passive night*, God enters into the process of spiritual maturation, when He continues transforming the soul through *the night of the senses* and *the night of the spirit* towards *the union* in pure love between the Himself and the soul [3].

### 4.1 Entering the Night of Senses

John of the Cross compares this stage of spiritual life to the mother-child relationship (John of the Cross 1959, I, 1, 2).

*It must be known, then, that the soul, after it has been definitely converted to the service of God, is, as a rule, spiritually nurtured and caressed by God, even as is the tender child by its loving mother, who warms it with the heat of her bosom and nurtures it with sweet milk and soft and pleasant food, and carries it and caresses it in her arms; but, as the child grows bigger, the mother gradually ceases caressing it, and, hiding her tender love, puts bitter aloes upon her sweet breasts, sets down the child from her arms and makes it walk upon its feet, so that it may lose the habits of a child and betake itself to more important and substantial occupations. The loving mother is like the grace of God, for, as soon as the soul is regenerated by its new warmth and fervor for the service of God, He treats it in the same way; He makes it to find spiritual milk, sweet and delectable, in all the things of God, without any labor of its own, and also great pleasures in spiritual exercises, for here God is giving to it the breast of His tender love, even as to a tender child.*

At first, beginners in spiritual life experience happy times. They find *great consolation* in different spiritual exercises: prayers, penance, sacred texts reading, etc. without any extra effort. They are drawn to it by the consolation and pleasure that they find in their new spiritual life and in many spiritual exercises and prayers. John warns, however, that just as children, these exercitants too are not prepared for the real life yet, since they have faults and imperfections. For instance, such persons see the purpose of prayer in, “*experiencing sensible pleasure and devotion and they strive to obtain this by great effort, wearying and fatiguing their faculties and their heads; and when they have not found this pleasure they become greatly discouraged, thinking that they have accomplished nothing. Through these efforts they lose true devotion and spirituality, which consist in perseverance, together with patience and humility and mistrust of themselves, that they may please God alone.*” (John of the Cross 1959, I, 6, 6).



The experience of faith can be easily confused with a psychological experience based only on the idea of faith. The experience of immediate closeness to God might only be a sign of fervor rather than something arising from the depth and purity of faith itself, which is the main determinant for us when talking about the actual presence and actions of God. What prevails in this stage of spiritual life, nevertheless, are images and different forms and techniques of meditation in which one easily finds pleasure.

In order to embark on a more advanced path of spiritual life, God must wean us from the “breasts of consolation”. It is not an easy task. The soul, just as a child, feels reluctant about abandoning all that brings it consolation. In that moment, the joy and consolation the soul had encountered before, starts to disappear. There are many who want God to guide them. In reality, they are unwilling to enter the maturity of spiritual life. They shun the trials, flee from the narrow road of life, and seek the broad road of their own consolation. They persistently beseech God to bring them to the state of perfection, yet when He wills to conduct them through the initial trials, they are unwilling to suffer them (John of the Cross 1973, II, 27).

Just like a small child learning to walk alone, a mystic begins with a *passive purgation of the dark night*. It is *the night of the senses*, through which a mystic detaches from himself in order to advance to a higher level of love for God (John of the Cross 1959, I, 7, 5–1, 8, 1). What John describes as the night is indeed *the darkness*; when we turn the light off in the room, the visual faculty is nourished by the objects in the room. Even if they cannot be seen, they did not change at all. *The night of the spirit* is “*the privation of every kind of pleasure which belongs to the desire*” (John of the Cross 1962, I, 3, 1), so that God can elevate us to a more profound spiritual life. John compares it to tearing through “the veil” that hindered us from seeing and reaching God, since all we had seen was the emotional aspect of this “sweet” encounter with God (John of the Cross 1973, I, 29–32).

At the outset of this spiritual life reform, we gradually lose pleasures and “appetite” for meditation. Despite that, beginners cannot, or dare not to detach themselves from meditation. They still labor, although they find little sweetness or none from a prayer. Their soul no longer feels God’s presence in the earlier manner. It must be *contemplated* [4].

Into the dark night souls begin to enter when God draws them forth from the state of beginners, which is the state of those who *meditate* [5] on the spiritual journey, and begins to set them in the state of *progressives*, which is the path of

those who *contemplate* – through to the state of the perfect, which is *the union of the souls with God* (John of the Cross 1959, I, 1, 1; I, 2, 8).

According to John, it is very important to distinguish the *cause of desolation*. Do spiritual aridities proceed from purgation or from sins and imperfections that lure us from God? John offers three principal signs for *the night of the senses* (John of the Cross 1959, I, 9):

- *A soul finds no pleasure or consolation in the things of God; it also fails to find it in any created thing*. Spiritual desolation permeates the whole of the emotional life and it does not proceed from committed sins or some dissipated inclinations.
- *The second sign of desolation* is that a man immersed in desolation, which hinders him from intense experience of God, believes that he *experiences the said purgation with painful care and solitude*, thinking that he is not serving God, but is backsliding in his spiritual life.
- *The third sign of the night of the senses* is that the soul *can no longer meditate in the imaginative sense* as before, however effort it might put in it. God communicates Himself to the souls by an act of simple contemplation, which cannot be attained through imagination or fantasy on the sensual level [6].

John notes that not all those who walk are brought by God to contemplation. That is why He never completely weans some persons from the sensual and emotional experience in spiritual life, or He only does that for a short period of time. On the other hand, many cease to grow because they misunderstand their “dark aridity”, or even if they do, they are not willing to pay the price for their spiritual advancement.

## 4.2 The Night of the Spirit

The second night into which God leads the soul is *the night of the spirit*. It does not happen right away, though. John says: “*It is wont to pass a long time, even years, after leaving that state of beginners, in exercising itself in that of proficients*” (John of the Cross 1959, II, 1, 1). The need for the second night arises from the prevailing imperfection of the soul, which, despite the purgation of the senses, is left with imperfections that are deeply rooted within. John compares it to the roots and the branches of a tree. Even if you remove the branch, the roots remain. Removing the branch, which represents the sin, does not suffice. It is necessary to search for and remove its cause. Thus, the purpose behind the night of the spirit is to go down to the roots of imperfection that are

often hidden deep within our subconscious and in our desires, affections, and habits (John of the Cross 1959, II, 2, 1–5).

The soul suffers many afflictions prompted by the process of liberating itself from the deepest roots of chaos and disturbances, and from the fancy in its own “Self”: “*This is a painful disturbance, involving many misgivings, imaginings, and strivings which the soul has within itself, wherein, with the apprehension and realization of the miseries in which it sees itself, it fancies that it is lost and that its blessings have gone forever. Wherefore the spirit experiences pain and sighing so deep that they cause it vehement spiritual groans and cries, to which at times it gives vocal expression; when it has the necessary strength and power it dissolves into tears, although this relief comes but seldom.*” (John of the Cross 1959, II, 9, 7).

The process of a passage through the night is a challenge. For many it is like a suffering of purgatory [7], because they are “*being purged here on earth in the same manner as there, since this purgation is that which would have to be accomplished there*” (John of the Cross 1959, II, 6, 6). This purgatory is a transformation towards a new outlook on living with God. This is a very important realization. Leading the soul into afflictions of the night is not a result of God playing with it or a result of His arbitrary will. In John’s words, “*these afflictions are not felt by the soul as coming from the said Wisdom... They are felt as coming from the weakness and imperfection which belong to the soul; without such purgation, the soul cannot receive its Divine light, sweetness and delight*” (John of the Cross 1959, II, 10, 4).

Just as Thomas Green, we can ask, “*How long will the souls have to endure this suffering?*” The question is understandable. Although the road of suffering, which is the night, is profitable and purposeful, it is not easy to accept the necessity of being immersed into the night. Green responds that the state of the night will last as long as we shall live. The process of purgation in our earthly life *never really ends*. It will last as long as we are exposed to the struggle with our own sinfulness, which is a lifetime endeavor. What is important, however, is to change our perspective with regard to the process of purgation. The dark night is a formation towards the interior freedom, when questions are no longer asked. This kind of questioning entails subconscious sadness over the life before the night of the senses. Although we might accept the process of purgation as inevitable, when we actually go through it, we often wish to return to the state when religion brought benefits. Radicalism of the night of the senses, which culminates in the night of the spirit, truly liberates us from this kind of reasoning (Green 1998, 165).

For John, God is patient. He always respects our freedom, never forces us to act and we always have an option to set limits for His work within ourselves. If we backslide, we will never be able to complete our transformation as per our will. Thus, “*The night of sense is common and comes to many; these are the beginners... The night of the spirit is the portion of very few, and these are they that are already practiced and proficient.*” (John of the Cross 1959, I, 8, 1).

At times, the anguish of the night cuts so deep that we are voided of the light and all the securities we once vividly experienced. *The night* is not just a metaphor for weakness, but also a profound existential experience of finality. When the soul “*sees itself that which it saw not before, it is clear to it that not only it is unfit to be seen by God, but deserves His abhorrence, and that He does indeed abhor it*” (John of the Cross 1959, II, 10, 2). That is the common reason why so many people turn back and never move from *the night of the senses* to *the night of the spirit*.

The mystery of the night is associated with *spiritual suffering* which is linked to the mystical silence of God who in our emotions was “too loud”. Suffering is something that *gets in our way*. We find ourselves in the state of feeling *helpless* and *lifeless* to change anything in our current state. In suffering, we are deprived of the authority over ourselves and as such, we are painfully confronted with the limitations of our own faculties. The active efforts to moderate the urgent attack of such passivity, to eliminate it or drive it away proves futile most of the time (Trajtelová 2011, 180). All there is left for us to do, is to *accept this suffering*. However, it is not about its blind acceptance or even seeking it out; that would surely be a sign of pathology. It is surely important to grapple with the suffering that can be relieved. On the other hand, in instances, when we are confronted with the suffering that transcends our abilities to eliminate it, it appears pointless to reason in an effort to suppress it or change the course of the events. Questioning the purpose goes beyond the active effort to overcome this suffering and opens up to believe that despite all, God is not “on the other side”. Despite the feelings of alienation, we can continue to establish our relationship with God.

Suffering guides a mystic into his relationship with God. A mystic learns to *accept God*, irrespective of whether he is experiencing joy or feeling empty. Love for God does not stand or fall on emotional ecstasy or any other form of validation. A mystic thus becomes equipped to receive the gift, which is God. He gives up all that is not God. *Passivity* then could be that unique disposition for this essential reception. It is also its inevitable prerequisite. The only thing that is



*active* is the effort to equip oneself for an adoption of this receptive attitude. According to John, this faculty come to us in *the dark night*. The faculty linked with *indifference* teaches us that *the gift* (of God) cannot be obtained, grasped or embraced by our own efforts alone. A mystic thus becomes *contemplative in action* and *active in contemplation*, as highlighted by Ignatius of Loyola (Trajtelová 2011, 188–189), John's spirituality can rightly be called the Paschal spirituality; hence, he came to be called "of the Cross".

## 5 Conclusion

Recent decades have witnessed that many, predominantly charisma-oriented movements within the Christian churches, place emphasis on joy (1 Thessalonians 5: 16) and invite us to be brave to establish our relationship with God on an emotional level too, for living with God must essentially lead to this joy.

Surely, joy is a very pleasant and rewarding emotion, but it should not be overrated. Our psyche is equipped with certain faculties that enable it to process external stimuli. If we find ourselves in a situation or an environment that is new, unsafe or worrying, perhaps we will be scared, experience distress, and insecurity. This initial experience might change after some time and we get used to it and learn to navigate our way through it. It is an *adaptation mechanism* of our psyche which is responsible for our coping with challenging (even the extremely challenging) situations. It works just as well when pleasant emotions are concerned. If we could get what we yearn for at this very moment, it would most likely make us happy. After some time, however, we would probably find out that what initially made us happy is taken for granted now. We adapt not only to unpleasant situations, but also to the pleasant and joy-evoking ones. A constant feeling of enjoyment and delight thus becomes impossible to attain, just as the emotional intensity of our mental experience cannot be permanent either (Šatura 2006, 27). In other words, our utopias "work" only in our minds, never in a real life. Our anticipated emotions brought about by some important positive event are always stronger than the real ones. With time, positive emotions fade away and the initial strong and positive event no longer fascinates us.

This natural faculty of our psyche also concerns the joy and delight enkindled by faith or positive religious experience. If such delight is coupled with the feeling of happiness, it will eventually lose its appeal. Such an intense emotion, which delight certainly is, is often experienced by people who have undergone a religious conversion. It can be a very strong

motivation for them. After all, our motivations and emotions are often intertwined. So, what appeals to us and touches us on emotional level, becomes the impetus for our motivation. For instance, people experiencing hardship or those finding themselves in situations over which they have no or minimal control, embrace the most intense emotions during a prayer (Zaviš 2012, 81). The problem arises when such delight becomes our goal, or the criterion determining whether our spiritual life, and the relationship with God, is the true one. The role of emotions in relation to praying should not be overestimated. Otherwise, we might fall into a trap of creating our own image of God based on our psychological and spiritual expectations (Zawada 1999, 23).

For this reason, mystics do not seek emotional delight in spiritual life. Just the contrary; immersion into contemplation requires, in a certain context, an attitude of indifference towards emotional delight. John of the Cross thinks that absence of emotional delight can indicate a beginning of spiritual transformation and embarking on a journey that leads to a deeper union with God. Spiritual delight is primarily about experiencing freedom and not about emotions. Emotions may be just its accompanying element. If we based our spiritual life only on "having some favors" from it and if the experiential aspect of our spiritual life became a main criterion for assessing its quality, we could eventually be disappointed. Ignatius of Loyola warned against the uncritical attitude towards different forms of consolation, especially the consolation presenting itself on the emotional level and against making decisions under the influence of such false consolation (Ignatius of Loyola 1968, 336).

John and Ignatius both believed that there is a place for positive emotions in our spiritual lives. What is there to remember, however, is that the key criterion for their acceptance should be the goal we all strive for. Only then are we equipped enough to discern whether we are indeed searching for the true relationship with God. This will essentially lead to our interior freedom. Otherwise, we run the risk of staying bound by our inclinations that in reality rob us of the opportunity to attain this freedom.

## Notes

- [1] In one of his notes to *The Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius establishes three kinds of thoughts in a person's mind: "one which is strictly my own, and arises wholly from my own free will; two others which come from without, the one from the good spirit, and the other from the evil one." (Ignatius of Loyola 1968, 32).
- [2] In spirituality, consolation and desolation need to be distinguished. Just as consolation, desolation too can be a manifestation of psychological sensing or brain activity. In some states of epilepsy, without external manifestations in a form of epileptic spasms, patients exhibited feelings of ecstatic happiness and existential bliss that people often considered to be of divine nature. However, it is not always about the diagnosis of epilepsy, since the states mentioned above can also be provoked by the activity of neural systems in the brain, which can be affected by external factors (Koukolik 2012, 177).
- [3] See Norbert Cummins for more detailed schemes of the individual phases of spiritual growth (Cummins 1994, 46, 53, 84, 94, 104, 126). Another well-known interpreter is Antonio Maria Sicari (Sicari 2011).
- [4] For John of the Cross, *contemplation* is an expression of the state of the soul and its attitude towards God in times of spiritual aridity, when the soul is set at rest and becomes passive (not indifferent though). It means that the soul is left to God's initiative; He transforms the soul according to His will. (John of the Cross 1962, II, 12, 6).
- [5] It would be wrong to claim that John undervalued the beginner's stage in the spiritual life. As of his recommendations, beginners should engage in meditation and spiritual exercises as well as use the figurative imagination. He says about this beginner's stage, "*individuals in this state should be given matter for meditation and discursive reflection, and they should by themselves make interior acts and profit in spiritual things from the delight and satisfaction of the senses. For by being fed with the relish of spiritual things, the appetite is torn away from sensual things and weakened in regard to the things of the world.*" (John of the Cross 1973, III, 32).
- [6] It is important to note that although we lack enthusiasm and consolation, our life in prayer is still healthy despite the emotional aridity, if our virtues are alive (Green 1998, 105).
- [7] "*A person's suffering at this time cannot be exaggerated; they are but little less than the sufferings of purgatory.*" (John of the Cross 1973, I, 21).



## References

- Barret, Louise, Rodin Dunbar, and John Lycet. 2007. *Evoluční psychologie člověka*. Praha: Portál.
- Cummins, Norbert. 1994. *Osvobození k radosti: úvod do nauky sv. Jana od Kříže*. Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství.
- Damasio, Antonio. 1994. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: Putnam.
- Green, Thomas H. 1998. *Keď vy-schne studňa*. Trnava: Dobrá kniha.
- Green, Thomas H. 2001. *Kúkoľ medzi pšenickou*. Trnava: Dobrá kniha.
- Ignatius of Loyola. 1968. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. Chicago: Loyola Press.
- John of the Cross. 1962. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. Accessed June 30, 2019. [jesus-passion.com](http://jesus-passion.com).
- John of the Cross. 1959. *The Dark Nigh of the Soul*. Accessed June 30, 2019. [jesus-passion.com](http://jesus-passion.com).
- John of the Cross. 1973. *The Living Flame of Love*. Accessed June 30, 2019. [www.saintsbooks.net](http://www.saintsbooks.net).
- Koukolík, František. 2012. *Nejspanilejší ze všech bohů*. Praha: Karolinum.
- Królikowski, Waclaw. 2010. *Dynamika duchovných cvičení svätého Ignáca z Loyoly*. Trnava: Dobrá kniha.
- Lonsdale, David. 2003. *Oči k vidění, uši k slyšení: úvod do ignaciánské spirituality*. Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství.
- Miklušček, Pavel. 1996. *Kristológia II*. Spišské Podhradie: CMBF UK.
- Rahner, Karl. 2007. *Dynamický prvek v církvi*. Olomouc: Refugium.
- Rupnik, Marko I. 2001. *O duchovním otcovství a rozlišování*. Velehrad: Refugium.
- Rupnik, Marko I. 2002. *O duchovním rozlišování: cesta ke zralosti*. Velehrad: Refugium.
- Sicari, Antonio M. 2011. *Divino cantico di San Giovanni della Croce*. Roma: Jaca Book.
- Šatura, Vladimír. 2006. *Žíme intenzívnejšie*. Trnava: Dobrá kniha.
- Špidlík, Tomáš. 2005. *Ignác – starec*. Velehrad: Refugium.
- Trajtelová, Jana. 2011. *Vzdialenosť a blízkosť mystiky: fenomenologická štúdia*. Trnava: FF TU.
- Zaviš, Monika. 2012. "Fenómén modlitby v psychológii náboženstva." *Theologos* 14 (2): 79–87.
- Zawada, Marian. 1999. *Karmelitánska meditácia*. Bratislava: Lúč.

# Cognitive Science and Spirituality

Received August 26, 2019

Revised September 8, 2019

Accepted September 10, 2019

**Key words**

Cognitive science, Default Mode Network, spirituality, meditation, self-reference

The study provides description and discussion on research in cognitive sciences in regard to spirituality. Meditation research shows that long-term meditators can sustain high amplitude brain oscillations and phase-synchrony during meditation. Differences acquired during meditation can persist in the brain after formal practice and thus change everyday life. Intensive long-term meditation can result in increased cortical thickness, which can slow age-related thinning of the frontal cortex. Influenced brain areas are connected with attention, interoception, and sensory processing. Hypnotic suggestion can diminish unpleasantness of pain while its other qualities, including intensity, remain unaltered. Mind-wandering was found to decrease happiness during all activities. This uniquely human trait, which typically constitutes half of the human mind activity, correlates with the activity of the so-called *Default Mode Network*. This network can be quieted with the help of spiritual practices, which can result in the state which in many respects resembles awakening, enlightenment, and union with God. One case of such transformation is described using his own account of his path and current state of consciousness.



We currently still do not have the theory of everything: we do not know even the basic laws which operate in the universe in their complete form. Even if we had such knowledge, it could be, and very probably would be impossible to make exact and reliable deductions from it about more complex phenomena in our universe, like are, for example, many aspects of and processes in human mind, human beings and human society. Because of that, all extrapolations from even our best scientific theories which would want to say something about phenomena which do not belong to the domains which are exactly described by their respective theories, are at high risk of being wrong; and many of them therefore probably are wrong.

Because of this it may be wise not to accept any such extrapolations, which may pretend to be consequences of scientific theories, at least until we indeed have a final theory of everything and are able to logically and exactly deduce propositions in question from it. Even then it will be questionable whether we should accept them, for other reasons, but until this prerequisite is met, we have even more reasons to not accept them – or their negations – on the basis of scientific theories alone [1].

I want to illustrate this with one example. In the era of Newtonian physics, it seemed to many that since according to this theory the phenomena which it describes are fully determined by initial state and physical laws, all phenomena of the universe are fully deterministic. This was an extrapolation. From the fact that the Newtonian laws of motion predict with great precision the movement of heavenly bodies and other objects and thus seem to show their behavior as deterministic it was derived that everything is deterministic, including all that comprises us, humans; so our behavior seemed to these thinkers also to be fully deterministic [2]. But later, quantum physics was formulated, which shows material phenomena in a different light. Now I am not claiming that quantum physics, for example, implies or even suggests that we have free will in the sense which would defy both determinism and randomness, but this theory certainly states that phenomena of small scale it describes are not fully deterministic. Thus we can see that many have come to a wrong conclusions in the past, both in this case as in many others, when they made extrapolations from the domain of the theory (a sphere in which it is proved to describe phenomena with great precision) to the space outside of its domain. Therefore, it would be wise to be careful, because we know that today we still do not have the complete theory of the universe. We should be cautious in all our extrapolations from any scientific research, be it physics, biology (including evolutionary theory), psychology, cognitive sciences, and oth-



## About the author

**Mgr. Ing. Michal Kutáš, PhD.**, is philosopher interested in spirituality, both current and traditional. His published works include articles on the issues of free will, identity, logic, science, evolution and spirituality, as well as translations of philosophical texts from English to Slovak. His email address is [michal.kutas@gmail.com](mailto:michal.kutas@gmail.com).

ers. Perhaps it would be best to just not accept any such extrapolations or take them as inspiration only, an inspiration for the thinking, which is tailored primarily for a given sphere of experience; that is, thinking – and possibly perceiving, feeling and experiencing – that has as its main subject given sphere of experience. Because of this, I will try not to do such extrapolations, or at least admit their hypothetical nature. To say something about the domain of spirituality and mysticism on the basis of the knowledge or experience originating in these spheres themselves is another matter: although I think our human inner intuition, experience and “seeing” is subject to errors and illusions, the inner path of wisdom is not made impossible by this fact; just as science is possible, although it cannot exist without the senses, which are subject to errors and illusions, so also inner wisdom, that is, the knowledge of ourselves, is possible, I believe, although our intuition, inner sense and “seeing” of that, which we ultimately are is likewise subject to errors and illusions. My state-

ments belonging to these domains therefore have the status different from my extrapolations from science, although they are subject to errors and illusions too. Yet the fact that some source of knowledge is subject to errors is consistent with the possibility of knowledge and perception based on this source, like in science, so also in spirituality.

Research, I am going to present and discuss, comes from the field of cognitive sciences, which studies human cognitive capacities. It can be interesting or inspiring to those who are interested in spirituality and mysticism.

Let us start with the theme of meditation, which has an important place in spirituality. Meditation is now studied in cognitive sciences by using of scientific methods and various brain-scanning techniques. Lutz *et al.* (2004, 16369), for example, found that “*long-term Buddhist practitioners self-induce sustained electroencephalographic high-amplitude gamma-band oscillations and phase-synchrony during meditation. These electroencephalogram patterns differ from those of controls, in particular over lateral frontoparietal electrodes.*” The meditation training seems to be quite a powerful tool for changing the brain and its processes, as we can see from the fact that “*the high-amplitude gamma activity found in some of these practitioners are, to our knowledge, the highest reported in the literature in a nonpathological context.*” (Lutz *et al.* 2004, 16372).

Synchrony of the oscillations of neural activity is sometimes connected with the presence of consciousness. Moreover, ancient Buddhist texts of the *Pāli Canon* state that through the practice of meditation, unification of mind can be achieved. Can there be some relation between this and another observation of Lutz *et al.* (2004, 16372), which mentions broad synchronization across neural networks of the brain? “*Assuming that the amplitude of the gamma oscillation is related to the size of the oscillating neural population and the degree of precision with which cells oscillate, these data suggest that massive distributed neural assemblies are synchronized with a high temporal precision in the fast frequencies during this state.*”

We can also say that in some sense we can now objectively observe some aspects of the process of meditation in the brain and state that it is somehow connected to the specific forms of brain processes, because “[*t*he endogenous gamma-band synchrony found here could reflect a change in the quality of moment-to-moment awareness, as claimed by the Buddhist practitioners and as postulated by many models of consciousness.” (Lutz *et al.* 2004, 16373).

Lutz *et al.* (2004, 16373) also report, that “*in addition to the meditation-induced effects, we found a difference in the norma-*

*tive EEG spectral profile between the two populations during the resting state before meditation. It is not unexpected that such differences would be detected during a resting baseline, because the goal of meditation practice is to transform the baseline state and to diminish the distinction between formal meditation practice and everyday life.*” In other words, the practice of meditation changes the processes in the brain long-term, as is also an explicit goal of many meditators and spiritual traditions. The practice should lead to inner change that perseveres after it and thus changes the whole life of the person, including its everyday aspects.

Attention, which is one of the core goals of contemplative life, can be deepened. This is not a mere subjective belief; there are some changes that can be objectively measured in the brain, and which seem to be connected to the quality of attention: “*Our study is consistent with the idea that attention and affective processes, which gamma-band EEG synchronization may reflect, are flexible skills that can be trained.*” (Lutz *et al.* 2004, 16373)

Lazar *et al.* (2005) did not focus on the long-term changes in brain processes but studied more “material” aspect of brain regions – their thickness. Thickness of a certain brain region suggests its more frequent use and greater development. Lazar *et al.* (2005, 1893) observed that “*brain regions associated with attention, interoception and sensory processing were thicker in meditation participants than matched controls, including the prefrontal cortex and right anterior insula.*” Note that the regions that were thicker are those connected with abilities meditation practice seeks to develop: attention, perception of stimuli from the outside world (sensory processing) and from body itself (*interoception*). Lazar *et al.* (2005, 1893) also found that thickness of said brain regions correlates with the length of practice, because “*between-group differences in prefrontal cortical thickness were most pronounced in older participants*”. They were also able to determine two brain regions whose thickness correlated with meditation experience. Moreover, they found that regular meditation practice may slow age-related thinning of the frontal cortex. We can summarize that the practice of meditation develops some parts of the brain to such extent that the results manifest in the thickness of these brain regions, indicating significant measure of development.

Other interesting results from the study of human mind concern the paradigmatic form of suffering, pain. In ordinary experience, intensity and unpleasantness of the pain seem to be inseparable, to be essentially connected or even to be the same aspect of it: you cannot have pain without suffering, or at least without unpleasantness in the case of not so intense



pain. Yet, many spiritual traditions and teachings report that due to meditative training, people are able to perceive pain without feeling as much suffering as is typical in human experience, or even without suffering entirely. Ordinary experience, on which ordinary thinking, but also, in most cases, philosophy, is based, can hardly arrive at such view. Yet, scientific research supports spiritual viewpoint in this respect. Rainville *et al.* (1997) used hypnosis to study whether sensory aspects of pain (perception of location, quality and intensity) can be separated from its affective aspects (unpleasantness). Let us note that hypnosis uses suggestion, which is, in the form of autosuggestion, probably one of the key parts of at least some forms of the placebo effect. This effect in turn seems to show, because of its scientifically verifiable results, influence which “mind has over matter”, that is, in some documented cases, astonishing in the eyes of ordinary experience [3].

Rainville *et al.* (1997, 968) explain that “*perceptual dissociation of sensory and affective aspects of the pain experience was achieved with hypnotic suggestions to both increase and decrease pain unpleasantness, without changing the perceived intensity of the pain sensations*”. They found that “*hypnotic suggestions for increased or decreased unpleasantness... altered both the perception of pain affect and the activation within some but not all of [specific] pain-related cortical regions*” (Rainville *et al.* 1997, 969). Primary somatosensory cortex activation, though, was unaltered. Activity in this brain region correlates with sensory dimensions of pain.

These findings do not prove that meditation can lead to lessened suffering in pain, but they open the possibility that affective component can be reduced even if sensory component is not. And if some meditation practices or methods aiming at spiritual transformation use suggestion or autosuggestion, these results point to one possible mechanism of reducing suffering in the presence of stimuli, which typically leads to it. I would like to emphasize that we should not look down on suggestion or autosuggestion and consider them to be something necessarily deceptive or delusional. Because the placebo effect is real and its effects can be beneficial, it is better to view suggestion and autosuggestion rather as a testimony to the power and importance of mind, and possibly also of its priority over matter. Primacy or at least key importance of mind and its development in general is recognized in many spiritual traditions and teachings. And when we look at some specific forms of spiritual practice like repeated affirmations, negations (for example, “I am not this body”) and questions (“Who am I?”), we can speculate whether what can look like autosuggestion is some kind of self-deception, or whether it can contain deeper truth or open the

mind to it (perhaps using thoughts to create some opening in thoughts themselves).

In spirituality, there is sometimes distinction made between the so called “Ego” and the “Self”. Ego is connected with our personal life-story, while the Self “lives in the present”; it can even be understood as the “Presence itself”. As probably the clearest example of this approach, we can mention Eckhart Tolle and his teaching, as he expressed it in his books *The Power of Now* (2004), *A New Earth* (2005), *Silence Speaks* (2003), and others. There are similarities between this concept and a distinction between narrative and momentary self-reference described and studied by Farb *et al.* (2007), who state that the *narrative self-reference* is linking experiences across time, while the *momentary self-reference* is centered on the present. With respect to these two modes of self-reference they distinguish between enduring traits of *narrative focus* (NF) and *experiential focus* (EF).

In their study, Farb *et al.* (2007) compared two groups of participants: one group went through an eight-week course in *mindfulness meditation*, which aims on training the individual to develop attention on the present (“trained participants”), while the other did not (“novices”). Farb *et al.* (2007, 313) report that experiential focus “*yielded focal reductions in self-referential cortical midline regions... associated with NF*.” This points to the fact that these two kinds of focus are indeed different from each other and if trained, they tend to supersede each other. “*These results suggest a fundamental neural dissociation between two distinct forms of self-awareness that are habitually integrated but can be dissociated through attentional training: the self across time and in the present moment*.” (Farb *et al.* 2007, 313).

Typically functioning human brain expresses these two kinds of focus as mingled together: in our flow of consciousness we at some moments perceive what is happening now and in other moments we relate to our past and future and inwardly “comment on it”. But both of these modalities can be trained. We can train ourselves to be present in the now, but also to relate to our personal story, to past and future, to possible scenarios of events and so on. In real life, we train ourselves in both of these modalities, but from my experience it seems that as we grow up, we tend to train ourselves (unconsciously) more in the narrative focus and thus we build strong narrative self-reference over time. But sometimes we also have to be present, and thus the capacity to be aware of the present moment never dies out. For example, based on my observations, but also on observations of others, in the moment of ordinary sense perception, there exists a short period of time (typically it seems to last for a fraction of a second) in which



we are not thinking. In this short period of time we are aware of what the senses are showing us – we just perceive [4]. It seems to me that even sensory perception requires a temporary halt of thinking (thinking in the form of inner monologue or comment, or a “typical full-blown thought”). We are coming back to the present moment many times a day (it seems to me that this “return to the present” happens in most cases at least every few seconds), just because of the need to be aware of the sensory perceptions of the outer reality and of our body [5]. Thus, the experiential focus is never wholly forgotten and replaced by narrative focus, because of the necessities of life, and our ability of momentary self-reference does not wholly die out. In contemplative life, this seed can be then picked up and nourished by various methods (and also without methods), like are different kinds of meditation and contemplation. The interesting aspect of the study of Farb *et al.* (2007) is that their findings correlate with some of “knowledge” accumulated in spirituality; we can see that the brain is changed according to our inner and outer experience with ourselves. Inwardly perceived transformation and transformation of behavior is in a certain sense mirrored also in the state of the brain. We should note that this transformation of behavior is also available for scientific study, although we can see these changes without the aid of science too – and use this experience and knowledge in the spiritual domain directly.

Farb *et al.* (2007) also found areas of the brain, which had greater association with narrative condition (*Posterior Cingulate Cortex, Dorsomedial Prefrontal Cortex*) and those that had greater association with experiential condition (*Posterior Parietal Cortex, Lateral Prefrontal Cortex*) in the “novices”. They also report changes in the brain due to meditation practice: “Following an intensive eight week course in mindfulness meditation, during which individuals learn to develop the capacity to monitor moment-to-moment experience, EF resulted in a pronounced shift away from midline cortices towards a right lateralized network comprised of the ventral and dorsolateral PFC [Note: Prefrontal Cortex], as well as right insula, SII [Note: Secondary Somatosensory Cortex], and inferior parietal lobule” (Farb *et al.* 2007, 319). They describe their findings as consistent with the concept of two modes of self-reference (Farb *et al.* 2007, 319):

*Consistent with a dual-mode hypothesis of self-awareness, these results suggest a fundamental neural dissociation in modes of self-representation that support distinct, but habitually integrated, aspects of self-reference: (i) higher order self-reference characterized by neural processes supporting awareness of a self that extends across time and (ii) more basic momentary self-reference characterized by*

*neural changes supporting awareness of the psychological present. The latter, represented by evolutionary older neural regions, may represent a return to the neural origins of identity, in which self-awareness in each moment arises from the integration of basic interoceptive and exteroceptive bodily sensory processes [...]. In contrast, the narrative mode of self-reference may represent an overlearned mode of information processing that has become automatic through practice, consistent with established findings on training-induced automaticity.*

From the evolutionary standpoint, the momentary self-reference seems to be older and narrative reference newer, more connected with specifically human traits. In this connection, we can point out that in many spiritual teachings, nature and beings other than humans are said to live in the present, while humans are described as beings that lost this primordial state. But the return to the life in present can maybe be united in some way with thinking and its advantages. Based on the experiences from spirituality it seems that we humans can be more present than we typically are and at the same time let go of at least those forms of thinking which are not productive and cause more suffering and which generally bring more harm than good. In this regard I would like to again point out that there also exist contemplative practices which use thinking and speech in order to reach transformation. It seems that thinking also can facilitate awareness; we, as humans, maybe can use also our thinking and our concepts, as well as our feelings and other experiences, to penetrate deeper. Consider various mantras and prayers which use words or sentences: human concepts themselves seem to be filled with meaning from deeper inner knowledge, transcending formal symbols, and thus they perhaps can be used in order to know that inner realm whose knowledge they contain [6].

The concept of the difference between the Ego and the Presence seems to be supported, at least in part, also by the research of the so called the *Default Mode Network*. This network consists of brain centers which support self-referential processing and its activity correlates with mind-wandering (Mason *et al.* 2007; Andrews-Hanna *et al.* 2010). In their study, Killingsworth and Gilbert (2010, 932) concluded that “*human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. The ability to think about what is not happening is a cognitive achievement that comes at an emotional cost.*” Their conclusion is based on the study, which used experience sampling. Using this method they accumulated a database that contained a quarter of a million samples from about five hundred people of different age and occupation from 83 countries (Killingsworth and Gilbert 2010). They found that



mind-wandering occurred in 46,9 % of the samples. According to their results, people were less happy when their minds were wandering. Interestingly, this was true for all activities they did, including the least enjoyable. They also report that *“what people were thinking was a better predictor of their happiness than was what they were doing”* (Killingsworth and Gilbert 2010, 932).

Because of all this and other reasons, Brewer *et al.* (2011, 20254) posed a question: *“Given the interrelationship between the DMN [Note: Default Mode Network], mind-wandering, and unhappiness, a question arises: Is it possible to change this default mode into one that is more present-centered, and possibly happier?”* They state that mindfulness meditation can represent a method how to achieve such a change.

Although three kinds of meditation they studied – *Loving-kindness meditation, Concentration meditation, and Choiceless awareness* – to some extent differed in regard to activation of brain centers, Brewer *et al.* (2011, 20254) found that *“the main nodes of the default-mode network (medial prefrontal and posterior cingulate cortices) were relatively deactivated in experienced meditators across all meditation types”* and that these meditators *“reported less mind-wandering during meditation relative to controls”* (Brewer *et al.* 2011, 20255). Their results suggest that *“the neural mechanisms underlying mindfulness training are associated with differential activation and connectivity of the DMN”* (Brewer *et al.* 2011, 20255). They also support the hypothesis that *“alterations in the DMN are related to reduction in mind-wandering”* (Brewer *et al.* 2011, 20255).

We have seen from other studies that meditation practice can have lasting results that reach beyond formal meditation. In the case of *Default Mode Network*, the state in which this network's activity subsided can, as a result of intensive long-term practice, extend to everyday life *“the consistency of connectivity across both meditation and baseline periods suggests that meditation practice may transform the resting-state experience into one that resembles a meditative state, and as such, is a more present-centered default mode”* (Brewer *et al.* 2011, 20255). An interesting case of such transformation was found as part of the research of the study just described. One of the subjects of this study, which listed highly accomplished meditators, was different in that his *Default Mode Network's* activity was very quiet not only during meditation, but also before meditation (Wright 2017, 167).

I would like to close this article with the brief description of the path and transformation, which this subject of the study just described, went through, because in him, the *Default Mode Network* seems to be quiet almost perpetu-

ally. The name of this researcher is Gary Weber. In his own short account of his transformation (Weber 2015, 1), to which he often refers to as “the turning of the page”, he described his efforts leading to it in these words: *“Two hours/day early-morning practice and retreats and teachers’ training programs, in both meditation and yoga, totaling about 20,000 hours.”* This practice included letting go of every attachment, because, *“as the practice deepened, it was apparent that ‘attachments’ were where the last vestiges of the ‘I’ were being held. Wherever there was an attachment, it was clearly seen that there was an I/me/my at the root of it as the core around which it was structured. Each attachment also clearly had its ‘own’ separate I/me/my. So what was then required was to go through every attachment, and surrender each one”* (Weber 2015, 2). These attachments were connected with narrative aspect of mind-activity: *“The approach was to focus on each attachment and its particular story, or stories, feel into it, and then let go of it. This continued until all that was left was attachment to my two daughters. That step was delayed until it was apparent that they were secure and would not suffer from whatever might happen, as there was no certainty what would occur when the final attachment was gone. There was even the fear that this body would die without thought and the ‘I.’”* (Weber 2015, 2). That did not happen, though. The effort towards enlightenment continued, because *“even after this surrender, there remained a little vestige of an I/me/my, which could be felt. It was not clear who/how to surrender it to ‘nothingness/emptiness’. The solution that manifested was to have some entity come and take it away... the entity that it was surrendered to was Ramana Maharshi”* (Weber 2015, 2), a well-known Indian sage who lived in twentieth century [7]. Then, *“two or three days later, during the typical morning sequence of yoga postures focusing on the affirmation ‘I am not this body’, going into an inverted posture that had been done thousands of times before, everything changed dramatically when coming down. There was no blinding flash of light, no chorus of angels, etc., but the ‘I/Ego’ had disappeared like a leaf had slipped from a hand, and there was just deep stillness, silence, now and presence. There was the clear, unmistakable, direct perception that this was ‘It’. It had been expected that the internal narrative thoughts would diminish considerably, as that was the goal after all, but it was a jolt when they just STOPPED, along with all self-referential fears, desires and suffering.”* (Weber 2015, 2).

Narrative thoughts and self-referential fears and desires seem to be connected to the activity of the *Default Mode Network*, so it makes sense that now this network is so quiet in Gary Weber's brain. I do not want to claim that whatever enlightenment, awakening, or how we want to call it, is, is just the activity of *Default Mode Network*, but there seems to be a connection between this brain's structure's strong activity



and the life of suffering dominated by the “story”, “past and future”, “I”, desires, fears and “negatively affective” self-reference.

Gary Weber reports qualities of his new state of being that were surprising to him. They manifested also in his professional career, which had nothing to do with spirituality or mysticism. That day when his “shift” occurred, there were around a thousand people, “four research laboratories and a budget of about \$250 million for which ‘I’ was responsible, and work had to take place that day without an ‘I’” (Weber 2015, 2). But everything went well, and, “as the days went on, work and ‘my life’ were actually going on without ‘me’. The work was much more creative, useful and insightful, as there was full and complete awareness in every meeting, whether it was with the CEO, peers, researchers, customers, analysts, etc.” (Weber 2015, 2–3). When he attended meetings at work, he observed that “no one else was actually there for the whole meeting, fully present in every moment to body language, voice inflection, and presentation details. They were somewhere else in their minds for most of the meetings” (Weber 2015, 3).

Gary Weber now views free will and control as non-existent: “‘my life’ was functioning perfectly without ‘me’... something, whatever one wants to call it, was somehow ‘doing’ my life and arranging all sorts of amazingly serendipitous and fortunate meetings, events, activities, etc. and always had been. ‘Free will’, control, choices and ‘doing’ were something that ‘I’ was totally certain that ‘I’ had and did... however, it was clear that this was a complete and total illusion, and always had been.” (Weber 2015, 3). He reports no fear, though, stemming from the fact that he no longer perceives free will, control, or choice: “Far from being terrifying and causing mind-numbing anxiety, the recognition that there was no ‘free will’, ‘control’ or ‘choice’ was one of the most amazing, freeing and enabling understandings that could be imagined. All of the guilt, and pride, which had been so skillfully installed by religion, culture, institutions, teachers, etc., just fell away.” (Weber 2015, 3) Yet he experiences directly something benevolent and loving, which carries him now: “This truly was ‘freedom’ beyond anything that could have been imagined. There was no sin, no karma, no good deeds and no bad deeds. Something benevolent and loving was guiding and holding ‘me’ and had been doing so all along. When there was a little surrender, there was a feeling of being held a little. When there was more surrender, there was a feeling of more care and support. Now, with no ‘I’ to hold on to anything, and with no alternative but total surrender, there was complete love, support and compassion.” (Weber 2015, 3).

I included many citations of Weber in order to show how this transformation of consciousness is experienced by the one transformed and how it can change his or her life. It is good, I think, to be aware of what this scientific research tries to study, although it cannot at present, and possibly ever, penetrate to the infinite depth of the Goal. But the Goal is dynamic and alive. I will therefore end with the Weber’s description of life in this dynamic field of bliss, fullness, connection and unity (Weber 2015, 4):

*There is, therefore, no end to the deepening, although there is no one ‘doing it’ – the brain, in its continual drive for efficiency, neural real estate optimization and minimal energy consumption – does it ‘all by itself’ as it strongly prefers stillness and order to suffering, ‘blah, blah’, anxiety, fears, etc. As Harada Roshi, a famous 19th/20th century Japanese Zen master said, ‘Enlightenment is capable of endless enlargement.’*

*Early every morning, what would look to others like a practice, still emerges, in a spontaneous combination of yoga asanas, breathing practices/pranayama, sitting meditation, walking meditation, chanting, self-inquiry, affirmations, negotiations, bhakti, spontaneous posture flows, etc. Even more surprisingly, every morning something new is disclosed... a key is turned in a lock in a door that wasn’t even known to be there. Just when it seemed as if nothing could be sweeter, more still, more complete, more present... it deepens.*

## Notes

- [1] Theory of everything is usually understood as theory in physics, and as such it is concerned with the phenomena which have to be convertible to the data of the bodily senses (such conversion is done with the combined help of scientific measuring instruments and scientific theories). But if not, all that is, is convertible to these data, theory of everything in this sense may not be sufficient for deriving consequences concerning all spheres of experience.



- [2] There can be an assumption that they would predict the phenomena they describe with perfect precision if we had absolutely precise data. This is an idealization, because in practice we will never have them. Thus, we will never know whether beyond our errors of measurement phenomena are fully deterministic even if according to our best theory they are.
- [3] Joe Dispenza describes many such seemingly miraculous cases in his book *You Are the Placebo* (2014).
- [4] Categorization in the sense of understanding what we perceive seems to be present, but the labeling with inner verbal comment, as also other activities of this “voice in the head”, are absent.
- [5] Perceptions of our body and of outer environment go on even if we are immersed in the inner verbal behavior; generally, we can be either aware of them or not. They even seem to be, at least for a short period of time, stored in the memory even in the moments we are not aware of them, because we may access them through it in retrospect: after the moment of realization that we had a thought, we may become aware that the present sensory perception was here before, in the time we were not aware of it, and in which we were immersed in the thought we just realized we had.
- [6] For example, the word “consciousness” seems to carry, at least for many people, some direct knowledge of ourselves, which is activated also in the moment when we use the concept of consciousness by thinking. Since we need not to have the formalization of this concept, it can still contain some experiential content. This may be true for those who were not able to find theoretical explanation of consciousness, because they compared all theoretical constructs of consciousness with direct experiential content of its concept and saw that it was not grasped by that theoretical understanding. In this case there seems to remain an access to what the term means even in the presence of activation of its concept, because this concept itself carries experience of consciousness. For others, words like “I”, “I am”, and others, may still carry experience of what we really are; especially when the experiential content was not replaced by some theoretical construct. In the case of such replacement we no longer activate experience when using concept; we activate the theoretical construct instead.
- [7] At the time of the event just described, Ramana Maharshi was already dead. This event was an inner act of surrender of Gary Weber, which does not presuppose their actual meeting.

## References

- Andrews-Hanna, Jessica R., Jay S. Reidler, Jorge Sepulcre, Renee Poulin, and Randy L. Buckner. 2010. “Functional-Anatomic Fractionation of the Brain’s Default Network.” *Neuron* 65 (4): 550–562.
- Brewer, Judson A., Patrick D. Worhunsky, Jeremy R. Gray, Yi-Yuan Tang, Jochen Weber, and Hedy Kober. 2011. “Meditation Experience Is Associated with Differences in Default Mode Network Activity and Connectivity.” *PNAS* 108 (50): 20254–20259.
- Dispenza, Joe. 2014. *You Are the Placebo: Making Your Mind Matter*. London: Hay House.
- Farb, Norman A. S., Zindel V. Segal, Helen Mayberg, Jim Bean, Deborah McKeon, Zainab Fatima, and Adam K. Anderson. 2007. “Attending to the Present: Mindfulness Meditation Reveals Distinct Neural Modes of Self-Reference.” *SCAN* 2 (4): 313–322.
- Killingsworth, Matthew A., and Daniel T. Gilbert. 2010. “A Wandering Mind Is an Unhappy Mind.” *Science* 330 (6006): 932.
- Lazar, Sara W., Catherine E. Kerr, Rachel H. Wasserman, Jeremy R. Gray, Douglas N. Greve, Michael T. Treadway, Metta McGarvey et al. 2005. “Meditation Experience Is Associated with Increased Cortical Thickness.” *Neuroreport* 16 (17): 1893–1897.
- Lutz, Antoine, Lawrence L. Greischar, Nancy B. Rawlings, Matthieu Ricard, and Richard J. Davidson. 2004. “Long-Term Meditators Self-Induce High-Amplitude Gamma Synchrony During Mental Practice.” *PNAS* 101 (46): 16369–16373.
- Mason, Malia F., Michael I. Norton, John D. Van Horn, Daniel M. Wegner, Scott T. Grafton, and C. Neil Macrae. 2007. “Wandering Minds: The Default Network and Stimulus-Independent Thought.” *Science* 315 (5810): 393–395.
- Rainville, Pierre, Gary H. Duncan, Donald D. Price, Benoit Carrier, and M. Catherine Bushnell. 1997. “Pain Affect Encoded in Human Anterior Cingulate But Not Somatosensory Cortex.” *Science* 277 (5328): 968–971.
- Tolle, Eckhart. 2005. *A New Earth*. New York: Penguin.
- Tolle, Eckhart. 2003. *Stillness Speaks*. Vancouver: Namaste Publishing.
- Tolle, Eckhart. 2004. *The Power of Now*. Sydney: Hodder Australia.
- Weber, Gary. 2015. *A Leaf Slipped from a Hand: An Awakening into Stillness*. Accessed August 20, 2019. [www.searchwithin.org](http://www.searchwithin.org).
- Wright, Robert. 2017. *Why Buddhism is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation and Enlightenment*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

# Islamic Reproductive Bioethics Knowledge Among University Students in the Czech Republic

Received September 20, 2019

Revised October 11, 2019

Accepted October 12, 2019

**Key words**

Islam, reproductive bioethics, procreation, infanticide, ARTs, induced abortion

This study has aimed to evaluate the level of knowledge about Islamic reproductive bioethics among university students in the Czech Republic. The research sample consisted of 581 students of twelve universities in the Czech Republic. The majority of participants were females (72,6 %), while males were more than 2,6 times less (27,4 %). Data were obtained via online questionnaires. Out of seven questions dealing with reproductive bioethics in Islam, majority of participants managed to answer correctly three questions: on the conception of the marriage (75,6 %), on the basic precondition of the procreation (94,8 %), and on the feminine infanticide according to Muhammad's doctrine (58,7 %). The majority of incorrect answers reached questions number 5 and 7, on the permissibility of the usage of the ARTs (79,5 %), and the permissibility of the induced abortion (66,3 %). Overall, the worst results reached those answers, that were dealing with the contemporary status of the Islamic attitudes towards scientific achievements in reproductive medicine. We assume, that this outcome stems from the typically historical approach to lecturing on Islam at universities. Although lectures on Islam are properly firstly focusing on written sources, history and ritual praxis of this religion, we suggest, that their content should be enriched with the dimension of present forms of living Islam in everyday life decision-making, and effort to manage current challenges according to religious regulations.



## 1 Introduction

Our research conducted in the frame of the project *Bioethics of Reproductive Health in Islam: Basis, Discussion and Challenges*, VEGA No. 1/0585/18, which included quantitative and qualitative methods and took place in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the first phase of our quantitative research realized from October to December 2018, we have conducted an questionnaire survey on Islamic reproductive bioethics knowledge among university students of humanities and social sciences at five Slovak universities: Comenius University in Bratislava, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, University of Žilina in Žilina, University of Prešov in Prešov, and The Catholic University in Ružomberok; at each university n=200, all together 1000 participants. The results were already published.

In the second phase of our quantitative research realized from January to August 2019, we have conducted a questionnaire survey on Islamic reproductive bioethics knowledge among university students at twelve Czech universities, which will be named later in the text.

Our qualitative research had three phases:

1. In-depth interviews with Muslim believers living in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding their attitude to reproduction in medical, educational and inter-religious context (October 2018);
2. In-depth interviews with Muslim believers living in Slovakia regarding the same topic as above (May 2019);
3. Interviews with mature students of the University of the Third Age at Comenius University in Bratislava, who study the course World Religions headed by Monika Zaviš (December 2018). These interviews were focused on the knowledge of Islamic reproductive bioethics.



### About the author

**Doc. PaedDr. ThDr. Monika Zaviš, PhD.**, is theologian and religious studies scholar with special interest in current bioethical issues of reproductive health in the world religions and spirituality in the context of psychology of religion and neuroscience. She is the faculty member of Department of Pedagogy and Social Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. Her email contact is [zavis@fedu.uniba.sk](mailto:zavis@fedu.uniba.sk).

### Co-authors

PhDr. Mgr. Dana Rebeka Ralbovská, PhD.  
 Prof. ThDr. Pavel Procházka, PhD.  
 PhDr. Kateřina Horáčková, DiS.

When we compare our total research in Slovakia and the Czech Republic on the Islamic reproductive bioethics knowledge among students, we clearly see, that the best results by far were obtained by our mature students aged 50 and over, what we consider to be both amazing – regarding their age, health condition, and the level of knowledge; but also sad – regarding the level of knowledge among day-time university students.

Why are we interested in the knowledge of marriage, family planning, fertility awareness, usage of medically assisted reproduction and induced abortion (Zegers-Hochschild, Adamson and Dyer *et al.* 2017, 1786–1801) ergo reproductive bioethics (Vivoda 2018, 99–113) in Islam among students at all? In the context of intense clash of cultures and religions, especially Christianity (Šoltés 2017, 17–86) and Islam in Europe, we are obligated to educate our students to be theoretically prepared for inter-religious communication, which will be based on human dignity and mutual understanding (Mistrič 2011). Knowing the key values and social orders built on them (Leiba-O’Sullivan 1999, 709–725) means regarding Islam, to know the doctrine and praxis of marriage, family and reproductive health.

Sachedina argues, that the meaning of the term *bioethics* in Islam can be conveyed using several word phrases in the Arabic language: *akhlaq-i pizishki* (virtues of the medical profession), *akhlaq-i zisti* (bioethics in the sense of judicial rulings on biomedical issues rather than ethics of medical practice), *fiqh al-tabib* (jurisprudence affecting medical professionals), *qadaya fiqhiya wa tibbiya mu’asira* (modern judicial and medical issues), *ahkam* (rulings or judicial opinions), and *akhlaqiyat al-tibiya* (bioethics without substantially taking up ethical dimensions of the issues) (Sachedina 2009, 17–18). Bioethics is a discipline belonging to a broader framework of ethics, which is in Arabic *akhlaq* and *adab* (Ramadan 2017, 3). Given the period in which bioethics as a field emerged, it addresses a very broad array of moral questions and issues of existential urgency from the perspective of both the individual and society. Reproductive bioethics is concerned with delicate issues pertaining to the most intimate aspect of human life. The interconnectedness of reproductive bioethics on one hand and the religious doctrine or a set of requirements the faith imposes on the believing person on the other is amplified in Islam because of the religious duty to marry, procreate and care for their offspring. Fulfilling the obligation of marriage by having children means fulfilling the will of Allah not only in the life of an individual, but the whole *ummah*.

In this study we are focusing on the findings of our research in the Czech Republic. Since Islam is not one of majoritarian and historically connected religions to this geographical area, its conceptions, logic of thinking and the value system are largely unknown and outlandish for Czech citizens. Surely, based on information from the mass media, they could gain conviction, that their knowledge of Islam is adequate, while is the real knowledge sometimes confused with prejudices or distorted information. For these reasons, we focused on finding the state of real knowledge among Czech university students, who are supposed to be one of the representative groups regarding relevant knowledge in the country.

## 2 Methods

Anonymous online questionnaire survey was conducted at twelve universities in the Czech Republic, specifically at the Czech Technical University in Prague – 152 (26,2 %), Charles University in Prague – 36 (6,2 %), University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice – 45 (7,7 %), University of West Bohemia in Pilsen – 51 (8,8 %), Masaryk University in Brno – 46 (7,9 %), Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem – 49 (8,4 %), Technical University in Liberec – 33 (5,7 %), University of Pardubice – 53 (9,1 %), University of Ostrava – 27 (4,6 %), Tomáš Baťa University in Zlín – 36 (6,2 %), Palacký University Olomouc – 47 (8,1 %), other university – 6 (1,0 %).

Total number of 581 participants have submitted online questionnaires from January to August 2019. There were 159 males (27,4 %) and 422 females (72,6 %). Age range of respondents was as follows: a) 19–20 years: 84 (14,5 %); b) 21–22 years: 172 (29,6 %); c) 23–24 years: 195 (33,6 %); d) 25–26 years: 117 (20,1 %); e) other: 13 (2,2 %). The participants were the students of the bachelor grade – 442 (76,1%), the master grade – 134 (23,1 %) and the PhD grade – 5 (0,9 %).

Our questionnaire consisted of 12 questions. First part of it consisted of five questions, which were focused on specification of respondents’ group. Second part consisted of questions related to topics of family and reproductive health in Islam. We have chosen those kinds of questions, which have the same answers or attitudes of believers in Sunni, Shi’a and secular Muslim world (Gürtin, Inhorn and Tremayne 2015, 3137–3153). Therefore, we do not focus on areas of criteria for concluding a marriage contract, because those differ according to concrete madhhab; nor on third-party donation, pre-implantation sex selection, etc.



### 3 Results

The results of our survey will be presented in tables and discussed in the frame of every question.

#### Question 1.

##### *How does Islam define marriage?*

Marriage, *nikāh*, is according to Quranic text in 49:13 an ideal, which is based on the order of Creator (*The Holy Quran* 1946). This text says, that whole human-kind was created from one couple, from man and woman. *Qur'an* permits a Muslim to have up to four wives, but only if he is able to be just to every wife and if he is able to completely take care of every wife. Marriage is a contract between man and woman, resp. women. The term sacrament does not exist in Islam and therefore marriage is not a sacrament. Every partner has exactly appointed rights and duties (Al-Sbenaty 2012, 21–22, 94–95).

**Table 1.**  
Concept of marriage in Islam

Answers	Number	Percentage
(a) relationship between two loving persons with no regard to their sex	2	0,3 %
(b) sacrament that unites two persons with no regard to their sex	0	0,0 %
(c) contract between two loving persons with no regard to their sex	0	0,0 %
(d) sacrament that unites man and woman / man and women	136	23,4 %
(e) contract between man and woman / man and women)	439	75,6 %
(f) one of the forms of coexistence of man and woman	4	0,7 %

#### Question 2.

##### *If a Muslim would like to marry a woman, what confession she has to be?*

The future Muslim's wife may be a believer who professes one of the three Abrahamic religions, or the religions of the Book: a Muslim, a Jewish, or a Christian. The future husband of an Muslimah may only be a Muslim (Zaviš 2013, 13–56).

**Table 2.**  
Confession of future wife in Islam

Answers	Number	Percentage
(a) Muslim	434	74,7 %
(b) Muslim or Jewish	76	13,1 %
(c) Muslim, Jewish or Christian	33	5,7 %
(d) whatever, just not an atheist	21	3,6 %
(e) it is not crucial, if she is or is not of any confession	17	2,9 %

### Question 3.

#### What is the basic requirement for human procreation in Islam?

Intimate relationships between a man and a woman are not permitted in Islam unless they are bound by a marriage contract. Intimate relationships between same sex partners are not allowed under any circumstances. Human procreation is only possible within the marriage of a man and a woman, resp. women (Al-Sbenaty 2012, 21–22, 94–95).

### Question 4.

#### What was Muhammad's attitude towards killing female newborns (infanticide)?

The pre-Islamic Arab tribes have routinely murdered newborn daughters. Muhammad told them, that Islam requires to stop this practice (Adnan 2004, 30–31). *Qur'an* 16:58–59 refers to infanticide of the daughters as to an evil decision (*The Holy Quran* 1946), because both sons and daughters are Allah's gift. That also means, that the usage of punishments in home education (Koldeová 2015, 104) should not be associated with the annihilation of the females. On the other hand, the fact, that female infanticide is in Islam forbidden, does not automatically eliminate the permission of temporary contraception usage. Al-Bar and Chamsi-Pasha mention, that even the Prophet himself allowed his companions to practice coitus interruptus (Al-Bar and Chamsi-Pasha 2015, 164).

**Table 3.**  
The basic precondition for human procreation in Islam

Answers	Number	Percentage
(a) long-term relationship of partners	23	4,0 %
(b) marriage	551	94,8 %
(c) free relationship of partners is enough, if they are willing to raise a child	6	1,0 %
(d) short-term relationship of partners is enough, if they are willing to raise a child	1	0,2 %

**Table 4.**  
Opinion on Muhammad's attitude towards female infanticide

Answers	Number	Percentage
(a) required	84	14,5 %
(b) forbidden	341	58,7 %
(c) recommended	52	9,0 %
(d) considered to be personal decision of every father	74	12,7 %
(e) considered to be personal decision of every mother	3	0,5 %
(f) declared for religiously neutral decision	27	4,6 %



**Question 5.**

*Is it allowed to Muslim couples, who do have health issues with conceiving a child, to use the ARTs (assisted reproductive technologies)?*

Yes, it is (Inhorn 2006, 350–352), because science and faith in Islam have to build together the individual life and the existence of all mankind. However, scientific achievements that would not respect human dignity or would be destructive to mankind, are forbidden. Therefore, human cloning, selective abortion, or the choice of the sex of the child without medical indication are all prohibited (Nordin 2012, 252–257; Sachedina 2009, 108). The longest registered history in Arab countries, particularly in Iran, has the use of the IVF (Tremayne and Akhondi 2016, 62–70).

**Table 5.**  
**Allowance of using ARTs in Islam**

Answers	Number	Percentage
(a) yes	119	20,5 %
(b) no	462	79,5 %

**Question 6.**

*Is it allowed to Muslim couples to use the advantages of genetic engineering in the case of the elimination of the chromosome, which is a carrier of genetically transmitted disease of their future child?*

Yes, it is (Zaviš 2018, 8–15). The most common cases are those of X chromosome-related diseases. The elimination of this chromosome in the frame of preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) or according to new glossary – preimplantation genetic testing (PGT) to prevent the onset of any severe disease (hemophilia, DMD, etc.) would significantly affect the quality of life of the affected individual and all those who will take care of him, especially parents (Daar and Al Khitamy 2001, 60–63).

**Table 6.**  
**Allowance of elimination of chromosome, which is a carrier of disease in Islam**

Answers	Number	Percentage
(a) yes	82	14,1 %
(b) no	161	27,7 %
(c) it is not allowed in humans, but it is allowed in animals and plants	338	58,2 %

## 4 Discussion

### Question 7.

#### What is Islam's attitude to induced abortion?

In Islam the begotten life is inviolable (Vivoda 2019, 31–43), no matter what prenatal stage it is. For a long time, there was a general ban of induced abortion. The cases of the rape of Muslim women in the war, later also under other circumstances without the war, cases of after the birth disabled individuals from incestuous marriages, cases of forced choice between mother's and child's life, etc., made Islamic lawyers and doctors improve their teachings on induced abortions and count on some permitted exceptions. Cases of acute threat to mother's life and rape are those in which Muslim doctors may incline to induced abortion. The principle of the lesser evil is chosen (Atighetchi 2009, 111–119). However, under no circumstances is the financial deficit of future parents justifying their decision to undergo abortion. Quranic text in 17:31 expressly forbids this and at the same time assures, that Allah will take care of subsistence of both descendants and their parents (*The Holy Quran* 1946).

Table 7.

Allowance of induced abortion in Islam

Answers	Number	Percentage
(a) completely forbidden	385	66,3 %
(b) forbidden in the case that a couple yet does not have any descendants	12	2,1 %
(c) forbidden in the case that a couple yet does have only daughters	46	7,9 %
(d) allowed in the cases of threat to mother's life and rape	9	1,5 %
(e) allowed in the case of financial deficiency of future parents	5	0,9 %
(f) allowed in the case of agreeing decision of future parents	124	21,3 %

Absolutely highest rate of answers in our survey was connected to question of the basic requirement for the procreation in Islam, which is marriage. This correct answer was picked by 551 participants, what makes 94,8 %. Also correctly answered question by majority of participants, i.e. 75,6 %, was on the form of the institution of the marriage, which is a contract. The third correctly answered question by majority of participants, i.e. 58,7 %, was the one on the permissibility of female infanticide according to Muhammad's doctrine. In comparison to results obtained in Slovakia at five public universities among 1000 participants, this is better outcome. Slovak students namely mostly inclined to the answer which claimed that performance of female infanticide is dependent on the decision of the father.

It is interesting, that Czech students have reached the same, by majority wrongly answered questions, as it was the case with Slovak students. Total percentage of 74,7 % of Czech participants claimed, that future wife of Muslim has to be of Muslim confession, but only 5,7 % answered correctly, that Muslim's future wife can be of the one of the three religions of the book, thus Muslim, Jewish or Christian. Answers to questions No. 5–7 have demonstrated, as same as among Slovak students, that participants are not familiar with contemporary Islam, more precisely, the information on current everyday life of Muslim believers, their challenges and struggles, which they try to respond to with all respect to sacred teachings and religious jurisprudence.

Participants of our research in the Czech Republic do know the concept of marriage and its necessity for human procreation in Islam. It has been shown, that they know the unconditional exclusivity of heterosexual marriages. These phenomena are related to Christian doctrine and thus to a culture based on Christian values. The striking difference between Islam and Christianity lies in the number of wives of a man, because Christianity recognizes as marriage only the relationship of one man and one woman (Zaviš 2017, 70). In this context it is necessary to point out, that Quranic permission of polygamy has been practically widely misused; videlicet, this permission literally relates just to extraordinary situations, e.g. as taking care of widows and their children bereaved after their husbands died in war (Hassan 2006, 248).

Thus, in the area of the theoretical knowledge of marriage and procreation in Islam, as same as Muhammad's position towards female infanticide, our respondents would be able to communicate inter-religiously. However, on issues related



to confession of Muslim's wife, and contemporary reproductive bioethics in Islam, our respondents would not be able to communicate competently inter-religiously. It follows from these facts, that Islam is presented at universities at a more historical level, by accentuating historically axiomatic individual and social principles, while the current Islam with a certain and constant shift in religious law is mostly absent at lectures. The presentation of history and phenomenology of religions at Slovak universities should not remain in the past, but it should also focus on the present and the future, not only marginally and briefly.

Growing xenophobia (Dojčár 2017, 10–11) involves not only religious and cultural aspects, but also the fear of potential infection with unknown diseases (Kováč, Krčméry, Oláh *et al.* 2018, 54–57). Also, many mass media have until recently flatly identified Muslims with Islamists in terms of terrorists and suicide bombers (Jančovič and Bencová, 2018, 5–56), etc. Religion-related reporting tactics are also covered by journalistic research. During her research, Rončáková managed to identify seven crucial news values that could be associated with religious messages: (1) conflict first and foremost, (2) scandalousness, (3) entertainment, (4) fragmentation, (5) incompleteness, (6) stereotypes, and (7) story (Rončáková 2017, 28). Analyzing our knowledge of islamophobia in the context of Rončáková's description, we can state that connected to news related to Islam come as primary these news values: conflict, scandalousness, fragmentation, incompleteness and stereotypes.

Another incorrect, but overall wide-spread image of Islam is related to conviction on its extremely growing fertility rates worldwide. Although this is the most true regarding certain African countries, which have the vast majority of Muslim population as shown in parentheses, e.g. Somalia (99,8 %), Niger (98,3 %), Mali (95 %), etc., and their populations are projected to increase at least five-fold by 2100 (United Nations 2013, xix), nevertheless, according to the UN figures by 2012, almost half of the world's top fifteen fertility declines had occurred in Muslim, a majority Arab nation (United Nations 2012). The trend of high fertility growth has radically changed over the past thirty years in the Middle East, and this corresponds to the trend in the rest of the world. Inhorn claims, that fertility rates have plummeted across the Muslim world and that this fertility decline has been profound, even revolutionary (Inhorn 2018, 147–159; Gargji and Chaudary 2019). Totally different situation is in Europe, where Muslim population makes up roughly 5 % of the whole population, and its growth was particularly in years 2010–2016 the re-

sult of migration. In comparison to non-Muslim woman who is expected to have 1,6 children, Muslim woman is expected to have 2,6 children. According to Pew Research Center projections, in the coming decades the Muslim fertility rates are expected to grow in Europe, so that they could more than double (Hackett 2017).

The fact is that ignorance inspires mistrust and prejudice that play a major role in religious conflicts around the world, and therefore we have a moral obligation at universities to prevent these humanity's evils using the objective and up-to-date content of the curriculum that our students can adequately prepare for encounter with another religion or culture. Since there is a compulsory course of non-confessional religious education in Denmark and Sweden already at primary school, we know with certainty that their pupils are able to form their perception, attitude and respect for another religion in a completely different way than it is in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, where there is still an unwritten distinction between pupils and parents of believers and non-believers according to whether their children visit a course of religious education or ethical education, which is extremely superficial and inadequate. Each person's religious belief is indisputable; however, a completely different dimension is the general knowledge of particular religions and cultures of the world, which makes the student more educated, open, flexible, cosmopolitan and consistently mature. Inter-religious communication can be built under condition of knowing the religious doctrines and practices of people of other cultures, but as long as some countries remain at today's level – confessional religious education versus ethical education, they will not avoid the future superficial division of society based on prejudices, nor the general lack of education of pupils in religions and cultures.

## 5 Conclusion

Our research among Czech students has sought to identify, present and evaluate the current state of knowledge of Islamic reproductive bioethics necessary for inter-religious communication. It would be also desirable to find out, how the teachers and professors themselves are involved. Future research should focus on the content of the courses, which are dealing with inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, resp. relations, too. Another question concerns the compulsory literature for students and the equipment of academic libraries with up-to-date, high-quality publications that can intrinsically address students and cause their spontaneous interest in their own inter-religious competencies. The following important dimension of inter-religious communication of students, after obtaining knowledge, is the ability of critical thinking and factual discussion. We need to find out, whether our students can think critically and also self-critically, and whether they can convert these considerations into a constructive, unaffected discussion. Findings and conclusions of our survey (n=581) at Czech universities could be perceived as a demonstration of a possible comprehensive nationwide survey of the issue.

## Acknowledgment

The paper originated as an outcome of the project VEGA No. 1/0585/18 *Bioethics of Reproductive Health in Islam: Basis, Discussion and Challenges*.



## References

- Adnan, Gunawan. 2004. *Women and The Glorious Qur'an: An Analytical Study of Women-Related Verses of the Sūra An-Nisa'*. Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen.
- Al-Bar, Mohammed Ali, and Hassan Cham-si-Pasha. 2015. *Contemporary Bioethics: Islamic Perspective*. London: Springer Open.
- Al-Sbenaty, Abdulwahab. 2012. *Manželstvo a rozvod podľa islamského náboženstva, islamského práva a podľa ich právnych úprav v niektorých islamských krajinách*. Bratislava: Levant.
- Atighetchi, Dariusch. 2009. *Islamic Bioethics: Problems and Perspectives*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Daar Abdallah S., and A. Binsumeit Al Khitamy. 2001. "Bioethics for Clinicians: 21. Islamic Bioethics." *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 164 (1): 60–63.
- Dojčár, Martin. 2017. "Migration, Xenophobia and Dialogical Ethos." In *Migrácia: náboženstvo bez hraníc – európska perspektíva*, edited by Martin Dojčár, 7–13. Trnava: Trnavská univerzita.
- Gargji, Inaara, and Muhammad Chaudary. 2019. "The Arab World's Silent Reproductive Revolution." An interview with Marcia C. Inhorn. *Al Jazeera News*, April 16, 2019. Accessed June 28, 2019. www.aljazeera.com.
- Gürtin Zeynep B., Marcia C. Inhorn., and Soraya Tremayne. 2015. "Islam and Assisted Reproduction in the Middle East: Comparing the Sunni Arab World, Shia Iran and Secular Turkey." In *The Changing World Religion Map*, edited by Stanley D. Brunn, 3137–3153. London: Springer.
- Hackett, Conrad. 2017. "Five Facts About the Muslim Population in Europe." *Pew Research Center*, November 29, 2017. Accessed May 7, 2019. www.pewresearch.org.
- Hassan, Riffat. 2006. "Marriage: Islamic Discourses." In *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, Vol. 3, edited by Suad Joseph, 246–249. Leiden: Brill.
- Inhorn, Marcia C. 2006. "Reproduction: New Technologies." In *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures. Family, Body, Sexuality and Health*, Vol. 3, edited by Suad Joseph et al., 350–352. Leiden: Brill.
- Inhorn, Marcia C. 2018. "The Arab World's 'Quiet' Reproductive Revolution." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 24 (2): 147–159.
- Jančovič, Jozef, and Zuzana Bencová. 2018. "Komparácia Pánovej vojny v Starom zákone a svätej vojny v Koráne na základe vybraných textov." *Acta Facultatis Theologicae Universitatis Comenianae Bratislaviensis* 15 (2): 5–56.
- Koldeová, Lujza. 2015. *Tresty vo výchove*. Bratislava: Wolters Kluwer.
- Kováč, Robert, Vladimír Krčméry, Michael Oláh et al. "False Fear from Marginalized Groups (Homeless, Orphans, Migrants) to Our Society – No Carriers of Dangerous Microorganisms." *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention* 9 (2): 54–57.
- Leiba-O'Sullivan, Sharon. 1999. "The Distinction Between Stable and Dynamic Cross-Cultural Competencies: Implications for Expatriate Trainability." *Journal of International Business Studies* 30 (4): 709–725.
- Mistrík, Erich. 2011. *Ciele a obsah multikultúrnej výchovy a vzdelávania pre Štátny vzdelávací program ISCED 0 a ISCED 1*. Accessed December 28, 2018. www.statpedu.sk.
- Nordin, Musa Mohd. 2012. "An Islamic Perspective of Assisted Reproductive Technologies." *Bangladesh Journal of Medical Science* 11 (4): 252–257.
- Ramadan, Tariq. 2017. "Islamic Ethics: Sources, Methodology and Application." In *Islamic Bioethics: Current Issues and Challenges*, edited by Alireza Bagheri and Khalid Alali, 1–21. London: World Scientific Publishing Europe.
- Rončáková, Terézia. 2017. "Religious Messages and the Media Code – Inherent Features of the Media Language Code and the Transmission of Religious Messages." *KOME* 5 (2): 19–37.
- Sachedina, Abdulaziz. 2009. *Islamic Bio-medical Ethics: Principles and Application*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Šoltés, Radovan. 2017. *Politika a etika v živote kresťana*. Prešov: Prešovská univerzita.
- The Holy Quran*. 1946. Translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Accessed June 5, 2019. quranyusufali.com.
- Tremayne, Soraya, and Mohammed Mehdi Akhondi. 2016. "Conceiving IVF in Iran." In *IVF-Global Histories*, edited by Sarah Franklin and Marcia Inhorn. Elsevier Reproductive Biomedicine and Society Online, Vol. 2: 62–70. Accessed March 1, 2019. doi.org.
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2012. Accessed June 22, 2019. www.un.org.
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2013. *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, Highlights and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.228*. Accessed July 21, 2019. population.un.org.
- Vivoda, Michal. 2018. "Rozbor vybraných bioetických výziev v súčasnosti." *Acta Facultatis Theologicae Universitatis Comenianae Bratislaviensis* 15 (2): 99–113.
- Vivoda, Michal. 2019. "Analýza etického postoja k počatému ľudskému životu v islame." *Acta Facultatis Theologicae Universitatis Comenianae Bratislaviensis* 16 (1): 31–43.
- Zaviš, Monika. 2013. "Manželstvo a rozvod vo svetových mimokresťanských náboženstvách s dôrazom na ich pozíciu v islame." In *Manželstvo a rodina v náboženskom kontexte*, edited by Martin Šarkan, 13–56. Trnava: Dobrá kniha.
- Zaviš, Monika. 2017. *Úvod do systematickej etiky*. Žilina: Žilinská univerzita.
- Zaviš, Monika. 2018. "The Issue of the Sex of a Conceived Child in Islam: From the Pre-Islamic Conceptions to the Current Methods of Genetic Selection of the Sexes." *Spirituality Studies* 4 (2): 8–15.
- Zegers-Hochschild, Fernando, David G. Adamson, Silke Dyer et al. 2017. "The International Glossary on the Infertility and Fertility Care." *Human Reproduction* 32 (9): 1786–1801.

# The Way of Heavenly Knight

Received August 2, 2019

Revised August 16, 2019

Accepted August 17, 2019

**Key words**

Spiritual experience, spiritual  
journey, spiritual symbolism

The monomyth *The Way of Heavenly Knight* is an original description of a spiritual journey in the form of a romance. Its frame is a poem of kōan-like verses. Each verse is followed by an explanation in the form of a chapter of the story. The main hero, the Wandering Knight, gradually passes through all the stages of his spiritual journey until he gets back to where he came from. The difference is that he comes back transformed, poorer in what he had to leave, but richer in his new spiritual experience.





<b>MONOMYTH</b>	<b>SCENE</b>	<b>SPIRITUAL SYMBOLISM</b>
Accepts the challenge	it is not enough to believe that the sun is behind the clouds	spiritual desire
Starts out on a journey	wants to get to the sun	first decision
Good deed	gives away wealth	cleanses his mind
Meets his teacher	bends in front of the hermit	learns humility
Initiation	accolade – knight of heaven	acknowledges higher power
Receives magic	his horse gets wings	his mind is open
Trials	fighters with clouds	obstacles in meditation
Breakthrough	his horse gives up grazing	renounces the world
First victory	finds the sun	inner unification
Reaction	dazzled by himself	finds out his narcissism
The goddess	saves the lost star	you and me are one
Plot	yearns to meet other stars	learns to distinguish
Solves the mystery	we all are both the star and the sun	outer unification
Last doubt	"You're still not at home here."	not only to visit but to live
Takes on a special task	"Conquer the kingdom of heaven!"	final decision
Reconciles with his father	acknowledges the white king	learns to respect the law
Temptation	tries to be a savior	even altruism can be egoistic
Defeat	loses the chess game	mystical death
Goal achieved	finds himself naked in a cave	spiritual awakening
Sacrifice	a hermit sacrifices for him	son becomes father
Returns transformed	becomes troubadour	serves the world
Epilogue	returns to his beloved every night	his journey continues







## Chapter One

**Those who long to see the sun,  
let them not be lost in the clouds –  
even if they firmly believe  
that the sun is beyond them.**

And it came to pass in ancient times that everlasting darkness struck the whole county. Day after day, the sky was overcast with dark, heavy curtains of clouds. No one believed that the sun could ever show. All lanterns were sold out for years ahead, and after them all candles disappeared from the shelves. Anyone who had at least a small oil lamp was scrupulously sparing every remaining bit of wick.

In a poor cottage below the castle, a cellar-master and two pilgrims are sitting at a table lit by a single candle:

"I hear the sun will come out tomorrow."

"Fool, how can you believe in unearthly things? Who remembers any sun? Maybe there's no sun at all."

"But I believe the sun exists! Once it comes out by itself, we have to believe and wait!"

"And what if you just wait in vain?"

"One day I must behold it, even after my death!"

"Well, well, we'll all see after we die."

Everyone around the table drank deeply from their clay cups. Without being noticed before, a knight joined their talk:

"You say, after death? That may be enough for you, but I'd like to see the sun right now! I want to follow the Way of Heavenly Knight. You know... I've already seen the red sky at sunrise. I must get there!"

"You're lying! Be aware, everybody, there's a heretic among us, can you hear him well?"

"But it's really true! Whoever becomes a heavenly knight can just rise above the clouds and see the sun. But first he

must believe that the sun has always been there! That what matters are the clouds, not the sun! And only after that he can see the sun for the first time and earn a well-deserved reward for his faith. And finally he goes ahead with the sun over his head."

"Nonsense! How could a horse be chased somewhere above the clouds?"

"They say that whoever yearns to get there with all his heart will be helped. As he is knighted to the heavenly knight, wings grow to his horse."

"Who are you anyway?"

"Nobody for you. For no one here! I'm a nameless knight errant."

"You talk a lot, knight! So do you believe or don't you? We'll be happy waiting here at the wine cup. Our faith is enough for us, one day our sun will rise on its own. But what have you shown at all? What good is that faith of yours? You ended up just like us! You have to sit here with us in the dark, but that's not all, you're unhappy here."

The knight stood up angrily and drew his sword, but then he bowed his head and muttered through his teeth:

"So this was the last straw. Why waste time? Early in the morning I'm saddling my horse to fight the clouds. Maybe it's not in vain. Maybe they'll get scared and disappear. Or at least retreat. I'll convince you! I'll try this adventure."

But the knight was not that fast to make it. Although he had already sold his castle and his heavy armour, the gold he got for it still weighed him down. His horse shuddered beneath the weight, always stumbling and falling into the mud when it looked up longingly. Still, no wings! Only the deep prints of four horseshoes remained on the road behind them – day after day still on the same ground. What heaven is that!

And so the knight had no choice but to give away his gold. He gave away his first coin with his face still drawn and his heart heavy that he would miss it on his way. But the last



coins he gave away with a joyful smile and sincere wish to serve the travellers. So much he liked the giving in the end!

When he had nothing to give away, a hermit in his scuffed robes with a brown hood, girded with a rough rope, stepped into his path and looked at him sternly:

“Knight, do you have still anything to give me?”

He’d love to give him something, but his moneybag and pockets were already quite empty. Too bad he was hurrying with it!

Embarrassed of not knowing what to do, he knelt before the hermit and pleaded with his head bowed:

“I have nothing to give you, Sir, please forgive my poverty. I am no longer the one I used to be.”

“You’re right, you’re not the one you used to be,” the hermit repeated his words in a solemn voice. And as the knight realized this truth – unknown from where – a sword fell so heavy on his shoulder that he almost collapsed beneath it. But to his wonder, he felt no pain. Startled, he looked up in amazement but saw no more of the hermit. Only his horse happily dug his hooves and waved bravely – yes, really! – his new wings. The knight understood that from now on he was no longer a worldly knight, having just been knighted heavenly.

But even with the new wings, he could not get his horse to fly. On the contrary, this choosy animal was most interested in what it would chew on a sweet herb or a crispy twig. He used to drift along, and he folded his new wings comfortably on his hips, as if he’d always been able to do it: “No hurry to heaven when there’s so much good stuff!”

“So where to go with a horse like that?” the knight pondered. It occurred to him that the closest thing to heaven was the mountains. There he may fight the clouds while still standing firmly on the ground.

So they headed for the mountains. The horse walked peacefully along a narrow path that wound out of the dense woods up to the mountain pastures, as if remembering what good-

ies he would find there. “How can he know it when he’s never been there?” the knight wondered. But he was finally content now. His wandering already led somewhere, and finally it had the right direction: ever higher and higher. As they passed the last of the wind-beaten spruces, the vast green pastures of pink rhododendrons and blue gentians blossoming in the islets among the protruding dark rocks opened before them. They were in the mountains.

The next morning, they finally managed to break through the clouds. The eternal twilight subsided unwillingly, and for the first time the knight saw the sun rise majestically over the pink wall of red clouds. They glowed solemnly by all the tones of blue, cyan, purple and gold. The whole world was suddenly flooded with heavenly brightness.

For the knight, it was a very glorious day. It seemed to him that the celestial glory would never end:

“I’m here, finally I’m here. I really came up here! So beautiful! So magnificent! The whole world is shining, the whole world rejoices! Now I’ll be wandering forever with the sun over my head. I’ll never get lost! The battle has been won.”

## Chapter Two

**What did the knight fight on the ground?  
As he forgot the sun,  
the clouds turned on the spot  
in a heavy, blinding fog.**

Though the knight was immensely happy, there was a strange doubt about him that he could not dispel: “How come the clouds gave up without a fight? And where did they vanish, anyway? I didn’t even deserve the victory! And what about my horse, it didn’t fly at all! What kind of heavenly knight am I, what am I dragging my sword and shield around for! And above all – what am I going to tell the guys below the castle? How bravely I conquered the clouds? Should I lie to them? Everybody’s going to laugh at me!”

And as he rides silently on his horse with his head down, immersed in his doubts, he suddenly looks up and is startled: The sun is gone! How come he didn’t notice it before?

It's just like before, there's the eternal gloom again! You can't even see the tip of the spear, just thick fog all around, wet and sticky, cold to the bones.

"How is that possible? My beloved sun has left me! It's the same sad, grey day again, with no warmth and no love. Why? Why?" screams into the fog in all directions.

Amid this cold silence, he can hear the far echo of his own voice: "Why? Why?" But the echo does not end, it does not fade in the distance, but it carries on, answering him in a high-pitched, ringing voice:

"Because you took it for granted that the sun would never be lost to you again, and then you completely forgot about it, and let yourself be surrounded by fog."

"And where did the sun leave me, then?"

"Nowhere, it's only the clouds that went up, my dear knight, the same clouds again, yet your beloved sun is high above your head all the time! As long as you are in a cloud, you don't know about it. The cloud is all around you as it's turned into a fog. You have to get out of it! That you can't see where to go right now? Don't hesitate, one way, just up!"

The knight stopped the horse, wiped cold sweat from his forehead, and worked hard to see where the mountain trail went on.

"Who could it had been, the voice? Oh, yes, I guess now! Clouds, they tend to be low once, then high again. What good does it do me that the sun shines just as kindly over them? Until I get high enough, it is foolish to rely that the clouds do not cover me. We have to get up, keep up!" exclaimed he in a resolute voice, urging his horse into a gallop.

## Chapter Three

**As the sun enchanted him,  
the distant fog turned  
to tempting glowing clouds.**

"What a beautiful, shining day it is!" the knight thought as the clouds receded again. "And not only shines the sun, everything else around shines! There's sun everywhere, there's actually sun in everything! So many bright clouds in the blue sky, resembling fleecy lambs! In fact – what lambs, I already know you well, you're just fog inside! Yet how beautifully you can reflect the rays of the sun... only this one wandered off somehow, I have to rush him... Into the gallop!"

The knight took hold of his spear and felt his horse accelerate gradually beneath him, turning into a gallop. As they approached within sight of the brilliant cloud, the knight was startled:

"Oh, but from near, that's not a lamb, but a grown ram... And how mighty he is! Look, he is standing on his hind legs and grimly sets his curved horns, as if urging me to fight."

The knight stops his horse and stares up at the dark, shaggy ram's head. He screams at the top of his lungs:

"So you won't obey me, you devil's head?"

"Come on, poor earthling, just try!" hears he a sneering reply.

So the knight starts up, holds his spear out in front of him, and grips the shield with a tightly clenched hand, as he expects to feel a violent impact. But what's going on? The spear just stabs into the thin fog, and it penetrates on and on, without any resistance, without any meaning or purpose. A cross-wind props into his shield, curls it, and he suddenly loses his correct direction. His head is spinning; he can't see what is left and right, not even up and down. The fog, still the same, dull and incomprehensible, seemed to surround him from all sides, as if there were always only this and nothing else.

The knight understood that he was lost, and that the whole fight had been in vain: "I had lost before I started. Again, there are the same clouds everywhere as before! But how is



that possible?" He dismounts and wipes the sweaty horse. Then, from a height above him, he hears a gentle ringing voice:

"Next time, don't mistake me for lambs, my fiction hero. Do you want them more than me? I'm the one who shines for you on my own! Bright clouds, they just reflect my light."

## Chapter Four

**How did he penetrate to the sun?**

**One fights the clouds with a sword,  
the other rises above them with a leap.**

"But clouds need to be put to an end forever, all of them!" shouts the knight. "How treacherous they are, how creeping, how ubiquitous! And close up they are so nastily wet and cold! What good is to be expected of them? My strength is in the sword, and what I cut off, it will never come together again. Clouds! Get out! Here will be only the sun, my beloved sun, the only one radiating."

So he cuts his sword into the clouds, swinging his muscular arms hard, fighting devotedly and persistently. As his forces gradually weaken, it allows him to notice more results. Yes, he managed to break the black and white cloud apart, and for a moment clear sky appeared between them. That's certainly good... But what about this bundle of grey fog? His sword slumps in vain, and only his fingers get stiff. And as he sweats with his effort, his sweat cools down in the thin, cold air, creating thus another cloud around him.

He stops in surprise: "This new cloud, I even make it myself with my own efforts! But I will never see anything through it! And yet my goal was to make the clouds fall so that the sun could be seen... It seems to be a futile struggle."

Disappointed, he puts down his sword and sits heavily on the hard rock. With pain he recalls the sun, where is it now? Perhaps the more he misses it, the more he must crave. He leans back and searches with his sight in the height, trying to penetrate the fog until he hears a quiet, ringing voice again from there:

"My knight, the struggle with clouds is a noble contest indeed. You can become a champion in it, who will be no equal in the tournaments of the heavenly knights. True, there are those who can do it for their whole life... but if you desire to win over the clouds once and for all, you have to be able to do something else."

"But what else can I master? I have a sword, and I cut into the enemy with it. I have a shield, and I protect myself with it. I have a spear, and I penetrate forward with it. And finally, I have a horse, and he carries me faithfully on his back all the time."

"And have you ever allowed your horse to fight alone?"

"How come, horse? They don't understand anything, even those with wings."

"But when it comes to grazing, every horse will understand."

"What?"

"A horse spell."

"No..."

"Yes! You whisper it in his ear: *You'll never be well-fed of clouds.*"

The knight stood helplessly, trying to put it together in his head.

"Just hold on tight!" he managed to hear the last words. From far, there was echoing a cheery ringing laughter until it gradually faded, and the silence was complete.

The knight hesitated for a moment, then bowed his head and sighed in resignation. He hugged the horse around his neck, bent to his ear, and whispered the spell there: "*You'll never be well-fed of clouds.*"

At that moment, the horse neighed, stood up with his hooves in the air and waved its wings so violently that it raised above all the clouds with a single, mighty leap. The knight

could barely keep in his saddle. That's why he was advised to hold on tight... Indeed, that magic spell had really worked!

Black and white clouds remained deep, far below them, and even the scattered shreds of fog could no longer be recognized. And though the vast sea of clouds beneath them emitted a glorious, enchanting glow, the knight finally realized that his horse would never be well-fed with earthly things. And not just the horse, even himself will ever be satisfied with the power over them. *"You'll never be well-fed of clouds,"* – yes, that was the right magic.

The whole world of clouds had now collapsed, and there was nothing but a clear sky above them. They were there, they arrived there. They were finally in heaven! As the clouds lost their dark power, the sun shone all the more – the knight's only beloved sun to which he set out here.

## Chapter Five

**And who was this sun?**

**"You are That" whispered the Earth.**

**"I am That" thundered the heavens.**

But where should he go next? And mainly, how to do it? The long awaited sun was here and there was so much of it that it could no longer be more. But it was still not *his* sun, he still didn't know it completely. He would like to embrace it, to feel its warm closeness, to kiss it, but he was not able to do that:

*"Love unloved, offered in vain: the lover is here, but the beloved one is still far away..."*

What was he supposed to do? After all, he was a knight, and as he had got through the clouds, he remembered the only way: To penetrate!

*"Heaven may be beautiful, but heaven is still only little. I'll try to get to the sun itself! Only then it will be possible to bring this adventure to the end."*

He leaned back and shouted: "Sun, my sun, you'll see me soon, I'm coming for you!"

He urged his winged horse to fly straight up, repeating to himself with a throat tight:

*"May it burn me to dust, lest there remain any splinter from the spear I hold out in front of me. The sun is my goal, that and only that."*

It's not easy just sitting on a horse and pointing upright. First he had to overcome vertigo and not deviate from the vertical. It was hard, extremely hard, but after a while he could just ascend. His direction was right, his goal was right, his determination was right. He had all the armour and the best horse for it. Now he firmly believed that he would succeed.

However, the more he extended his spear, the more his faithful horse swung its wings, the higher the sun seemed – still the only one, still kindly shining in a flawlessly clear sky, but still beyond his reach. Exhausted, he remained hanging motionless in immeasurable space. The horse beneath him dug its hoof into the void several more times, and then it hung the tired wings for good. They were neither rising nor sinking any more. There was total silence.

And in that silence it happened. No one knew how, no one knew exactly when, no one said why. It was a strange, indescribable grace through which time started to run again, but this time without the knight's previous effort. All that was known was 'This is you' and it was the same as 'This is me'. So close to each other that there was no need to embrace anyone, just to be quiet.

And when the knight dismounted his horse and bent down to tie his shoelace, he noticed that in his heart was the same sun he had seen in the sky before, and that it had always been there. From here he no longer has to go anywhere, and so it will remain forever.

*"I am who I am. I am who I am."* He repeated these words quietly, finally knowing who he was, who he loved and who he was loved by, and who he was now in union with.

But he could not know that this was just the first act of his story, and that there were new, even more glorious adventures awaiting him in the kingdom of heaven.







## Chapter One

**Those who long to see the stars  
let them their sun set –  
even if they knew well  
that the stars are there by day.**

After the knight had managed to know the sun, a long rest awaited him in the kingdom of heaven. He reached out, put his hands behind his head, blissfully stretched his body tired with a long struggle, and then just enjoyed the immense grace he had received. It warmed him somewhere deep inside, and it was the only wealth he was allowed to keep. For a long time, it seemed that he was lacking nothing, and that it would remain forever. He had also forgotten about his horse that might go to graze in heavenly pastures.

And in fact, the knight did not lack anything for a long time. But as celestial time passed inexorably, something began to dwell on him.

“What’s the matter with me?” It was an unfamiliar feeling for him, for as a poor knight, he was more used to distress than surplus. But now it was all the other way around! What was extra, that was a mysterious glow he hadn’t noticed before. It was now pouring in the whole world – far below and far away, up to immense distances.

But where did that strange glow come from? The knight had been searching for its source for a long time, and was surprised to find that it was coming from himself. “Yes,” he understood, “when the sun is in my heart, it must also shine. The joy and glory of me now shine all over the world. All this here is my shining day!”

But when there is something extra in heaven, there must also be something missing. After some time, the knight was amazed, how it is possible, that the glow came only from him and from nothing else.

“Can I be such alone in the world? There must be someone else who also radiates joy and happiness! Down below, the world is shrouded in a thick blanket of clouds, but here in heaven – why can’t I see anyone here? What a heaven is this!”

“Is there anyone else?” He shouted from the top of his lungs into the unfathomable abyss, but in vain. He felt his happiness crumble, as quickly as he had found it.

“Is there anyone else?” He called again, this time more quietly. He recalled that stars also belonged to the sky. “That’s how it has always been! Sure, the stars, at least those, at least tiny islands of someone’s presence, they must be here somewhere, but where? I don’t see any around here!”

And indeed, the stars, these were not to be seen, as if they had been cursed. More and more sadness fell on the knight, and his glow thus faded faster and faster. Yet an unexpected thing happened: As his own light ceased to dazzle him and surrendered to the darkness, this began to open before him in all directions, gradually revealing its deepest secrets: First, second, third, thousand... The stars leapt from the depths of darkness and covered the entire celestial vault with a distant flickering brightness.

The shining day of the knight’s soul was thus utterly forgotten, and now there was ruling the only dark, silent and freezing night in the whole heaven.

## Chapter Two

**What did the knight fight in heaven?  
As he left the beloved sun,  
in the distance it has changed  
into the last sunken star.**

The knight’s glow had already faded enough that when he looked back into his heart, he saw only a tiny, nameless star instead of the sun.

“Is that me?” he wondered. And then he realized it fully: “I, too, must be a mere star, in fact! Nothing more, what a sun, for I am but a tiny, nameless star here in this vast heaven, just one of countless others.”

And he was so light and fleeting as if he had spread to the vast space, as if there wasn’t a single place in heaven where he could rise even a little above the other.



But his horse walked around all eager, hoofing and snorting as if sniffing another adventure. The knight was alert, watching his gaze curiously. The horse was staring at one darker place in the sky where stars were missing.

"There must be a terrible loneliness," the knight realized, "such a desolate, dreary void."

He rubbed his eyes and looked even deeper into the celestial abyss. "Well, there's a tiny star in the centre of it, just as if to revive that dark place." The horse nodded at it, as if already knowing in advance what it was going to happen.

*He sang a romance  
about a no-one's land where the sunshine disappears,  
so that the stars may come out in the night of love,  
about beautiful princesses and their hidden chambers,  
about brave knights fulfilling them their most secret wishes.*

And as this romance flowed from his lips, the silver thread of his spear wrapped itself around his body, drawing him with gentle but irresistible force to the abandoned star. As he approached, a new, festive garment, such as he had never worn before, was gradually woven from the wrapped thread around his body. It was a long, shiny flowing cloak with red decoration that revealed his manly muscular chest.

"What happened to me? I'm here suddenly without all my weapons, which I've always relied on so much, with my chest bare, utterly delivered to that mysterious, distant power. This is how everyone can beat me!" However, as a true knight, he was not frightened. Deep in his heart he even looked forward to not missing a new adventure.

Slowly, the knight grew accustomed to wondrous things happening in heaven, noble and mysterious. It started with that very horse: In front of his eyes he covered himself with a dark blue velvet shawl with silver trim. The knight, to his amazement, found that his spear had turned into a long silver thread, stretching somewhere into a dizzying abyss. Now he held not a shield in his hand, but the body of a lute, and his sword turned into its neck. He was surprised and didn't understand anything, especially what made him start playing the lute, and then begin to sing:

### Chapter Three

**As he embraced the abandoned star,  
she turned in his arms  
in a blazing, beloved sun.**

The unknown star was approaching fast. She was so beautiful and so attractive that the knight could keep his eyes on her. A crown of every colour he had ever known, and even had never seen before, blazed around her head. She seemed to take in turns the gleam of all the gems of the world, moving in an unknown dance. Gradually, however, he realized that the star was declining from his direction. The mysterious thread that had drawn him to her was already burned in her heat, and he had no choice but to approach her by himself. Though he attracted her naturally with his own weight, she seemed afraid of the tremendous speed of his winged horse. But she didn't run away, she just dodged him, until they started dancing around.

They swirled around, like two stars have been doing since long ago, bowing to each other in full respect and admiration. It was an extremely rare encounter, as it happens once in many, many ages, if memory ever encompasses it, whether human or celestial.

"Come closer to me so I can embrace you."

"You must let go of the bridle for that, my heavenly knight."

The knight released his bridle and spread his arms.

"I gave up the sun, and the sun is here again. How is it possible, how can you be my sun?"

"I the same way as you can be my sun! I was so looking forward to you coming one day..."

Then they stepped back away from each other courtly again so that they could get a better look at each other.

"You must be... a celestial fairy? And what do they call you?"

"I have no one to call me, as I have been abandoned here for ages. I just remember in ancient times, when the stars used to be within reach of each other, that my name was Astera. And what's your name?"

"I am a nameless knight, long abandoned by my relatives. They had served the king faithfully for a long time, until they had had enough and became robbers. I don't want to know them anymore, and neither the king likes me too much."

"But the knights of heaven, they serve not the earthly but the heavenly king. Once I heard your name from him."

"I have a name here? I've never been here! I'm just on my way."

"Yes, so far you are just on your way, but on a heavenly way. And here you are at home. You came here to visit your true home! And here your name is Celestin."

The knight was just wondering, but he liked the new name Celestin and he felt it belonged to him, just as this beautiful celestial fairy couldn't be named other than Astera. From now

they knew their names and could get to know each other better.

"When we are separated, we are a star to each other, a mere star in the midst of countless others," said Celestin.

"But when we are close together, we are the sun to each other, the only sun not equal in the world," Astera assured him.

So they embraced each other in heavenly love and got to know each other. As soon as they departed, they recognized a loved one with their own name and their own beauty. Conversely, in intimate proximity each of them loved one single being who had been here since ages and will be the same for ever.

## Chapter Four

**How did he get to the stars?**

**One chases them with the wind,  
other silently glows with them in the sky.**

Then throughout the heavenly ages knight Celestin rested in the grace of this heaven. His love settled, and he flowed peacefully through time with his beloved star, Astera. Yet he was beginning to feel that there was something extra about him. It was the same as when he first met the sun closely. Despite the enormous power that had attracted him to the beloved star, the idea of what other stars were doing began to haunt him. But he couldn't see any stars yet, because the sunshine of nearby Astera completely overshadowed them.

"It begins to seem to you, my dear, that I am no longer enough for you?" Astera turned to him.

Hesitantly, Celestin sought the answer. He felt that he was just waking up from a sweet dream, but he allowed himself to dream the rest of it. Though still having been drunk with heavenly love, in the depth of his soul he was curious what would happen next:

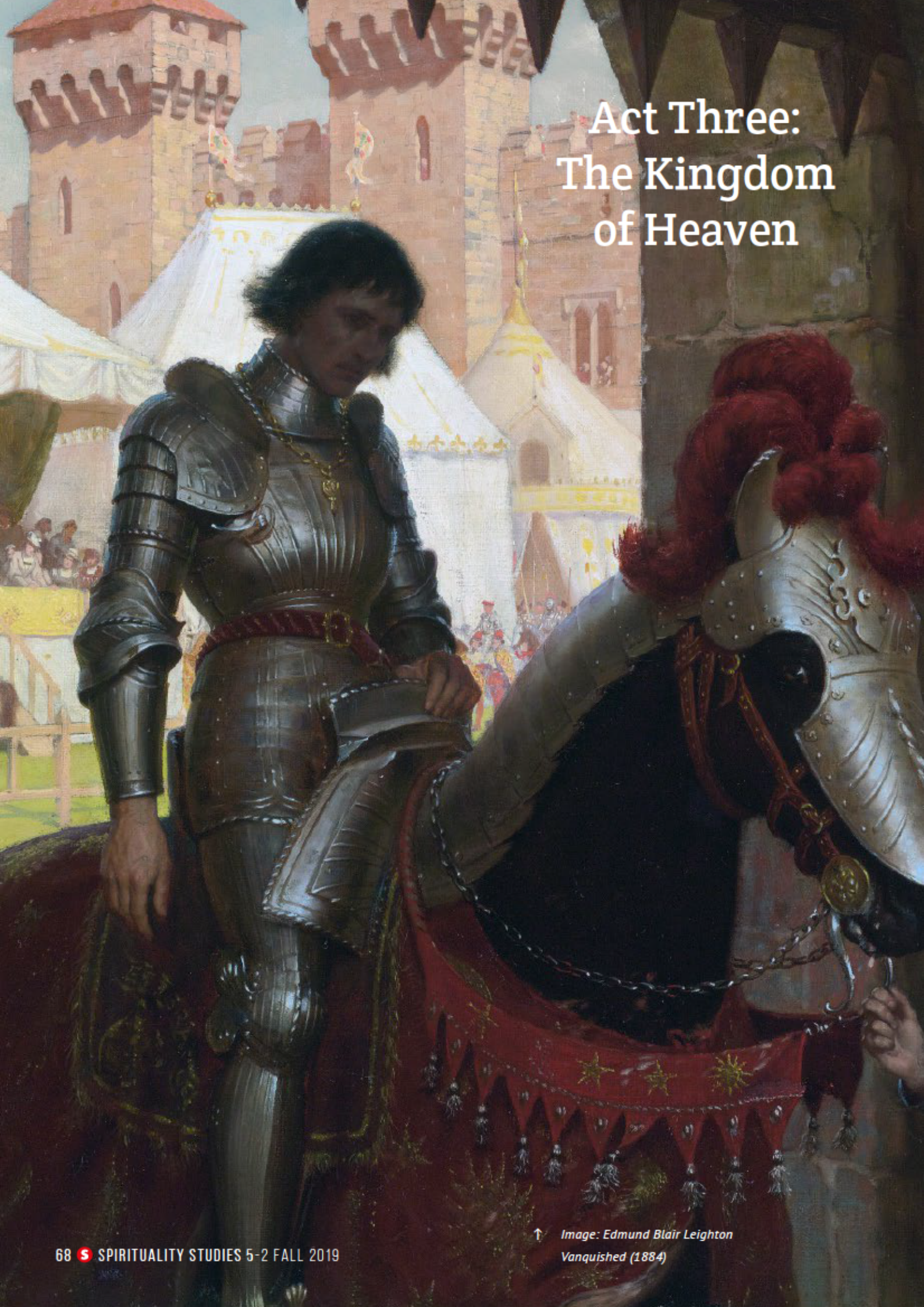
"I just realized you weren't the only abandoned star here. My heart is now crying for the other ones. I'd like to fly after them."







# Act Three: The Kingdom of Heaven



↑ *Image: Edmund Blair Leighton  
Vanquished (1884)*





that image, her face no longer shone as it once did, as if she now humbly shared his exile with him.

He rushed his horse, from nowhere to nowhere, yet at least forward, and urged him into a trot:

“Where are you all? I challenge you to fight!”

But there was only dead silence everywhere, without the slightest murmur.

“Don’t you even see me here, a tiny human being, the smallest of the smallest?”

As he fully realized his infinite misery, he finally looked up. At that moment he was horrified and shivering in terror. There stood a whole celestial army.

He realized that the battle he so recklessly asked for would not be long to wait. Ahead of him, now a gigantic chessboard, perfectly smooth and shiny, stretched diagonally upward to unseen heights, over which echoed the trumpet’s voice, announcing the start of the match. The opponent had white figures. The knight noticed the heavily clad pawns in the foreground, the menacing enemy knight with the long sword behind them, and the impregnable rooks on both sides of the chessboard.

“Here I have nothing to lose,” the knight thought, lifting his black horse to the rear and leaping into the middle of an empty white field. “Check!” he shouted at the white king, who stood at an angle in the black field.

But the white king, leaning on the ancient sword, showed no surprise. On the contrary, he stabbed the sword in front of him with both hands, reached out to the knight, and spoke to him in a gentle voice:

“Welcome, my dear heavenly knight. This game is as old as the whole world, and there is no less to play than life. But you and your horse jumped just in the middle of this game. I appreciate your bravery, but long ago the white has begun first,” he pointed at his army, “and is therefore at an advantage. I will let you back your move, but then get out of here quick!”

“His Majesty, I promised to bring this adventure to the end, no matter how. That’s my only wish. I’ve sacrificed everything for it. I don’t even have anywhere to go back to.”

The white king shrugged. His appearance was familiar to the knight! Yes, he reminded him of a hermit he had met at the beginning of his journey.

“So you still believe, my dear knight, that the kingdom of heaven can be conquered by mere sword?”

The white king fixed his wise, kind eyes on him.

“But the sword falls out of your hand as soon as it shivers with your eagerness. This is not the way of the king. He must peacefully command the entire army! Turn around and look behind you.”

The knight obeyed and looked back. Behind him towered a wall of huge black figures. The brave pawns immediately covered his bold cavalry attack, the knights had already mounted their horses and the entire army was moving forward with a thud. This was his army, waiting for his command. His hope was now in united force!

## Chapter Three

**Whenever he was certain  
of the kingdom of heaven,  
he reached into the void.**

“The command has to be peaceful,” the knight recalled the wise words of the white king, and his fear gradually vanished. He now stood in the back of his army as a black king. He wore a glittering crown of black gems on his head, precious armour of dark steel on his body, and a sword with an ebony hilt in his hand. Next to him stood a black queen he had never seen before. She was incredibly beautiful, her long black hair covered her exposed shoulders, and above her firm hips she had a high, wrought belt of dark, matt metal. But she was doing nothing yet, just gazing intently into the distance at the white king, as if to enchant him with her magic sight.



“She doesn’t even care about me,” the knight complained, “and yet she should be my main strength! A queen, that’s the strongest chessboard figure!”

He remembered the carving on his old wooden shield. Yes, a queen! The lady of his heart... She sent him to death, and it will happen soon. Why is he here to fight for some vain kingdom with a white king who, moreover, is good and yet wisely advises him? He is a thousand times better! Let him keep his kingdom and reign in it fairly further...

Such thoughts ran through his head while the battle continued. The white knights already penetrated his territory, and a huge white rook threatened his right side.

“So will my lady do anything?” The knight wondered. He watched her anxiously, not to miss her only movement. To his surprise, he realized his lady was no longer in her original position. She stopped watching the white king and stared at the back of the nearest black pawn.

“What is she doing? She is supposed to attack and not throw off with the last infantryman. She had liked at least the white king before, but this is too much!”

He stopped and reminded himself to command peacefully. So he pushed out jealousy and looked at the pawn’s back. What if things were all different?

And indeed, it was different. The black pawn in front of them had a small door in his armour, up on his back! The knight strained his eyes even more and gradually became convinced that every single figure, either black or white, had that hidden door there – in secret, not to know about it, and not to be able to reach it.

It occurred to him that his beloved star – apparently now in the role of this black queen – was somehow helping him out here. Only her love had just changed from hot to metallic cold: “Think my dear, hurry, just notice. Use your head!”

“Oh, these ladies... Who’s supposed to know them?” The knight frowned, yet obeyed, forcing himself to think coldly in the middle of the fight with all his strength:

“The back door, of course, he realized immediately. This game has its backdoor. And with the backdoor there is a way out! Black or white, pawn or king, we all have a chance to get out, escape the curse in that chess figure of ours. And whoever doesn’t get out by himself, let him help the other one.” This thought enchanted him now. He rejoiced that he had just found the key to victory:

“Just let the enemy attack, from now he has no chance,” he was cheering ahead, “it’s all just a game of black and white after all... because the truth is only who we are inside, and this one can never lose! It’s a real miracle, now I’m holding the last key to the kingdom of heaven in my hand. It is just enough to turn it right. In fact, I can become the saviour of all beings in the world!”

At that moment, his cold mind had subsided, and the decision was made in one instant. Turning sharply to the black lady at his side, he shouted in fierce passion: “I’ll free you first!” With a single move, he swept the lush raven hair off her back, and ripped her gown with his iron glove. He rushed to the hidden door, opened it, and reached inside hastily. But his face froze in horror: He felt absolutely nothing inside!

## Chapter Four

**Is human life enough for this goal?**

**One sleeps until the horn blows,  
the other doesn’t just allow his eyelids to sink.**

The knight stood petrified, watching the battlefield grimly. “This is obviously not where salvation leads. How could it, if this is just Heaven of Nothing? Horror! The disguise will be even more perfect than I expected! Still, there is real blood pouring from the wooden figures, though all empty inside. The wounds in my empty body really hurt me, and I can clearly feel the icy breath of death behind my neck.”

Then he watched how his black knight ended up stabbed, hitting a long spear in a hurry. His two rooks slowly turned into piles of ruins. In the end, even his black queen had to cross the board and surrender herself to the white king: “Don’t go there! Stay with me...” Just in vain.

It was all as the white king had correctly predicted. He had started with the first move and, with his infinite wisdom, had always to win. The knight understood that whatever he did, he would always be faced with an inevitable loss from which there was no escape.

Then it actually came. A white horse rushes to his left, a white bishop is pointing at him from the right, and a white king stands right in front of him: "Chess mat, my dear heavenly knight! You've lost the last chess field you can still stand on. Black King, you didn't surrender in time, so prepare for death!"

An unspeakable horror overwhelmed the knight, penetrating to the furthest depths of his being. This is really the end of all hope! Absolute end! Fully reconciled, he just expected when it would happen. Now, or now again... It doesn't matter anymore. Moments passed...

Suddenly he heard a mighty horn sound over the battlefield, announcing the end of the match. And it was only this single sound, vibrating in the entire kingdom of heaven that finally awakened him:

"After all, it's all different! I just dreamt the whole thing, absolutely everything. It was all only my dream about myself! Who would have thought this was possible? It's just Astera, my beloved star – where is she, what is she doing now – she has known it for ages! She didn't need to wake up anymore! It was only me who did not understand how deep and true this dream about oneself could be."

Those were his first thoughts when he rubbed his eyes. "Astera..." And he was extremely grateful to her for sending him to conquer the kingdom of heaven, though she knew in advance how much it would cost them both.

## Chapter Five

**And how did he get there?**

**As he heard from heaven "Where are you?"**

**he knelt and whispered "I don't know..."**

**And then he just listened**

**to the echo vibrating in silence –**

**"You are here,"**

**"here,"**

**"here"...**

"The kingdom of heaven," he thought, "how could it be at any place?" He smiled at this idea. "But where did I actually wake up, then?" He felt around and found himself in some strange cave with rugged walls and a high ceiling he could not reach. As his eyes got used to the dark, he noticed a roughly carved bench standing at one wall, with a brown robe and knotted rope lying on it. "The hermit!" realized the knight, "I should thank him, too." What would he do if I asked him, as he did last time, "Do you have anything else to give me?"

The knight looked at the bench with the robe, and then looked at himself. He was quite naked! After all the disguises, there was nothing left on his body. And what beautiful and glorious costumes they were! He laughed frankly at this memory. Then he looked at the robes again and finally began to understand the hermit.

He got up, put on hermit's robes, and girded himself with his rope. "Thank you, dear hermit. You had something to give me because now I'm even poorer than you. But I don't need to be a hermit anymore. It would be just another disguise."

He sat down on the bench and felt good and light again. Will this adventure ever end? Who knows! Where is Astera now? Who knows! Who is he himself and who will he be in a moment? Who knows! And where is he anyway? Who knows...

As he sat in the poor hermit robe, he knelt in respect and merely listened to the vast silence that reigned in the cave. This silence continued to grow until a perfectly clear and distinct response emerged from it:

"You're here, you'll always be here. You will always be where you are and who you are. Like me, I am the one who I am."

The knight bowed in silent approval.

"You can travel on with the sun over your head, knight!" the cave echoed.

The knight walked out of the cave and stared into the sunshine that spilled across the valley. The sun is here again! He was finally home. His horse stood nearby, nibbling on a fairly ordinary earthly bush, as if nothing had ever happened.

It might seem that at this point the knight's adventures will end, for nothing greater could be achieved, on earth or in heaven. But there is still an earthly life and a world waiting for the knight outside the cave.





## Chapter One

**What was close before,  
that is far away now.**

**What was far away before,  
this is close now.**

“Well, you have returned to us, my dear heavenly knight, welcome among us poor ones,” appeared the hermit in front of the cave.

“But Father, what are you wearing, this used to be my knightly dress!”

“Nothing, son, this was just scattered over the rocks. They were probably sweeping up there in the morning,” laughed the hermit, pointing at the sky with his finger. The knight jumped off his horse, stumbled towards the hermit down the rocky path, hugged him and put his head on his shoulder. He didn’t say anything; they just held each other in their arms for a long time.

“So, so... that’s how it should be,” said the hermit, “we are equal now.”

“And what about your horse, my heavenly knight? Here on earth, his wings will only inspire envy.”

The Knight nodded sadly, drew his sword, and swung to chop them off. But the horse shook its head dismissively and looked up at him pleadingly. Even the hermit was alarmed:

“Hold on, Knight, the wings are just too much to see!”

So the knight lowered his sword, leaned against it, and shrugged.

“You can leave them for the night,” the hermit continued, “just by day we try to hide them. Compared with that former celestial glory, the sackcloth shawl will be poorer, but even a horse has to get used here,” he laughed softly.

“In fact, the wings may come in handy,” the knight laughed bitterly with him, “after all, it is being sung that on clear nights a spirit soars on them to the heavens!”

He flashed his sword over his head to make it look cheerful and brave, but it rather made him sad:

“It’s soaring to the heavens... The heavens! Where else can they be than here, where I am? This is what I already know well; a heavenly dream is a mere disguised earthly dream! And yet I feel there’s still some difference between heaven and earth... how could I be homesick here?”

So he tucked his sword with one hand, while he lovingly caressed his old leaky shield with his other hand, in the same way as he used to play the celestial lute up there. He gazed with tenderness at the faded image of the lady of his heart. Now they were closer to each other than in heaven, but differently than he had ever imagined, and he would never be able to explain it to anyone here on earth.

## Chapter Two

**What did the knight leave with?**

**He had the sun in his heart,  
and a star in his palm.**

**And what did he return with?**

**He had a star on his forehead,  
and his heart in his palm.**

The knight and the hermit descended along a rocky path that wound down into the valley. Far below them, the river glittered, and on its banks lay villages with thatched roofs and white church towers. The knight guided the horse, and the hermit showed him the way in places covered with bushes.

“Knight, do you know what you’re getting into?”

“Yes, Father... perhaps.”

“Then don’t forget four things. First: When you were leaving, you didn’t know the sun yet, though you had it in your heart. You will always remind yourself that here is everybody like you were before. Second: When you wanted to get hold of the stars there, you were ready to give yours first. Never forget how hard it is for others here. Third: Once the sun goes out, a star will shine on your forehead. You’ll hide her, otherwise you would betray your mistress.





"He must have known beforehand that they were after me... Perhaps he heard it from herdsman. A good hermit, so good... and then he arranged to change our clothes. Now everyone believes they've killed me, and the vengeful brothers will never let look for me again. But a hermit, he sacrificed himself for me, a good hermit!" The Knight threw himself on the grave, a cruel cry rattling his body. "Father!" he called desperately, "Father!" But the hermit was no longer here.

Then the horse came back after all. The knight tied his broken bridle, looked back for the last time and started off. As he looked into the inside of his shield, he saw a drop of the hermit's blood beside the engraved image of the lady of his heart. He wiped his forehead and took several deep breaths. He could not bear any more. Now he was sure he had led this adventure to the end.

### Chapter Three

**And when he crossed the threshold  
of his birth home?**

**Cheers of joy rose from the ground,  
silent cries fell down from the sky.  
Hallelujah...**

He arrived in the village below his former castle late in the evening. He sat down in a corner, again at the same table, wondering what was new.

"Where have you been all along? You'll be surprised, but an amazing thing happened here. The sun is shining again, and most importantly – we didn't have to lift a finger for it."

"I'm sorry, I was..."

"Fool, couldn't you stay home? You've missed a historic event! There's a rumour that the court astrologers were working on it, and that they've made it. They need to be thanked!"

"But in heaven..."

"In what heaven, here in the castle, there will be a huge festival, and even the king is to arrive. Our King himself! But you obviously don't even know what a king looks like!"

"A king, down here, an earthly one?"

"What are you talking about? Wait for tomorrow, the sun will rise again! There will be lots of entertainment and joy, wine will flow in stream."

The knight stared into the ground for a moment, but then recalled the hermit's advice. He thanked him silently and took courage:

"Yes, my friends, certainly, of course. I'm also happy to come and participate. A wandering troubadour will surely be welcome here."

He straightened up, looked at the guests with a smile, and continued to speak bolder as he found his new role:

"Yes, sure, I'll borrow a lute somewhere. I've got a lot to sing about. It will be about the glorious adventures that await the heavenly knight when he desires to bring them to the end." He jumped right up on the table and began:

*I'll sing a romance  
about a no-one's land where the sunshine disappears,  
so that the stars may come out in the night of love,  
about beautiful princesses and their hidden chambers,  
about brave knights fulfilling them their most secret wishes.*



"We're curious, then," laughed the jolly guests, until their voices faded in the clatter of pewter tankards and fists banging on tables.

"I'm curious, too," nodded the knight as he was leaving the hall, "if the sun will come up again in the morning. Does it have to at all?"

He smiled frankly at this thought and remembered the hermit again. Sure, he'd like it to shine again tomorrow. "Yes, Father, so be it if it is your will," he whispered humbly to himself.

He mounted his horse and rode out into the starry night. He went where he belonged as a heavenly knight, where he was at home. He looked back cautiously that anyone could not see him, took off the sackcloth, exposed the horse's wings and spurred him on. With his heart pounding, he then listened as the horses' hooves rattled faster and faster on the stone blocks beneath him. One last touch to the ground, and beyond that there was only silence.

Only the dark outline of a flying horse and rider was overshadowing the vast star vault. It was steadily shrinking, and the number of stars around it gradually grew, until only a single tiny star was eventually covered:

"My beloved..."

And at last the shadow disappeared, and this star shone again in the sky, with a double brightness.

For all this night they were allowed to be together again. From earth they were two as one, and from heaven they were one as two.

Hallelujah...

## Notes

- [1] "The Ten Cow Herding Pictures." In *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, edited by D. T. Suzuki, 1949, 363–378. London: Rider & Co. Accessed May 5, 2019. [us.archive.org](http://us.archive.org).
- [2] *The Rāmāyān of Vālmiki*. London: Trübner & Co. Accessed May 5, 2019. [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).
- [3] St. Teresa of Avila. 1921. *The Interior Castle*. London: Thomas Baker. Accessed May 5, 2019. [sacred-texts.com](http://sacred-texts.com).
- [4] *The Shorter Discourse on Emptiness [Cūḷa Suññata Sutta, MN 121]*. Accessed May 5, 2019. [www.dhammadata.org](http://www.dhammadata.org).
- [5] *The Quest of the Holy Grail*. 2000. Cambridge, ON: In Parenthesis. Accessed May 5, 2019. [www.yorku.ca](http://www.yorku.ca).
- [6] Gjellrup, Karl Adolph. 2005. *Der Pilger Kamanita*. Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening. Accessed May 5, 2019. [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).
- [7] Campbell, Joseph. 2004. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Accessed May 5, 2019. [www.rosenfels.org](http://www.rosenfels.org).



# Ignorance



Received September 17, 2019

Accepted September 23, 2019

**Key words**

Ignorance, knowledge,  
impermanence,  
nature of Buddha

**In his essay, Sandó Kaisen provides an analysis of ignorance as the very core of human beingness and points out to the impermanence of all knowledge uncovered through the practice of the Sitting of the Buddha.**











## Mission

Spirituality Studies is a double-blind peer reviewed academic journal published twice a year in English for international readership. The journal welcomes original contributions from various academic fields reflecting the phenomenon of spirituality in its multiple forms and from multiple perspectives.

Spirituality Studies covers a wide range of theoretical and practical (lived spirituality) issues related to spirituality, such as processes of “spiritual” transformation as reported and described in various traditions of mysticism (in Christianity, Judaism, Islam etc.) or yoga (in Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, new religious movements etc.). The journal publishes theoretical and empirical studies, research articles, essays, interviews, reviews and poetry.

Spirituality Studies also provides a forum for sharing personal spiritual experiences of spiritual practitioners elaborated in a form of an autobiographical essay or poetry. By combining academic and personal approaches to spirituality, the journal aims at providing an exceptional interdisciplinary platform for constructive dialogue between a variety of viewpoints, approaches, and methodologies in the study of spirituality.

The third area of the Spirituality Studies’ focus is spiritual education. When publishing studies on spiritual education as well as teaching and methodical materials, which reflect practical experience of educators, Spirituality Studies facilitates education related to spirituality and fosters the awareness of the importance of spirituality for personal, interpersonal and social well-being.

The journal is published by The Society for Spirituality Studies in partnership with the Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique/Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (DIM·MID) and European Union of Yoga. It is housed on the [spirituality-studies.org](http://spirituality-studies.org) website.



[www.spirituality-studies.org](http://www.spirituality-studies.org)