

## **The Christian mystical path and the mental-spiritual path of integral yoga.**

Chapter from *Yoga and Christianity* by Heinz Grill (1998)

*Translated Lisa Winchester (2021)*

Christianity as well as yoga has produced different paths in the past centuries, which in many ways contradict each other in their development, in their formulation, constitution and also in their objectives. We could perhaps succumb to the profane opinion in all simplicity and assert that all paths must lead to the one goal of union with God and experience of God. This goal is certainly common to all paths, both the Christian as well as the Eastern. But we mustn't overlook the fact, that the term 'experience of God' often means different aspects and thus very special experiences. The goals are perhaps directed in a certain way towards ecstatic experiences, that are experienced as liberation and higher-level experiences, and in other ways they are directed towards certain feelings that are reminiscent of oneness or a union, of a so-called "unio mystica". With these different experiences various goals are connected and so the effects on the spiritual world and, proceeding from this, on the formation of communities and their forms of expression, are of a different character. The common goal is, however, certainly not, as it is often assumed by the partisans in their contradictions and violent disputes, a bad intention, but the goal is eternal goodness, the truth in the world and the greatest possible connection to these ideals. This, what we call God, is what these ways want to find and actually experience in their earthly home. The common goal is a constant, partial and tentative approach to the high and highest secrets and an experience of the hidden or inexpressible, which, in its ultimate consequence, applies to every word and escapes any description.

Let us take once more the Christian-mystical path as an example, to characterize that deep inner descent or that entering into the hidden worlds of the deepest psychic experience. The path taken by Hildegard von Bingen and her co-sisters is indicative of this, and it is indicative of various areas of monastic life in the early Middle Ages. In the late Middle Ages, this path became more and more lost, or at least broke away from its characteristic restraints and opened itself increasingly more to the world in a secularization. At the time of Hildegard von Bingen, monastic life still had a very different character than we find today in the last remaining places of monastic life. At the center of monastic life stood the Liturgy of the Hours (Breviary, the official set of prayers 'marking the hours of each day and sanctifying the day with prayer') and at the center of individual experience stood individual prayer and work. Prayer was, however, at that time in the early Middle Ages, still carried by completely different perceptions and subtle feelings. Prayer was in this previous demanding monastic life, a contemplative prayer and led in an increasing activity inside to an being-like world. The nuns and monks felt into a mood, in a growing way, through prayer, which can typically be described as sympathetic and experiencing with a higher or finer world of spirituality. The rhythms had a special place, or they should prepare individual life for the experience of the essential and unconscious primordial ground. The prayer tradition back then prescribed prayers in the morning, at noon and in the evening, as it is in the monasteries still today. The special thing about these emerging rhythms in prayer was, however, the fact that the monks and nuns experienced the morning differently in prayer than midday, and this in turn was different from the evening. The joyful and tender morning mood of a still almost moving, silent calm gave the praying person a very imperceptible mood of a melancholic departing and a plunge into a being world of the coming day. Prayer was often based on melancholic, painful and at the same time, yet very pure feelings towards the otherworldly or astral world. In the evening, however, the monks and nuns perceived a quiet satisfaction with the being-like world and a touch of unity in their hearts. The setting sun, with its last shimmer and its soothing red, gave a sense of belonging and oneness with the otherworldly realm of the dead and with the being-like aspects of creation. The rhythms of prayer were carried by these feelings and inner moods and received their appropriate classification and timing through them. Prayer was always directed with feeling and sympathy towards an astral world on the other side, where the suffering and seclusion of the deceased is, which for a certain exists time like invisible pillars in the spiritual world. People still felt very close to purgatory or an otherworldly, suffering world and they united to some extent with a being-like and otherworldly part in their prayers. The moods of prayer were focused on an inner experience of natural creation and the transcendent worlds in the astral realm. The feelings exuded

the desire of a longing for a secure home, and they were often devout, brotherly and shaped out in a direct closeness of experience and warm-hearted experiencing.

The mystical path of older Christianity was mostly shaped by many ascetic toil and penance exercises. These exercises even went partly with self-flagellation and accompanied with the infliction of a conscious pain from the body. An essential discipline for killing the impure feelings and all worldly desires, which arose in the body through the radiance of the blood, the monks and nuns achieved by being imprisoned in their monastery cell for a certain period of time. This imprisonment in the cell in the most barren conditions, without the possibility of communication and without any possibility of worldly distractions, was like a certain becoming dead to the body and thus an extinguishing of the desire-life. Those feelings, which the old monasticism attained with imprisonment, were perhaps in a certain way somewhat ambiguous, but it certainly led to a different approach to the world. When the monk left his monastery cell after his isolation and approached his brothers, he felt a deeper connection and an intense friendship that reminds one of true gratitude and brotherly togetherness. Through the imprisonment and seclusion in the cloister the monk or the nun had to endure a certain death of the outer life and so could meet in a new way their fellow brothers and fellow sisters, and the whole world.

Those intense feelings and devotions, those experiences in rhythmic prayer, which led to the unification and experience of the being of creation and which led the mind closer and closer to the kingdom on the other side, were at that time, however, mostly not rated as a real experience of God. The holiest and greatest personalities in the cloister experienced the angelic world and felt the otherworldly kingdom of death and brought the dead and ancestors a deep compassion as their offering. In many cases, however, these feelings during prayer and the mood in the cloister were carried from pain and pity. The blissful experience and the true "unio mystica", the experience of godliness and unity with god were still a further stage for monastery existence and represented a considerable difficulty even for the greatest personalities. The subtle feeling in an otherworldly realm of the dead, the angelic wingedness with subtle feelings and perceptions and the intrinsic sympathy for elemental creation, and the changing moods that came to earth through the astral influences were still fleeting, external feelings that were not yet a real connection and the final experience of delight in God. The mystics, therefore, had to continue to bring their thought life into silence or into a kind of monotony, so that this thought life, in which the emerging and surging I might be based, came to a complete calm and thus to an extinction. Only when this thought-life was completely silent could the contemplation and pure subtle-feeling experience of unity be attained. The silence or a monotony of thought reached the ancient mystics through many penances and through a constant monotony in prayer or in certain works. Thinking became monotonous, more autonomous and therefore slower, until it almost dried up like in an infinite ocean. The mystic stepped deep into their world of sensation and into the astrality that is always present and yet not recognized in ordinary life. The astrality encompassed all their feelings of the kingdom of the heart. The mystic went deep into these sensations and thus into the inner world and sought in this world the unity and delight of the eternal being-connected with God. They succeeded after a long catharsis and with great effort and an innermost sustained prayer, which was answered by an overcoming grace. This longed-for answer of a grace was noticed by the mystic in a kind of eye or an appearance in the mind and the rising light of contemplation. The light of contemplation has become a strange expression for us, which we can barely imagine in its meaning and its profound significance. In the deep descent, into the innermost feeling world and in the continuing struggle for prayer and unity, the Christian mystic, who had become pure, experienced this light of contemplation like a spectator accompanying them from the outside or from a higher level with one eye. He experienced God and felt the deep connection in prayer through the light of contemplation, that looked down at him, in the deep descent, as if from above.

The way of this older mysticism is only followed today in various modifications and partial approaches. Great personalities such as Abbot Emmanuel Jungclaussen or the Benedictine monk Bede Griffith went, to a substantial degree, through a similar form of this mystical path. Characteristics of this mystical path are also found in some areas of yoga ecstasy and trance states, which are reached through yoga meditation. Paths such as Tibetan Buddhism are also very similar in their psychic experience to this mystical-Christian path. For the contemplation of yoga and Christianity is precisely that purity or catharsis, which represents on

the mystical path an indispensable necessity, very noticeable, for without purification in the mind and in the vital feelings, no real progress can be made on the way to God. The path of mysticism truly leads to goodness in the world, and it leads to brotherliness, compassion and sympathy, and it leads to a deep closeness to creation, to the elemental beings of the earth and to all those beings and creatures who belong to the belong to invisible spheres. It would, however, be an exaggeration if this Christian mystical path was upheld as the only and valid way to experience God in Christianity, for the ways of experiencing God are manifold, and they, above all, guided by various spiritual approaches. The dangers of the Christian-mystical path lie in that harden, isolated work, which easily tends to worlds-alienation or sometimes triggers psychological crises that are difficult to cope and which, without further help or the integration of thoughts, brings about an extremely difficult synthesis between individuality and creation. On the mystical path the retreat from life is imperative and it places such a high value that the whole of life is often weakened and thus easily leads to an inadequate integral shaping through. The Christian-mystical way is, however, by the kind of inner descent into feelings, by purifying the feelings and the mentality of a particular interest also for all other paths.

For the synthesis of yoga and Christianity, or, generally speaking, for the mastery of all low and fixed attachments to a pure vision of God and individual unified experience, we need additional activities, which include above all thinking and its possibilities. On the spiritual-mental path, which is described here in its further basic constitution, a particular intellectuality or a particular educational knowledge is not necessary, but above all a specific turning to thought, concentrated thought development and an emerging, pictorial thought modeling is necessary. Thinking must not be tied to feelings, passions or secret desires of physicality, rather, it must become pure and a shining light and model itself out of this, according to the high wisdom of the existing supersensible realities. The spiritual-mental path leads, therefore, first of all to a transformation of all intellectual and vital patterns into a pure thought life that resembles a light of the personality. While the mystic immediately descends into their world of sensation and thus into deep bodily experience, so the path of Integral Yoga rises more to a brighter, more perfect and transformed life, that learns to experience itself in the joyful-sense of thought. The thought life is not wiped out and brought to a monotony and almost a silence, but it is brought back into its own world of light and into its own origin, so that like a sun-like being-limb can shine above its own physicality.

As a consequence of this transformation of the thought-life, which is led from a more reflective to a discriminating thinking, from vicara to viveka, or from a more projective, analyzing, and discussing thought to a pure sunlit glow, the attunement of feelings and sensations arises, which are stored at a deeper level more behind or below this thought-life. The feeling life encloses our unconscious life and our vital nature. This feeling life is like a great body of water on which the sun of thought shines from above. When this sun of thought warms the sphere of the air with fire, and this air again acts on the surface of the feeling life, so it is slowly warmed through like the water in the lake and animated in its character. The feeling life is lit-through on the spiritual-mental path through the high and highest ideals in the thoughts on a new, more comprehensive and purer level.

As a third and highest stage of the transformation a reversion of this light takes place onto the physical body and into the hidden will-life. The physical body is the firmest or densest part, which represents a final consequence and outflow of the spirit. The light of thought, which learns to move in its own high ideals, warms the inner life of sensation, flows through it, and proceeding from this the physical corporeality receives that high alchemy of transformation, so that the body receives a revitalization, rejuvenation and refinement right down to its deepest cells. This transformation, which takes place right down to the will and into the deepest layers of corporeality, is the last and highest step of a sophisticated yoga activity. Life becomes love, and it will once again express that love through the body and its own beauty. The transformation always begins from above or from a higher and a pure sun-like seed, and descends from it into the depths of perception and into the innermost layers of corporeality. That mysterious alchemy, which takes place as a consequence of a gradual transformation, goes from above to below, as in the moving course of the elements, which, like the building blocks in the wise order of nature converge, and therefore, does not happen by our own direct activity itself but by high beings who work on us and on the creative plan of world evolution. It happens through the very own creative wisdom itself. On the path of the spiritual-mental direction of yoga, we must, however, tirelessly strive for the highest ideals and insights, as well as

also the devotion and service to those highest ideals. We must leave ourselves to a certain degree and not give up life but give up the bindings to life, and direct all our faith, all our attention, all our effort, and our whole purpose in life to that highest vision of what is humanly possible, and at the same time look with the most intense interest and daring enthusiasm at this other worldly power of purity. From the Christian point of view this activity means a true awakening to a creative relationship, an untiring approach to Jesus Christ, an untiring search for the knowledge of his person and a constant effort to serve in agreement to the highest ideals. The flesh and blood of the mortal mind has nothing to say.

But just as a mountaineer climbs to dizzy heights, so the spiritual path increases to levels, but also brings a danger and temptation. This danger lies in pride and hubris, which easily leads to arrogance and knowing-better, or to a vain, hidden self-dark. These temptations can be more easily mastered if the aspirant becomes aware that knowledge is not their own right to possess, and they must begin the path anew every day and from the very bottom, from the deepest valley floor. The work of recognizing knowledge always begins in darkness or ignorance, and once it rises to the light, it is quite different from the expectations that it has conceived. Knowledge is loneliness and being displaced in the world, and it is touched by the pain of Indian world-being, but it is also animated by a joy over the one whose name in the world no one knows.

Both paths, the older mystical path of monastic Christianity and the spiritual-mental path, are currently still oppositely oriented. In a more distant future, however, they will find each other with their inner search for truth and open up a greater integral spirituality.