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I. Yogic Practices, Meditation, and Prayer

1. The Four Yogas

The four yogas are universal since every religion stresses devotion-heart (bhakti), knowledge-intellect (jnana), activity (karma), and meditation or prayer-will (raja). These four techniques performed to attain realization of the Divine are applicable to all religions, and only vary in details to suit the different forms of practices. Appeal is made to what is best and noblest in men and women, bringing about a process of self-transformation. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) presents the rational procedures of each yoga as an efficient and effective means of attaining one's designated goal. He disclosed, "Each soul is potentially Divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work [Karma Yoga], or worship [Bhakti Yoga], or psychic control [Raja Yoga], or philosophy [Jnana Yoga]--by one or more or all of these--and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details." "The grandest idea in the religion of the Vedanta is that we may reach the same goal by different paths; and these paths I have generalised into four, viz. those of work, love, psychology, and knowledge."¹ Nevertheless, a devotee should strive to be proficient all four yogas. Then their needs, interests, attitudes, temperament, and aptitudes will harmonize in a realistic unified organized effective manner. The three basic behavioral orientations are: affective related to feeling, cognitive

representing reason, and industrious involving action. Consequently, there is a tendency for a social person to select bhakti, an intellectual individual to prefer Jnana, an active person to choose Karma, and a meditative type to prefer Raja Yoga. We are potentially Divine as the nondual Atman Self and as the dualistic Divine Self.

If “will” is related to raja yoga this makes raja yoga compatible with action (karmayoga), thought (jnana yoga), and feeling (bhakti yoga). Granted meditation is pursued for other purposes but by improving concentration it does strengthen the will. The raja yoga practice of meditation increases willpower that facilitates the ability to exert self-control over ones own behavior and to resist temptations that retard spiritual progress. The four yogas supplement one another being that they each lead to the same goal, realization of Brahman- God. In addition, they are complementary, since by practicing one method the other three will be enhance. A virtuous cycle can arise since one yogic activity will motivate another. This leads to a consistent process of self-improvement. In this sense the four yogas overlap, since for example activity (karma) also involves thought and knowledge (jnana), feeling (bhakti), and concentration and willpower (raja). Each of the four yogas entail knowledge, feeling, and willpower though they tend to focus on one of these characteristics. Ramakrishna asks, “How can you love [bhakti] him unless you know [jnana] him?”²

In Hinduism the Vaishnava and Dvaita Vedanta emphasize the bhakti yoga of devotion, Advaita Vedanta the jnana yoga of knowledge, Yoga Schools the raja yoga of meditation, and many religious Orders the karma yoga of external work. Each of these organizations is a part of Hinduism that comprises all four yogas. When Vivekananda states, “A man may be intellectual, or devotional, or mystic, or active; the various religions represent one or the other of these types” and “Therefore the whole scope of all systems of Yoga (and each religion represents one),” by religions he is referring to the various Indian Schools.³ Christianity also employs all four yogas, since there is a division of labor where devotional devotees follow something comparable to bhakti yoga, intellectual’s jnana yoga, mystic’s raja yoga, and administrator’s karma yoga.

Swami Atmarupananda of the Ramakrishna Order in the United States and France explained the differences between the four methods of yoga, “Each yoga is connected to a particular human faculty and field of

experience and aspiration: jnana yoga to the faculty of the discriminating will, the field of awareness, and the aspiration for self-knowledge and unity; bhakti yoga to the faculty of the loving will, the field of beauty, and the aspiration to lose oneself (or find oneself) in the infinite Ocean of Love; karma Yoga to the faculty of the active will, the field of service, and the aspiration for unity with the whole universe; raja Yoga to the faculty of the introspective will, the field of psychology, and the aspiration for self-mastery.”⁴

Three Lecturers in Philosophy at Open University in England, Diane Collinson, Kathryn Plant and Robert Wilkinson provide further information on the subject. “In the light of this profound tolerance of the variety of religious belief, it is not surprising—and here he follows an ancient tradition in Hindu thought—to find that Vivekananda contends that there is no single form of discipline (or, as he would put it, yoga) suitable to lead all human beings to a realization of the truth of Vedanta. In his view, there are four major types of personality, and for each an appropriate yoga. To each of these yogas he devoted one of his major works. The approach to Vedanta via philosophy is the jnana-Yoga, which has been outlined above, and which is suitable for the person in whom reason is the dominant feature of the personality. Others are primarily given to action (karma) or work, and for them karma-Yoga is appropriate, outlined in a work with this title. The goal is to act or work whilst maintaining absolute non-attachment to the work or its fruits ... In his work Bhakti-Yoga, Vivekananda describes how emotion can be controlled for spiritual ends, the ultimate goal being to love God because it is good to love God, entirely without ulterior motive. Finally, there are those who aspire to direct awareness of Brahman: mystic experience, and the discipline for them is raja-Yoga, the king of yogas.”⁵ One might consider the practice of raja yoga to be based on a sixth sense.

It must be remembered that Indian and Western religious terms have more than one meaning. For example, a jnani is associated both with a person who follows the path of knowledge and with Nondualism. Yet a number of thinkers in the West and India in who possessed great understanding of religion were Dualists (Theists).

Traditional Indian philosophy classifies religion and mystical experience into three types as described by Vivekananda, “From their interpretations have arisen three systems of philosophy and sects. One is Dualistic [Theistic], or Dvaita; a second is the qualified Nondualistic

[panentheistic], or Vishistadvaita; and a third is the Nondualistic [Absolute or Acosmic], or Advaita.”⁶ One could subdivide the different forms of Theism into Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc. In Savikalpa samadhi the theist-dualist experiences Brahman (God) and themselves as being separate entities, and in Nirvikalpa samadhi the nondualists realize their Essential nature and Brahman-God’s Essence are one. In 1957, R. C. Zaehner (1913-74) distinguished between three types of mysticism: theistic mysticism as communion with a Personal God through love; panentheistic mysticism an experience of unity or rapport with nature and the totality of existence; and monistic mysticism an experience of undifferentiated oneness.⁷

Many experts believe the etymology of the word religion lies with the Latin word religare, which means “to tie, to bind.” This is not accepted by all. Likewise yoga means to “yoke or bind.” We might think of the three yogas of the head (jnana), heart (bhakti), and hand (karma).

In modern Western psychology, “Introspection is the examination of one's own conscious thoughts and feelings.... [It] relies exclusively on observation of one's mental state, while in a spiritual context it may refer to the examination of one's soul. Introspection is closely related to human self-reflection and self-discovery and is contrasted with external observation. Introspection generally provides a privileged access to one's own mental states not mediated by other sources of knowledge, so that individual experience of the mind is unique. Introspection can determine any number of mental states including: sensory, bodily, cognitive, emotional, and so forth.... introspection is often compared with perception, reason, memory, and testimony as a source of knowledge.” An individual employs introspection as a form of internal self-analysis to get some understanding of their mental states and why they act the way they do. Only we know the contents of our own conscious mind. Meditation is a useful technique for gaining access to the workings of some hidden aspects of the mind. One problem is that many of a person's thoughts, feelings, and motives are unconscious, and therefore not accessible to the conscious mind. A person can go to a psychotherapist to get professional advice that will increase their self-understanding.⁸ People are often unaware of their own thought and emotional structure and biases. To counter this introspection is the process of directing your attention inward to gain personal knowledge concerning one’s mental and emotional states,

memories, and judgments. It can lead to a higher level of self-awareness and a better understanding of other people's behavioral patterns.

The saintly Luther Burbank (1849-1926) the world's greatest horticulturalist and plant breeder was possibly the first Western scientist to endorse yogic practices. There is a photo on the Internet of Luther Burbank with Paramahansa Yogananda dated December 22, 1924. Burbank wrote, "I have examined the Yogoda system of Swami [Paramahansa] Yogananda and in my opinion it is ideal for training and harmonizing man's physical, mental and spiritual natures.... Through the Yogoda system of physical, mental and spiritual unfoldment by simple and scientific methods of concentration and meditation, most of the complex problems of life may be solved, and peace and good-will come upon earth.... I am glad to have this opportunity of heartily joining with the Swami in his appeal for international schools on the art of living, which, if established, will come as near to bringing the millennium as anything with which I am acquainted."⁹

While the four yoga's concentrate on the mind, Haṭha yoga focuses on the physical body. It places emphasis on body movements, breath control (pranayama) in terms of inhaling, exhaling, and retention, and posture (asana). Its physical benefits are enhanced energy levels and muscle strength; and increased flexibility in the spine and hamstrings and range of motion in their joints, and improved balance. In addition, it reduces levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.¹⁰

Jnana Yoga is referred to as Henosis in classical Greek thought meaning mystical oneness or union. In Neoplatonism, henosis is a state of unification where the mind merges with One (comparable to Nirguna Brahman). Through the process of contemplation the mind is without thoughts or divisions. The finite person is dissolved, completely absorbed in the One.¹¹

This no doubt is highly speculative, but if we attempt to align some basic virtues with the four yogas we might get the following. But of course some of these virtues apply to more than one yoga.

Karma Yoga (Action): Achievement, Altruism, Ambition, Charity, Competence, Consistency, Constructiveness, Courage, Courteousness, Dependability, Dutifulness, Energetic, Ethical, Fairness, Friendliness, Generosity, Gentleness, Giving, Goodness, Helpfulness, Honesty, Humility, Integrity, Justice, Kindness, Lawfulness, Leadership, Patriotism,

Practicality, Productivity, Professionalism, Prosperity, Punctuality, Reliability, Respectful, Selflessness, Service, Success, and Thoroughness.

Jnana Yoga (Intelligence): Alertness, Attentiveness, Brilliance, Certainty, Cleverness, Common Sense, Conscientiousness, Contemplation, Conviction, Creativity, Curiosity, Depth of Thought, Education, Efficiency, Faith, Foresight, Imagination, Innovation, Insightfulness, Intelligence, Intuitiveness, Inventiveness, Knowledge, Learning, Logical, Objectivity, Optimistic, Originality, Rationality, Reflection, Resourcefulness, Self-awareness, Self-respect, Thoughtful, Tolerance, Truthfulness, and Wisdom.

Bhakti Yoga (Feeling): Appreciativeness, Bliss, Calmness, Caring, Cheerfulness, Compassion, Consideration, Contentment, Devotion, Emotional Awareness, Emotional Control, Empathy, Enjoyment, Feeling, Forgiveness, Happiness, Joyfulness, Love, Serenity, and Sympathy.

Raja Yoga (Will); Decisiveness, Dedication, Detachment, Determination, Diligence, Discipline, Endurance, Fortitude, Intensity, Motivation, Perseverance, Persistence, Purposefulness, Reverence, Self-discipline, Self-improvement, Self-reliance, Spirituality, and Steadiness.¹²

2. Raja Yoga

Swami Vivekananda was himself a perfected yogi. Even as a child, “Every night brought some strange vision to Naren. Singular was the manner in which he fell asleep. As soon as he closed his eyes, there would appear between his eyebrows a wonderful spot of light of changing hues, which would expand and burst and bathe his whole body in a flood of white radiance. As his mind became preoccupied with this phenomenon, his body would fall asleep. It was a daily occurrence.” Thinking it to be a natural thing, he originally thought everyone had this experience.¹³

Today many experts in the field consider Vivekananda to be the Father of the modern yoga movement in both the West and in India. In agreement with this theme, Karel Werner (1925/26-2019) a Professor of Indian Religion at the University of Durham in England in his work *Yoga and Indian Philosophy* (1977) emphasized, “Vivekananda was a great Advaita Vedantist and Jnana Yogi and it was owing to him that Indian philosophy and Yoga began to fire the imagination of many people in Western countries as early as the end of the last century. Prompted by the urging of his master Ramakrishna and helped by the historical situation of India,

which was responsible for his English education, Vivekananda started a trend for popularity of Yoga, which, with inevitable ups and downs, has stayed with us ever since.”¹⁴

Vivekananda’s originality is emphasized by Sarah Strauss, Department of Anthropology, University of Wyoming, in a 2002 article, “The yoga that Vivekananda taught to Western audiences was articulated in English explicitly in and for that context. Vivekananda returned to India in triumph, bringing back the new forms of transnationally produced yoga that he had developed over the course of four years of lectures. Many of his insights were codified in written pamphlets like *Raja Yoga* ([1896] 1990), in which he explains core elements of the Hindu Sankhya and yoga traditions in terms easily understandable to a largely Christian, English-speaking, middle to upper-class audience. He framed his arguments in the language of science and in the spirit of the 1893 parliament's interest in comparative religion. Certainly, Swami Vivekananda's very modern representation of yoga put the ball in play, and many different people picked it up, adding their own spin to a characteristically Hindu multiplex phenomenon. These many new representations of yoga permitted, new practices, and accommodated new audiences for an old system.”¹⁵

In her book *A History of Modern Yoga* (2004), Elizabeth De Michelis of the faculty of Divinity at Cambridge University in England devoted over eighty pages exploring this subject. She discussed, “the shaping of Modern Yoga, of which [Vivekananda’s 1896 book] *Raja Yoga* is the seminal text. In it, Vivekananda carried out a major revisitation of yoga history, structures, beliefs and practices and then proceeded to operate a translation (often semantic as well as linguistic) of this 'reformed' yoga into something quite different from classical Hindu approaches. Vivekananda's 'reshaping' of the yoga tradition [was unique].... he brought about a number of crucial doctrinal and practical changes to key traditional concepts.” She quotes Anantanand Rambachan who wrote, “Vivekananda's influence is ... pervasive ... Not only did he largely formulate [the contemporary understanding of Hinduism], but he also gave it the language in which it is articulated. There is very little in modern Hindu, particularly Vedanta, apologetic writing that does not carry the clear imprint of Vivekananda's influence.”¹⁶

Catherine Albanese Professor of Religious History at the University of Chicago and former President of the American Academy of Religion wrote

in 2007, “Elizabeth De Michelis has argued his [Vivekananda’s] seminal role as ‘creator’ of what she terms ‘fully-fledged Modern Yoga’ which for her includes, but is not limited to, ‘Modern Postural Yoga.’ In a designation that encompasses not only the United States but all of the West in interaction with the Indian Subcontinent, she credits Vivekananda's *Raja-Yoga* with ‘immediately’ starting ‘something of a ‘yoga renaissance’ both in India and in the West.”¹⁷

In a February 1896 letter to Alasinga, Vivekananda revealed, “Then you see, to put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds--is a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The dry, abstract Advaita must become living--poetic--in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology--and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work.”¹⁸

Vivekananda’s *Raja Yoga* (1896) the first English-language translation and commentary on the subject is unique, being that he presented yoga in a way that could be understood by modern men and women. It is written in a clear and conversational manner for educated people, rather than in a highly technical classical style understandable only to a specialized expert. That year concerning Paul Deussen’s translations of Sanskrit texts, Vivekananda told him “that clearness of definition was of primary, and elegance of diction of very secondary importance.”¹⁹ In the book he writes, “Anything that is secret and mysterious in these systems of Yoga should be at once rejected.... Mystery-mongering weakens the human brain. It has well-nigh destroyed Yoga--one of the grandest of sciences.... Thus Yoga fell into the hands of a few persons who made it a secret, instead of letting the full blaze of daylight and reason fall upon it. They did so that they might have the powers to themselves.”²⁰ Vivekananda was inspired by his conversations with Paul Deussen, after which in London in October and November of 1896 he delivered eight of his sixteen lectures on Jnana Yoga and all four on Practical Vedanta.

In all of his lectures and writing Vivekananda sought to be as broad and compressive as possible. Mentioning that each system of Indian philosophy views the Vedantic truths from a particular perspective. Unity,

synthesis, and integration are the prevailing themes of his methodology. As he stated in February 1897, “All along, in the history of the Hindu race, there never was any attempt at destruction, only construction.... We have had a host of reformers--Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, and Chaitanya. These were great reformers, who always were constructive and built according to the circumstances of their time. This is our peculiar method of work.”²¹

Consequently, in seeking a unified system of Indian knowledge he was able to explain Indian Raja Yoga from many standpoints. These perspectives included his own spiritual experiences; each of the six traditional schools of Indian philosophy (Darshanas); Tantra and Shaivite (*Kurma Purana*) yogic literature; bhakti, jnana, and karma yoga; and its correspondence with contemporary physics (matter and energy), biology (evolution, anatomy, physiology), psychology (conscious and unconscious mind), and mysticism (spiritual realization, superconsciousness).

Vivekananda would dictate portions of his translation of “*Patanjali’s Yoga Aphorisms*,” along with some of his profoundly thought-out ideas contained in his commentaries, and his appendix to his book *Raja Yoga* to Sarah Waldo, which she took down in longhand.²² She revealed, “It was inspiring to see the Swami as he dictated to me the contents of the work. In delivering his commentaries on the [Yoga] Sutras, he would leave me waiting while he entered deep states of meditation or self-contemplation, to emerge there-from with some luminous interpretation. I had always to keep the pen dipped in the ink. He might be absorbed for long periods of time, and then suddenly his silence would be broken by some eager expression or some long deliberate teaching.”²³

According to the analysis of Ayon Maharaj (later Swami Medhananda) Romain Rolland in his biography on *The Life of Vivekananda* (1930) taught that a Raja Yogic “science of the mind” was superior to Freud’s psychoanalysis. That, psychoanalysts could learn a great deal from the experiences of the mystics, in order to gain a better understanding of the psyche and its metaphysical foundations. It should be combined with the Vedantic philosophical method of Jnana Yoga. The ancient Raja Yogic method emphasizes detached mindfulness and mental concentration, especially as discussed by Vivekananda. It is a safer, effective, and more ethically and spiritually beneficial means of discovering and controlling the unconscious mind than Freudian psychoanalysis. The three main

advantages of Raja Yoga are: 1) It stresses the development of moral character and ethical qualities that are necessary for the practice of mental control and self-mastery. 2) These techniques empower and strengthen a person more than relying on the curative function of the analyst. 3) Over the centuries, Raja Yoga has been scientifically developed and empirically tested.²⁴

Reverend Donald Harrington of the Community Church of New York related in a speech given at the United Nations auditorium in 1993 that his father a druggist attended the Parliament of Religions in 1893 and later told his children of his experiences, “Among his reminiscences was a remembrance of how the gathering was electrified by the words that were spoken by Swami Vivekananda when he was first introduced, when he explained something which was a little difficult for American religionists to believe—that belief was not the central business of religion. He said, religion is not a way of believing, it is a way of being and becoming. Religion is being real yourself, and becoming part of what is real in the universe. This was a revelation and it was a very striking and important one. My father spoke of it very often.”²⁵

Mrs. Constance Towne who knew Vivekananda in 1894 later indicated, “He taught me much of the philosophy he preached and wrote about, how to meditate, and what power it would be against the hurts of life; what force of purpose it would attain for the preservation of the body, for logical thought, for self-control, for ecstasy, for the attraction of others; its power for good, its knowing how to read others and their needs; not to dull the edge of your sword, to be moderate in one’s consumption of food, to know what one’s own body needs to make it live well; of chastity, tolerance, purity of thought, and love for the world—not of one person but of everyone and of all created things.”²⁶

Concerning Vivekananda’s classic commentary on *Raja Yoga*, in Russia Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) the world famous writer noted, “The book is most remarkable and I have received much instruction from it. The metaphysical side of the doctrine, the precept as to what the true ‘I’ of man is, is excellent. So far humanity has frequently gone backwards from the true and lofty and clear conception of the principle of life, but never surpassed it.”²⁷

Incidentally, In August 1900, each morning Vivekananda would walk and converse with the Scottish Sir Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) on their

way to the Paris Exposition. In September, they met at a party thrown by the Leggett's in Paris, France. Geddes biographer stresses that as a result of his encounter with Vivekananda, "The eastern discipline of body and mind made such a lasting impression on both Anna (Geddes' wife) and Patrick that they later handed on to their young children the simple Raja Yoga exercises for control of the inner nature." These experiences deepened Geddes' interest in the land and soul of India. Geddes penned a Preface to a French translation of Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* (1910).²⁸ In 1917, the *Prabuddha Bharata* praised Geddes' efforts by stating, "He has distinguished himself not only by his expert knowledge in town-planning, but also by his profound learning in all subjects connected with the betterment of human life on earth, and his selfless devotion to that cause." The discipline of sociology was first introduced into Indian Universities in 1919 at the University of Bombay by Geddes who was later succeeded as head of the department by G. S. Ghurye.²⁹

Along this line Reverend Sidney Spencer (1888-1974) at one time Principle of Manchester College, Oxford indicated, "Vivekananda's approach was that of the mystic, the man who knows himself as one with the Infinite and Eternal Spirit, and that for him was not a mere intellectual abstraction. It was an actual living experience; it was the culmination of his own inner life. At the same time that experience and its central place for him, gave him the clue to the understanding of religion in all its forms—not that religion by any means always reaches such heights or even aspires to such heights. What he came to see was that it is experience that is essential in all forms of religion. What mattered for him were not the dogmas of religion or its rituals or moral codes taken by themselves; what mattered fundamentally was the inner experience for which it stood.... 'The end of all religions,' he said, 'is the realizing of God in the soul.' That, I believe, is indeed the vital fact, to realize God in the soul, to enter into the consciousness of the Divine Presence, however we may express it so that that Supreme and Eternal reality becomes the ruling and guiding and inspiring power in our whole life."³⁰

Spencer adds, "The 'soul' of Hinduism he found in spirituality, grounded in the sense of the immediate presence of God and the possibility of seeing and knowing Him. At its highest level it calls for concentration on that endeavour and so (Vivekananda believed) for renunciation of the world. The Hindu seeks perfection through the merging

of his life in the infinite and universal Life of Brahman (God). Hinduism stands thus in principle for universal charity and tolerance.”³¹

Marie Louise Burke (Sister Gargi) (1912-2004) specified, “One of the most salient points of the Swami's teaching was that the Reality, the Absolute, was not a matter of speculation, but of *supersensuous* experience. Nor was the possibility of such experience a matter of speculation. Down through the ages, the great seers and saints of the world have testified to their own vivid, immediate, permanent, realization of ultimate Reality. The Swami himself not only vouched for such knowledge, but insisted that everyone can and must attain it; for without it, religion was mere talk.”³²

Patanjali’s eight limbs of yoga are: “ethical discipline (yamas), rules (niyamas), physical postures (āsanas), breath control (prāṇāyama), withdrawal from the senses (pratyāhāra), one-pointedness of mind (dhāraṇā), meditation (dhyāna), and finally samadhi.”³³ One-pointedness is achieved by entering a Perceptual Mode where the mind is concentrated totally on the Chosen Ideal. This differs from the intellectual Conceptual Mode where the mind is in the changing realm of ideas moving from one concept to another. The majority of people are apt to be in the Personal Mode thinking of their life events.

Because of its practical value, no aspect of Indian thought has gained greater acceptance in the West than yoga practice and philosophy. Today yoga and meditation are undertaken by millions of Westerners to gain spiritual awareness, maintain good physical health, reduce tension and stress, feel peace of mind, to make their mind more concentrated, increasing the power of the will, and to become a better person. Ethics tells you to be a good person, while yoga is a tool that makes it easier to gain control over one’s mind and attain that ideal. The purpose of raja yoga is to gain control over the mind by becoming aware of our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, and to change them if they are harmful to us. We discover who we truly are, and we begin to understand the true nature of the universe.

According to a scientific study conducted by *Yoga Journal* and *Yoga Alliance*, the number of Americans practicing yoga has risen amazingly from four million in 2001 to 20.4 million in 2012 and to 36.7 million in 2016. The practice has entered the family system since 37% have children under the age of eighteen who also practice yoga. Seventy-two percent are women, 74% are relatively new practicing it for five or less years, and

56% are engaged in yoga for stress relief. In 2012, the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health discovered that 18 million (8%) of U. S. adults were involved in mantra, mindfulness, spiritual, or yoga mediation. Many of these people are not associated with traditional religious and spiritual traditions. Experts expect these percentages to rise in the future.³⁴

Consequently, with the expansion of education and yoga, modern religion is placing more emphasis on reason and religious experience than in the past. Other auspicious signs are that India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi got the United Nations to create a yearly International Yoga day beginning June 21, 2015.³⁵ President Barak Obama carries a statuette of the Hindu deity Hanuman (along with a tiny Buddha statue and a Christian rosary bead and Coptic cross) in his pocket. He seeks inspiration from them when he feels tired and discouraged.³⁶ On both sides of the political spectrum, Hilary Clinton and Ivanka Trump practice yoga.³⁷

Concerning spiritual power Vivekananda stated, "The Yogis claim that of all the energies that are in the human body the highest is what they call 'Ojas.' Now this Ojas is stored up in the brain, and the more Ojas is in a man's head, the more powerful he is, the more intellectual, the more spiritually strong. One man may speak beautiful language and beautiful thoughts, but they do not impress people; another man speaks neither beautiful language nor beautiful thoughts, yet his words charm. Every movement of his is powerful. That is the power of Ojas. Now in every man there is more or less of this Ojas stored up." "The Ojas is that which makes the difference between man and man. The man who has much Ojas is the leader of men. It gives a tremendous power of attraction. Ojas is manufactured from the nerve-currents." "The great sexual force, raised from animal action and sent upward to the great dynamo of the human system, the brain, and there stored up, becomes Ojas or spiritual force. All good thought, all prayer, resolves a part of that animal energy into Ojas and helps to give us spiritual power. This Ojas is the real man and in human beings alone is it possible for this storage of Ojas to be accomplished. One in whom the whole animal sex force has been transformed into Ojas is a god. He speaks with power, and his words regenerate the world. The Yogi pictures this serpent as being slowly lifted from stage to stage until the highest, the pineal gland, is reached. No man or woman can be really spiritual until the sexual energy, the highest power possessed by man, has

been converted into Ojas.”³⁸ Personal power results from thought combined with will.

The pineal gland is a small, pea-shaped gland in the center of the brain. Its physiological functions are not fully understood, but it does produce and regulate hormones like melatonin that controls the circadian rhythm and plays a role in regulating sleep patterns. The French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650) considered the pineal gland to be the meeting place of the body and the soul (mind). He thought the pineal gland is involved in sensation, imagination, memory, and the causation of bodily movements. In Indian spiritual literature the pineal gland is often identified with the “third eye” corresponding to the Ajna chakra in the sixth center of the subtle body, located in a subtle region in the center of the forehead between the two eyebrows. It can be awakened through the practice of meditation.³⁹

Many people have taken up the practice of yoga to improve their blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, digestion and bone health; to increase flexibility, muscle strength, blood flow, and immunity; and to reduce arthritis, joint and spine problems, and stress. In addition, they gained happiness, concentration, relaxation, an improved nervous system, less tension, better sleep, peace of mind, a better life style, self-esteem, inner strength, altruism, and sociability.⁴⁰ By increasing their powers of concentration the practice of yoga enhances the intelligence level.

There are some Westerners who think that personality and character changes can only come about through an involvement in the world. Actually, meditation is a more direct approach to self-transformation since it involves directly working on the mind without an intermediary. The indirect approach is to work through the external world and have those experiences reflect back on the mind.

The Rationale for a Yoga Philosophy

The goal of yoga psychology is more than having a well-adjusted personality in society, but a spiritual transformation of personality and character. A genuine mystic knows Brahman-God directly, not indirectly as an abstraction through intellectualism. Emphasis is placed on the Ideal Self along with the empirical self. The self-image is replaced with a Divine

image. Western psychology seeks to make the unconscious, conscious, while Yoga's goal is to make the superconscious, conscious.

Yoga properly performed produces an integrated personality where all of the person's mental and emotional capacities are well coordinated with each other. There is an organized, integrated, and synthetic unity of intelligence, emotions, volitions, and behavior working together for a common goal. An ideal personality is consistent, persistent, integrated, and flexible adapting itself to a variety of varying situation.⁴¹

Through a process of concentration, yoga unlike psychoanalysis (that deals with ideas) works directly on altering the forces and vibrational states of the mind composed of the substance of subtle matter and energy. Through yogic practices powers of restraining the mind are developed that nullify negative mental vibrations making them ineffective in causing mental problems. All negative powerful emotions that can overwhelm a person are reducible to samskaras, mental impressions that a yogi can overcome through mind control (not medicine).

According to neuroscientists when a certain thought is repeated often enough, it forms a groove in the brain. Thoughts in the future automatically return to the familiar grooves in the brain. Each time a samskara is recalled and repeated, the groove in the mind gets deeper and the impression gets stronger. As these grooves deepen over time it takes more effort to change those older ways of thinking.⁴² Why do grooves in the mind produce particular thoughts and feeling? What is the relationship between the two?

There is no better way to modify samskaras (mental impressions) and vasanas (habits) than through meditation when new samskaras are forged on the mind. Negative psychological forces like hate, fear, depression, etc. are internal aspects of the mind that attach themselves to external people and events. If a person is having mental problems they can try meditating on the inner impersonal negative force-vibration itself, not the external events or persons through which the force manifests. Properly executed this can nullify the negative force. Concentrating on the Chosen Ideal (that aspect of the Deity that you worship) helps destroy the negative psychological forces in the mind. These negative forces do not reside in the deeper regions of the mind. In addition, the practice of yoga enhances homeostasis, a psychological balance within the psychic system.

Raja Yoga philosophy claims that by faithfully following its methods for a long period of time, its practitioners will be transformed and adopt saintly qualities with greatly improved levels of intelligence and benevolence. They might even attain samadhi and make contact with the Divine world. In order to validate these claims Vivekananda developed a comprehensive Philosophy (Metaphysics and Epistemology) of the Mind that has never been surpassed, to explain why this is possible. His system of ideas discussed below include: the process of personal evolution can be greatly speeded up, the awakening of the Kundalini force and superconscious samadhi brings illumination and Divine wisdom, one mind has three states, unconscious, conscious, and superconscious that is dormant in most people, one can manifest their innate Divinity within, and our mind is a fragment of the Universal Mind. The seven chakras of the kundalini are arranged vertically. At the base of the spine in the subtle body is located a reserve of latent spiritual energy that can be awakened by yogic practices and devotion to Brahman-God. The energy will flow upward through the narrow channel of the sushumna [nerve].

To be a yogi one must develop a positive mindset realizing your talents and abilities can develop over time through effort and persistence. Concentrate on the means of diligence and hard work rather than on the end results. Think positively, not negatively and be willing to face challenges.

Vivekananda clarifies, “The powers of the mind are like rays of light dissipated; when they are concentrated, they illumine.... From our childhood upwards we have been taught only to pay attention to things external, but never to things internal; hence most of us have nearly lost the faculty of observing the internal mechanism. To turn the mind, as it were, inside, stop it from going outside, and then to concentrate all its powers, and throw them upon the mind itself, in order that it may know its own nature, analyze itself, is very hard work.... There is no limit to the power of the human mind. The more concentrated it is, the more power is brought to bear on one point.... The powers of the mind should be concentrated and turned back upon itself, and as the darkest places reveal their secrets before the penetrating rays of the sun, so will this concentrated mind penetrate its own innermost secrets.”⁴³ When a person attempts to meditate on the inner world, there is a tendency for the mind to concentrate on their external life experiences. The mind naturally goes

out through the five senses and internalizes those experiences. Unless the mind is properly trained, it is difficult for it to withdraw from the external world and observe its own nature. Meditation focuses in on the present moment, while the past and future are temporarily forgotten.

He adds, most important, the purpose of the science of Yoga is “to shorten the time for reaching perfection.” My getting control of the internal Prana of mental power one can speed up the process of personal evolution. “Instead of slowly advancing from point to point and waiting until the whole human race has become perfect,” great souls reached perfection in one lifetime.⁴⁴ Yoga being a science requires experimentation. “As this Kundalini force travels from centre to centre, layer after layer of the mind, as it were, opens up, and this universe is perceived by the Yogi in its fine, or causal form.... Thus the rousing of the Kundalini is the one and only way to attaining Divine Wisdom, superconscious perception, realization of the spirit.”⁴⁵ “From one state a man comes out the very same man that he went in, and from another state the man comes out enlightened, a sage, a prophet, a saint, his whole character changed, his life changed, illumined. These are the two effects. Now the effects being different, the causes must be different. As this illumination with which a man comes back from Samadhi is much higher than can be got from unconsciousness, or much higher than can be got by reasoning in a conscious state, it must, therefore, be superconsciousness, and Samadhi is called the superconscious state.” “The Yogi teaches that the mind itself has a higher state of existence, beyond reason, a superconscious state, and when the mind gets to that higher state, then this knowledge, beyond reasoning, comes to man. Metaphysical and transcendental knowledge comes to that man.... Because these three states--instinct, reason, and superconsciousness, or the unconscious, conscious, and superconscious states--belong to one and the same mind. There are not three minds in one man, but one state of it develops into the others. Instinct develops into reason, and reason into the transcendental consciousness.” “When this superconscious state is reached, man becomes free and divine; death becomes immortality, weakness becomes infinite power, and iron bondage becomes liberty. That is the goal, the infinite realm of the superconscious.” The goal is to get rid of nature's control over us by manifesting our innate Divinity within.⁴⁶ Spiritual (yogic) perceptions reveal Divine things that

bring about profound essential changes in a person, which empirical perceptions mediated through the physical senses do not do.

Vivekananda adds, “Our bodies are simply little whirlpools in the ocean of matter. [Our mind is] simply a mental whirlpool in the ocean of mind.” “Now there is something beyond Akasha [Matter] and Prana. Both can be resolved into a third thing called Mahat--the Cosmic Mind. This Cosmic Mind does not create Akasha and Prana, but changes itself into them.... The Mahat becomes changed into vibrating thought; and that becomes in one part changed into the organs, and in the other part into the fine particles of matter. Out of the combination of all these, the whole of this universe is produced.”⁴⁷

Mahat is the omnipresent and eternal Universal Mind and Body of Brahman-God of which our mind and body are a fragment. “The mind is universal. Your mind, my mind, all these little minds, are fragments of that Universal Mind, little waves in the ocean; and on account of this continuity, we can convey our thoughts directly to one another.”⁴⁸ Due to the ego we identify with a minute part of the physical and mental universe (an individual's body and mind) and not with the totality of existence.

The external world of the five senses and the internal world of the mind are so interconnected that through mind control it is possible to gain control over the external world. Vivekananda writes, “The external world is but the gross form of the internal, or subtle. The finer is always the cause, the grosser the effect. So the external world is the effect, the internal the cause. In the same way external forces are simply the grosser parts, of which the internal forces are the finer. The man who has discovered and learned how to manipulate the internal forces will get the whole of nature under his control.”⁴⁹ “Just as Akasha [Primal Matter] is the infinite, omnipresent material of this universe, so is this Prana [Primal Energy] the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of this universe.” If a person had perfect understanding of the Prana he could “control everything in the universe, from the atoms to the biggest suns.... Thought is the finest and highest action of Prana.”⁵⁰

Swami Vivekananda and the Psychology of Religion

In 1896, with the writing of his classic work *Raja Yoga*, Swami Vivekananda became a candidate for being the founder of the modern

“Psychology of Religion” movement. In this book Vivekananda discusses that religious knowledge is acquired from spiritual experience, which is accomplished by a concentrated mind. To attain this state it is necessary to follow certain ethical practices, to learn how to meditate, generate mental energy, and to make significant self-improvements. He tells us how to enter the higher superconscious realm, and how this process is related to the physiology of the brain. That “the unconscious, conscious, and superconscious states--belong to one and the same mind ... Instinct develops into reason, and reason into the transcendental consciousness” through personal evolution. Meditation, concentration, controlling the thought waves of the mind, the kundalini, holiness, samadhi, and eventual liberation are also examined. Furthermore, he discusses repression, egoism, how the unconscious part of the mind influences the conscious aspect, and how habits are formed.⁵¹

The Wikipedia essay on the Internet considers William James (1842-1910) the Harvard professor to be the founder of the Psychology of Religion with his seminal book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902).⁵² James’ book has chapters on religious experience, saintliness, mysticism, subliminal consciousness a part of the mind not directly accessible to intentional observation, and other topics, and quotes both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. He cites two long references taken from Vivekananda’s “Practical Vedanta,” “The Real and the Apparent Man,” and most important his book *Raja Yoga*.⁵³

When describing religious experience James displayed knowledge of Eastern mysticism. Organized institutional religion is described as “second-hand” compared to the true religion of the direct private mystical experience of an individual. The potentiality for other forms of consciousness is discussed, and that such experience can impart exceptional meaning and truth-giving quality to the agent.⁵⁴ James makes the contrast between the “Religion of Healthy-Mindedness” and “The Sick Soul” (“Religion of Unhealthy-Mindedness”). While a healthy-minded religion is positive emphasizing religious experience, productive activity, and the glory of its founders; an unhealthy-minded religion focuses in on negative things like the evils and sins within society and individual people. Of course the great souls who are the founders of religion must point out the shortcomings of the devotees so they will work to overcome them.

In the writing of *Varieties*, James was no doubt influenced by Vivekananda but we will probably never know to what extent. At the Cambridge [Massachusetts] Conferences held at Sara Bull's home, Vivekananda made the acquaintance of William James probably in October and definitely in December 1894. There is a possibility at that time Vivekananda demonstrated the nature of Divine communion to James by entering into samadhi in his presence. Soon after Vivekananda and James met at dinner at the residence of Sara Bull. "After dinner the Swami and the professor drew together in earnest and subdued conversation. It was midnight when they rose from their long discourse." Vivekananda informed Mrs. Bull, who made inquiries about their long conversation, that James is "A very nice man, a very nice man!"⁵⁵

It is quite likely that William James attended Vivekananda's eminent talk on "The Vedanta Philosophy" presented before the Harvard Graduate Philosophical Club on March 25, 1896. Before he gave the presentation, "Mr. [James] Lough said that Vivekananda's addresses [his published pamphlets] interested not only the philosophical students, but also Prof. James and Prof. [Josiah] Royce, who hope to be at his Harvard talk." Three days later James sent a letter to Swami addressing him as "Dear Master," inviting him to lunch at his home. Swami Abhedananda wrote that Vivekananda was offered the chair of Eastern Philosophy at Harvard University, which as a sannyasin he could not accept. Professor James attended the class given by Swami Saradananda at the Cambridge Conferences on the 29th of November 1896 and asked many questions. In 1897 after Vivekananda returned to India, James was one of the Harvard dignitaries including Josiah Royce and a young Arthur Lovejoy who signed a letter requesting that their "Dear Friend and Brother" to return to the United States as a teacher.⁵⁶

On May 28, 1898, Lewis Janes took Swami Abhedananda to Harvard University where he attended a class given by the philosopher's Josiah Royce and William James. Abhedananda considered their talks to be "extremely interesting," especially James refutation of the idea of the Unity of the universe. The next day at the Cambridge Conferences held at Sara Bull's home, Abhedananda discussed the subject of "Unity in Variety." In attendance was Professors William James with his students sitting by his side, and Charles Lanman the Harvard Sanskritist. In his discourse, Abhedananda brought up James arguments against "Unity" and attempted

to refute them. “At the close of the meeting Prof. James shook hands with me and congratulated me for my lucid and logical discourses on the subject of Unity and invited me to come to lunch with him in his house next afternoon.” A four-hour discussion ensued with Abhedananda maintaining the unity, and James the plurality of the universe. Abhedananda tells us, “Prof. Royce, Prof. Lanman, Prof. Shaler and Dr. Janes supported my arguments against Prof. James, who was at last convinced that the Vedantic point of Unity of Brahman the ultimate Truth was unassailable.” The following year on April 30, 1899 Abhedananda lectured on “Religious Ideas in Ancient India” at the Cambridge Conferences, with William James, Charles Lanman, and other distinguished Harvard professors attending the talk. Abhedananda mentioned that Professor Lanman (1850-1941) became a good friend of his, attended his lectures in Boston, and later became an honorary member of the Vedanta Society of New York. Lanman was President of the American Philological Association (1890-91) and the American Oriental Society (1907-08).⁵⁷

In a letter to Sara Bull dated August 2, 1900, James noted, “I have just been reading some of Vivekananda’s Addresses in England, which I had not seen. This man is simply a wonder for oratorical power.... The Swami is an honour to humanity.” In a letter to Josephine MacLeod dated August 8, 1900 James described Sister Nivedita whom he met as possessing “an extraordinary fine character and mind,” to be “a most deliberate and balanced person,” “who has Hinduized herself and now lives for the Hindu people.” James also wrote, that he “might get hold of the first 3 parts of Practical Vedanta,” written by Vivekananda. As mentioned above James supplied long quotes from Vivekananda’s writings in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and in *Pragmatism* (1907) where he wrote, “The paragon of all monastic systems is the Vedanta philosophy of Hindostan, and the paragon of Vedantic missionaries was the late Swami Vivekananda who visited our land some years ago.” After James’ death, in his personal library they found volumes of the works of Vivekananda and Abhedananda.⁵⁸

Raja Yoga psychology can be integrated with modern psychoanalytic theory. The practice of Raja Yoga strengthens the will and gives people the inner strength to face their problems so they can make the necessary changes in their thinking and actions to overcome their difficulties. It opens up a whole new world previously unknown to its practitioners.

People engaged in yoga often reach their peak at an older age in the life-cycle than most people do; certainly older than an athlete and even than an intellectual. Dr. Eugene Irvine Taylor, an Associate in Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School made the following remarks. For Vivekananda psychology, “meant the spiritual evolution of consciousness, not simply the description of sense data and its analysis by the mind.... internal science, concentration of mind means drawing consciousness back towards one’s self—a process of involution, where consciousness is systematically detached from the various objects in the external world until the mind itself becomes the object of conscious absorption. Awareness is thereby cleansed or purified, so that consciousness, and hence personality, is transformed. This, he said, was yoga.... [William James of Harvard University] saw in Vivekananda’s inner science a vast unexplored dimension for the understanding of personality and character formation. We know from subsequent references he made to Vivekananda’s system that James saw great value in the Hindu practice of systematic, daily periods of concentrated relaxation. These, James felt, could be of great use in preparing American children for learning in the classroom. James also observed in the methods of Vivekananda’s yoga a form of spiritual discipline that could be used by anyone to penetrate into untapped reservoirs of energy and power for physical as well as mental tasks, and also in the treatment of certain neurasthenic conditions.”⁵⁹

Two additional candidates for the founder of the modern Psychology of Religion are J. H. Leuba (1868-1946) a fellow at Clark University, for an 1896 article on the religious conversion process; and Edwin D. Starbuck (1866-1947) who received a PhD from Clark University in 1897, for a book titled *Psychology of Religion* (1899). Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts was a unique institution that had only graduate students. Its first President from was Granville Stanley Hall (1844-1924) an esteemed educational and child psychologist who was the founder of the prestigious *American Journal of Psychology* (1887) and the first President of the American Psychological Association (1892). Hall met Swami Vivekananda and later stated, “His lectures here [the United States] have attracted considerable attention in some quarters.” They probably met at the Parliament of Religions in 1893, since at the Columbian Exposition, Hall presided over an “experimental psychology in education” conference. Its quite possible Vivekananda had some affect on Hall, since in 1896 Swami

Saradananda, and in 1899 and 1909 Swami Abhedananda were invited to speak at Clark University. As part of a two-week conference held at Clark University beginning on September 7, 1909, Sigmund Freud gave five lectures on the subject of psychoanalysis. These are the only public speeches he gave in the Western Hemisphere. Two days later, his companion Carl Jung presented the first of his three lectures at the University. On the following Monday the featured speaker at the conference was Swami Abhedananda who spoke on “English Rule in India--As India Sees it,” as part of an International Relations seminar.⁶⁰

The Wikipedia essay considers Emile Durkheim to be the founder of the Sociology of Religion for his work on Catholic-Protestant suicide rates in 1897 and their sociological implications. The two most important early contributions to the field are Max Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) and Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912).⁶¹

Vivekananda also made important contributions to the Sociology of Religion not recognized by Western sources. His original ideas include: the four class theory of history and the return of Brahmin (including intellectual) leadership, the coming spiritual age, national dharma, the historical importance of single individuals particularity in the founding of new religions, and he predicted in Europe a “dreadful war” in the in the next twenty years combined with less wars in the distant future.

Vivekananda was also one of the first thinkers to use the ideas of contemporary physics (e.g., matter, energy, thermodynamics) and biology (e.g., evolution, heredity) in defense of metaphysical ideas.

Josiah Royce is America’s greatest philosopher of Absolute Idealism (comparable to Qualified Nondualism in India), whose ideas to some extent resemble Ramanuja’s system of thought.⁶² It is quite likely that Royce was very much influenced by Vivekananda’s lecture on the “Vedanta Philosophy” presented before the Graduate Philosophical Club at Harvard University in March of 1896; and by Abhedananda’s debate with William James, which he attended on the unity vs. the plurality of the universe in May 1898.

In Royce’s most important philosophical work *The World and the Individual* (1899-1901) in the lecture “The Unity of Being, and the Mystical Interpretation” he writes, “In the *Upanishads*, an immediate sense of the unity of all things runs parallel with an equally strong sense that this

unity is wholly in myself who knows the truth.... The Self [Atman] is precisely the very Knower, not as a thing that first is real and then knows, but as the very act of seeing, hearing, thinking, in so far as the mediating presence of some Other, of some object that is known, seen, heard, thought, is simply removed, and in so far as the very diversity of the acts of knowing, seeing, hearing, thinking, is also removed.... All our relative satisfactions take the form of finite ideas. The Absolute must be ineffable, indescribable, *and yet not outside of the circle within which we at present are conscious*. It is no other than we are.... The Absolute is the very Opposite of a mere Nothing. For it is fulfillment, attainment, peace, the goal of life, the object of desire, the end of knowledge.... The truth cannot then be independent of the Knower. But if not independent of the Knower, and yet if not given to him by his finite experience and thought, what can the truth be except what one approaches, within one's own very heart, when one gradually casts off finitude, and wins unity and peace.... I have dwelt so long upon the *Upanishads*, because, as I have said, they contain already the entire story of the mystic faith, so far as it had a philosophical basis.”⁶³ Professor J. J. Clarke pointed out, “Josiah Royce (1855-1916) was the earliest American philosopher of any significance to take Indian philosophy seriously, and became an important stimulant for later American philosophers' interest in Asian thought. He discovered in *Vedanta* useful support for his version of monistic idealism, using Indian metaphysics as a weapon with which to attack prevailing realist and dualist views.”⁶⁴

3. Spiritual Experiences and the Verification Principle

Swami Vivekananda asked the question, “What is the proof of God? Direct perception, Pratyaksha. The proof of this wall is that I perceive it. God has been perceived that way by thousands before, and will be perceived by all who want to perceive Him. But this perception is no sense-perception at all; it is supersensuous, superconscious.”⁶⁵ “People have been fighting for ages, and what is the outcome? Intellect cannot reach there at all. We have to go beyond the intellect; the proof of religion is in direct perception. The proof of the existence of this wall is that we see it; if you sat down and argued about its existence or non-existence for ages, you could never come to any conclusion; but directly you see it, it is

enough.”⁶⁶ “The proof, therefore, of the *Vedas* is just the same as the proof of this table before me, Pratyaksha, direct perception. This I see with the senses, and the truths of spirituality we also see in a superconscious state of the human soul. This Rishi-state is not limited by time or place, by sex or race. Vatsyayana boldly declares that this Rishihood is the common property of the descendants of the sage, of the Aryan, of the non-Aryan, of even the Mlechchha. This is the sageship of the *Vedas*, and constantly we ought to remember this ideal of religion in India, which I wish other nations of the world would also remember and learn, so that there may be less fight and less quarrel. Religion is not in books, nor in theories, nor in dogmas, nor in talking, not even in reasoning. It is being and becoming.”⁶⁷ “So, when you see religion and God in a more intense sense than you see this external world, nothing will be able to shake your belief. Then you have real faith.”⁶⁸ Religious experience involves experimentation, observation, and verification.

Vivekananda continues, “When the mind has attained to that state, which is called Samadhi--perfect concentration, superconsciousness--it goes beyond the limits of reason, and comes face to face with facts which no instinct or reason can ever know.... The Yogi teaches that the mind itself has a higher state of existence, beyond reason, a superconscious state, and when the mind gets to that higher state, then this knowledge, beyond reasoning, comes to man. Metaphysical and transcendental knowledge comes to that man.” Knowledge about Brahman-God is derived from spiritual perception. “Reasoning is the method of comparison between certain facts which we have already perceived. If these perceived facts are not there already, there cannot be any reasoning. If this is true of external phenomena, why should it not be so of the internal?... All knowledge must stand on perception of certain facts, and upon that we have to build our reasoning. But, curiously enough the vast majority of mankind think, especially at the present time, that no such perception is possible in religion, that religion can only be apprehended by vain arguments.”⁶⁹ Many people believe that religion unlike science is not based on direct experience; but on faith, belief, and dogma. Yet, going back to the origin of the major religions of the world, we see that they were based on the direct spiritual experience of their founders. Each of them claimed to have seen Brahman-God or a Divine Being, experienced the highest Reality, and to have received the truth, discovered by a higher intuition.

In modern science they call this the “Verification Principle,” developed by the prestigious British analytic philosopher Sir A(lfred) J(ules) Ayer (1910-89). Strong verification refers to observation-statements that are directly verifiable, that is, a statement can be shown to be correct by way of empirical observation. A principle begins as a hypothesis implied by a theory, which is then compared against empirical observations. If the hypothesis is consistently supported by data through empirical verification, it achieves the rank “verified” principle. In *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), pp. 118-19, A. J. Ayer an atheist and supporter of logical positivism wrote the mystic “is unable to produce any intelligible propositions at all.... mystical intuition is not a genuinely cognitive state.... religious experience is altogether fallacious.” Over fifty years later in June 1988, his attending physician Dr. Jeremy George said that after his near-death experience while having cardiac arrest Ayer’s told him, “I saw a Divine Being. I’m afraid I am going to have to revise all my various books and opinions.” This went against his lifelong beliefs (biases, prejudices). Ayer had no idea that the verification principle could be applied to religion and that realizing God is a matter of direct perception and observation that surpasses theoretical constructs. After which Ayer spent a lot of time with Frederick Copleston the Jesuit philosopher and priest and according to his wife he became a much nicer person.⁷⁰ “All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal” is not empirically verifiable. It is a logically necessary statement that is analytic, being true by virtue of the meaning of its constituent terms.

Many scientists know the Verification Principle applies to perceptions of the physical body, but they are unaware of its applicability to subtle body (mind body, thought body) perception such as yogic and psychic powers, or spiritual body perception. They accept sensual perception but not supersensual perceptions. For example, Buddha established a new religion only after he attained the enlightened state of Nirvana. Jesus spoke with the Father in Heaven, perceived his presence, and received His messages. Muhammad received the *Quran* verbatim over a 23-year period transmitted by the archangel Gabriel from a heavenly realm. Swami Brahmananda (1865-1922) could see Brahman (God) within all people. Thus, the Verification Principle is the epistemological foundation of all of the major religions of the world. One problem is that since the 17th century in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, there has been a tendency to separate

mysticism, theology, and philosophy into three separate areas, whereby a religious practitioner is apt to accept one or two but not all three of them. Following the philosophy of Foundationalism, valid direct perception is self-evident and does not require additional proofs to be justified. Unlike inferential knowledge, vivid and direct intuition is known immediately.

Most often a religious experience is private (involving a single person) and not public. Yet the fact that over the centuries many Christian saints of the highest moral order have had visitations of Jesus verifies their experiences. Also, these experiences brought a lifelong transformation in these people, which is not required in the verification of scientific discoveries. As a young man Swami Vivekananda went around Calcutta asking prominent religious leaders like Debendranath Tagore, “Sir have you seen God?” Not have you written a book on or delivered lectures about Brahman (God). From Sri Ramakrishna he got this response, “I crept near him and asked him the question which I had asked so often: ‘Have you seen God, sir?’ ‘Yes, I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intense sense. God can be realized,’ he went on; ‘one can see and talk to Him as I am seeing and talking to you. But who cares? People shed torrents of tears for their wife and children, for wealth or property, but who does so for the sake of God? If one weeps sincerely for Him, He surely manifests Himself.’ That impressed me at once. For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he had seen God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. As I heard these things from his lips, I could not but believe that he was saying them not like an ordinary preacher, but from the depths of his own realizations.”⁷¹

The best way to verify religious experiences is to practice mysticism and you will probably have a spiritual experience that validates them. Once you have the experience you will no longer deny their existence.

4. Meditation, Contemplation, and Prayer

Indian: “Turn the senses and the mind inward to the lotus of the heart. Meditate on Brahman” (Svet. Up.* 2:8; cf. BG 13:24). “Without meditation, where is peace? Without peace, where is happiness?” (BG* 2:66, p. 49). “Therefore you must remember me at all times, and do your

duty. If your mind and heart are set upon me constantly, you will come to me” (BG* 8:7, p. 95; cf. 3:12; 6:12; Kat. Up. 2:2.1; Svet. Up. 2:10).

New Testament: “I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also” (1 Cor. 14:15; cf. Jude 20). “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you” (Col. 1:3). “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; and pray for us also” (Col. 4:2-3; cf. 2 Thes. 1:11). “Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thes. 5:17-18; cf. Mt. 5:44; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18).

Pray in Solitude. Indian: “Practice austerity and meditation in solitude” (Mun. Up.* 1:2.11). “A yogi should try to concentrate his mind, retiring into solitude and living alone” (BG 6:10). New Testament: “When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret” (Mt. 6:6).⁷²

Swami Vivekananda expresses these ideas, “The greatest thing is meditation. It is the nearest approach to spiritual life--the mind meditating. It is the one moment in our daily life that we are not at all material--the Soul thinking of Itself, free from all matter--this marvelous touch of the Soul!”⁷³ “You must keep the mind fixed on one object, like an unbroken stream of oil. The ordinary man's mind is scattered on different objects, and at the time of meditation, too, the mind is at first apt to wander. But let any desire whatever arise in the mind, you must sit calmly and watch what sort of ideas are coming. By continuing to watch in that way, the mind becomes calm, and there are no more thought-waves in it. These waves represent the thought-activity of the mind. Those things that you have previously thought deeply, have transformed themselves into a subconscious current, and therefore these come up in the mind in meditation. The rise of these waves, or thoughts, during meditation is evidence that your mind is tending towards concentration. Sometimes the mind is concentrated on a set of ideas--this is called meditation with Vikalpa or oscillation. But when the mind becomes almost free from all activities, it melts in the inner Self, which is the essence of infinite Knowledge, One, and Itself Its own support. This is what is called Nirvikalpa Samadhi, free from all activities.”⁷⁴

He continues, “In order to reach the superconscious state in a scientific manner it is necessary to pass through the various steps of Raja-Yoga I have been teaching. After Pratyahara [Withdrawal of the senses

from external objects] and Dharana [Concentration], we come to Dhyana, meditation. When the mind has been trained to remain fixed on a certain internal or external location, there comes to it the power of flowing in an unbroken current, as it were, towards that point. This state is called Dhyana. When one has so intensified the power of Dhyana as to be able to reject the external part of perception and remain meditating only on the internal part, the meaning, that state is called Samadhi. The three--Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi--together, are called Samyama. That is, if the mind can first concentrate upon an object, and then is able to continue in that concentration for a length of time, and then, by continued concentration, to dwell only on the internal part of the perception of which the object was the effect, everything comes under the control of such a mind. This meditative state is the highest state of existence. So long as there is desire, no real happiness can come. It is only the contemplative, witness-like study of objects that brings to us real enjoyment and happiness. The animal has its happiness in the senses, the man in his intellect, and the god in spiritual contemplation. It is only to the soul that has attained to this contemplative state that the world really becomes beautiful. To him who desires nothing, and does not mix himself up with them, the manifold changes of nature are one panorama of beauty and sublimity.”⁷⁵

Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) made this differentiation, “Two basic types of prayer are used by different individuals: man-centered and God-centered prayer. People whose prayer is man-centered beseech God to enrich their life on earth, to remove their sufferings, to provide them with wealth, success and comfort. God-centered prayer, on the other hand, is motivated by spiritual discrimination and devotion. People whose prayers are God-centered seek Him alone, knowing that God-realization is the whole purpose of life. The Lord’s Prayer is God-centered and in it Jesus teaches us how to become absorbed in the consciousness of God and find eternal joy and freedom.”⁷⁶ “Meditation requires a great, strenuous effort to concentrate the mind definitely upon Pure Consciousness, upon God. It does not matter just what the conception, the ideal of the Godhead, may be. But there must be a positive something to concentrate upon. We have to raise one strong wave of thought to the exclusion of the rest.... This is what the Hindu means by meditation, a constant flow of thought toward that one ideal. In other words, you walk with God, you sleep with God, you

eat with God, you live with God. Struggle to maintain that constant flow of the mind toward God.”⁷⁷ Our minds naturally operate on the surface and it takes effort to concentrate on the deeper reality.

The point made by Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) in Egypt is that some people make the mistake of praying for things that will bring them harm, under the delusion that it is to their benefit. “It is the height of folly ... to ask [for] what is inexpedient (i.e., what is evil for oneself), under the impression that it is good.” “For God knows generally those that are worthy to receive good things and those that are not; whence he gives to each what belongs to him.”⁷⁸ “When he has now reached the summit, the gnostic prays that the power of contemplation may grow and abide with him, just as the common man prays for a continuance of health.” They strive to purify the soul so that they may experience intimacy with God. When a gnostic reaches a holy state, “All his life is prayer and communion with God, and if he is free from sins he will assuredly receive what he desires.... to such as are worthy, the things that are truly good are granted even without the asking”⁷⁹

In Poland members of the Hasidic movement founded by Isaac Luria (1534-72) defined prayer (as explained in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*) as “the feeling of oneness with God, the state of the soul when man gives up the consciousness of his separate existence, and joins himself to the eternal being of God. Such a state produces as species of indescribable joy, which is a necessary ingredient of the true worship of God.” “The chief practical principle of Hasidism is communion with God for the purpose of uniting with the source of life and of influencing it. This communion is achieved through the concentration of all thoughts on God, and consulting Him in all the affairs of life. The righteous man is in constant communion with God, even in his worldly affairs, since here also he feels His presence. An especial form of communion with God is prayer. In order to render this communion complete the prayer must be full of fervor, ecstatic; and the soul of him who prays must during his devotions detach itself, so to speak, from its material dwelling.” Pray from the heart and focus all thoughts on God in order to feel His presence. God’s presence is to be apprehended even when one is engaged in secular affairs. This process produces an indescribable happiness that is part of the authentic love of God. Rejoice in the heavenly voice and potency that work within the self.⁸⁰

Ramakant Sinari's explained that the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) in *What is Metaphysics?* stresses the point that the well-deserved success of modern science and technology has drawn humanity away from the search for Being (Ultimate Reality, Brahman, God). Science has no means to lead people to Being, nor does it have the ability to penetrate through their yearning for Being. It has made humanity immune to higher values of life, unable to fulfill the spiritual quest. Consequently, with the oblivion of Being, modern humanity lives an inauthentic existence.⁸¹ What Heidegger did not realize is that Being can be discovered through the inner world of meditation.

Anthony Wilhelm clarified that the Catholics teach, "By prayer we communicate with God, open ourselves to him, find out his will for us and obtain the strength to live as we should.... Prayer is the great way in which God allows us to work with him in saving ourselves and others, in spreading love in the world.... When we pray we try to make contact with God, become aware of him, open ourselves to his love and his desires for us.... We must be humble and reverent as we pray. Christ always reminds us that our prayers should be simple and sincere.... We should pray often, several times a day if possible.... We should pray for everyone and anyone."⁸²

Christians often classify the prayers of the faithful into five basic categories:

1) Petition is asking for personal favors by appealing to God's mercy, love and generosity. Petitionary prayer, which requires faith in the Lord's power and grace, could be considered as a rudimentary form of meditation. While the lower form of petition involves asking for material objects, a middle type desires better health. The higher aspect of petition seeks guidance and strength from the Lord realizing our dependence on God. It is best to pray for spiritual and moral virtues such as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control," which the apostle Paul calls the "fruits of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23). People also pray and meditate to receive guidance and personal insights that apply only to their own situation concerning what they should and should not do.

2) Confession or penitence involves acknowledging our sins before a merciful God, or before a representative of the Church (Catholic), in order to attain forgiveness and the remission of the penalty for our

transgressions. Confession helps us to know our shortcomings and how we can improve our self.

3) “Intercession is prayer with, for and on behalf of another person, group of people, or even the world, which is undertaken by an individual or a group.” Like petition, intercession involves a feedback loop when the Lord responds to our prayers.

4) Thanksgiving is expressing appreciation and gratitude for the good things God has done for us. Praise originates in a heart full of love for God. It is important to thank and praise God for the goodness, mercy, and justice He has bestowed on us. Gratitude uplifts, energizes, and motivates us in our spiritual journey. Being grateful is an act of showing appreciation and a manifestation of love, devotion, and commitment to the Lord. “I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever. Everyday I will bless thee, and praise thy name for ever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable” (Ps. 145:1-3). An example of a prayer of thanksgiving is, I thank you Lord God for incarnating and coming to earth and teaching us the way to Heaven. For establishing your church and proving us with the ways to work out our salvation. We are so fortunate that you have bestowed your grace and loving kindness on us, taken on our burdens when we turned to you for help, and increased our wisdom concerning spiritual matters, though we have not deserved it. That we can rely on your power and strength to guide us on the right path, that you may reveal yourself to us. You are not only concerned not only with me, but with others as well. Thank you for being source of strength in my life, I do not know what my life would have been without you.⁸³

5) “Adoration, basically is the directing of one’s whole being toward God, so that in all its diversity it is to the praise and glory of God ... It is above all an interior disposition of devotion and the act of prayer proceeding from faith, hope, and charity. This inner act is concretized in the form of adoration, awesome reverential praise, humility, and devotion.”⁸⁴ Christian adoration is the most advanced form of prayer and is equivalent to the higher forms of Indian meditation. Catholics “distinguished between adoration (*latria*) which is offered to God alone, and veneration (*dulia*) accorded to the saints. Because of her unique place among the saints, the Virgin Mary receives a high degree of veneration (*hyperdulia*).”⁸⁵ Self-surrender to the will of God is also an advanced

spiritual practice.

The purpose of prayer is not to try to persuade Brahman-God to give us what we want, but to seek Brahman-God's will and then align our desires with it. We must have full faith that He will give us what is best for us. Jesus willingly placed his desires in full submission to the Father's will. He said to the Father, "Not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:42; c.f., Mark 14:36; Mt. 26:39).⁸⁶ Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) made this differentiation, "Two basic types of prayer are used by different individuals: man-centered and God-centered prayer. People whose prayer is man-centered beseech God to enrich their life on earth, to remove their sufferings, to provide them with wealth, success, and comfort. God-centered prayer, on the other hand, is motivated by spiritual discrimination and devotion. People whose prayers are God-centered seek Him alone, knowing that God-realization is the whole purpose of life. The Lord's Prayer is God-centered and in it Jesus teaches us how to become absorbed in the consciousness of God and find eternal joy and freedom."⁸⁷

A Gallup Poll published in 1982 tells us: 33% of the American respondents reported that when they pray they "ask for favors" (lower petition); 78% "ask for help, guidance, or strength" (middle and higher petition); 53% "seek forgiveness" (confession); 60% "seek help for others" (intercession); and 74% "give thanks" (thanksgiving).⁸⁸ It is not clear from this poll, what percentage of the respondents strived for the more sublime and spiritual level of contemplative adoration of God in their prayers.

Swami Prabhavananda's successor at the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Swami Swahananda (1921-2012) recognized that prayer (and meditation) has many psychological benefits. "It relieves the mind of tension, which is the natural concomitant of a life of hurry and worry. It neutralizes mental repressions and purifies the subconscious. It releases an extra amount of hope and energy and thus enables a man to face life squarely.... Prayer frees man from anxiety and sustains him in moments of suffering. Prayer frees man from tension by unburdening his mind, putting faith in God's power to alleviate suffering, or by seeing one's problems in a larger perspective."⁸⁹ Prayer frees the mind of its problems, of egotism and the burden of negative emotions. For these reasons it cleanses and brings peace to the mind. Gradually there is an enhanced faith in God and in oneself, accompanied by an increased enthusiasm, optimism,

hope, personal energy, strength of will, humility and selflessness. “Prayer’s efficacy lies in helping us forget the embodied condition and become attuned to a Higher Reality. Prayer thus purifies the mind, as do other spiritual disciplines. When prayer is methodological, regular and fervent, it disciplines the mind and prepares it for higher realization.”⁹⁰ The validity of prayer is supported by the fact that it: is universal practiced, brings great benefit to people of all religions, enables a meditator to transform their character, and it is responsible for the illumination of many mystics and saints. When prayer is practiced with sincerity, zeal, and regularity a believer is bound to receive a response, which proves its efficacy and increases their religious faith.⁹¹

Meditation and Yoga

Meditation is known in Western religions and Greek philosophy as Contemplation (Lat. *contemplatio*, Gr. *theoria*). Contemplation is the opening of the mind and heart, one’s whole being to God, a direct experience of the Divine. It involves thinking profoundly about God, which yields an inner vision, experiential knowledge, witnessing Him as a living reality, and the ultimate goal of union with God. Like meditation contemplation entails concentration, a turning inward, reversing those faculties of the mind that naturally turn outwards. For Plato through contemplation the soul ascends to knowledge of the Ideal Forms the realities that underlie the empirical world. Plotinus taught that the highest contemplation can lead to an experience of the World Soul, Nous, and the One. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity deification (*theosis*) or unity with God and participate in His Divine nature is acquired by engaging in contemplative (*theoria*) prayer.⁹²

To attain the higher Reality a person must transform their inner nature to become adaptable to the higher world. The various forms of meditation follow a format that includes the following four items.

1. The object meditated on: a) consists of no, one or many objects, b) is static or changing, c) consists of a visual form, a sound, or a sensation, and d) is perceived through the senses, or is imagined in the mind through visualization or another technique.
2. The meditative technique: a) is practiced with the eyes opened or closed, and b) might involve recitation, memorized material, discursive ideas,

breath control, focusing on different parts of the body, specific posture, or physical exercise.

3. Expected effects during meditation can include: a) mental events, b) creative thoughts, and c) pleasant peaceful emotions.

4. Expected effects after meditation can include: a) modifications in cognitions or perceptions, b) changes in one's behavior, character, and personality, and c) altering one's emotions.⁹³

The goal of meditation is to internalize the Chosen Ideal so you identify with Him/Her as part of your psyche. The meditator has empathy, meaning the ability to experience the emotion that the Chosen Ideal feels. In time the mediator's nature (ideas, attitudes, values, conduct, feelings, and qualities) will resemble in a limited way that of the Chosen Ideal. When meditating it is best not to consider oneself as the doer, but that the Chosen Ideal is the doer working through us and causing these changes in our mind to occur. Through the practices of meditation we strive to make our mind compatible with the higher world so that after the death of the physical body we are capable of entering it. The goal is to establish in the mind a concentrated long-lasting direct internal perception of the Chosen Ideal. Mystical experience is a direct contact with the Divine realm that transcends human existence. It may be concentrated on illuminating the mind (rational) and/or on stimulating the heart and feelings (emotive). The result is an inner transformation of the mystic that goes beyond religious dogma, external rituals, and institutional identity.⁹⁴ By practicing meditation one will develop other religious virtues. When we realize Brahman-God, at the same time we realize our own divinity.

Introjection is a process whereby a person incorporates into their thinking and behavior the ideas, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other characteristics of the Chosen Ideal. They have not been assimilated as part of the self. Internalization involves the integration of the Chosen ideal's character and personality into one's own personal identity. It entails the formulation and modification of the self. Identification is a social-psychological process where the devotee assimilates and internalizes the character, values, properties, attitudes, ethical standards, expectations, and roles of the Chosen Ideal into their own behavior and self-conception. It is a transformational process that involves modeling one's self after the Chosen Ideal, and having a feeling of oneness with the Deity.⁹⁵

Anger, addictions, laziness, etc, are due to the negative vibrations of

the mind that produce these forms of energy-forces in the subtle matter of the brain. Through meditation these vibrations can be evened out and thereby nullified, and replaced by positive vibrations of peacefulness, self-control, productive activity, etc. producing new energy-forces. When meditating one should try to enter into an inner world, where they forget all of their outside activities and associated thoughts. Studies have shown that practicing mindfulness can reduce stress, anxiety, depression, fatigue, and pain. Mindfulness meditation changes the brain structure, including gray matter volume and cortical thickness and reduces the loss of brain tissue.⁹⁶

The will is strengthened through the practice of meditation, which makes it easier for an individual to overcome obstacles that block personal progress. Instead of their mind regulating them, they control their mind. Meditation also produces insight and understanding of your nature and awareness of what you are thinking or feeling about. The person then recognizes their unhealthy or unproductive thoughts and feelings.

There is a difference between an intellectual state (subtle realm) and a spiritual state (causal realm). The great intellectual thinker William James mentioned he was not inclined to enter into a mystical state of mind. Mysticism deals with experiencing Brahman-God directly by focusing on a concrete spiritual object, while intellectualism is concerned with knowing Brahman-God as an abstract object (idea).

Christian meditation is a type of prayer that seeks a personal loving relationship with God. It is grounded in having a deeper understanding of the revelations of God presented in the *Bible*. The meditator responds to the love of God, because "We love, because he first loved us" (I John 4:19). Meditation combines thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. The goal of meditation is to bring joy to the heart and to "fill the mind with thoughts related to the teachings of the *Bible* and aspects of Christian devotions. Meditation involves the inherent action of the Holy Spirit who enters the soul of the meditator. A person is encouraged to visualize and imagine scenes from the life of Christ or sayings from the Gospel. The result is a loving service to others. At times the meditator will feel peace and possibly a feeling of ecstasy. As a result of deep transcendent meditation the awareness of the body disappears.⁹⁷

In the book *Mysticism*, Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) refers to Christian religious contemplation. She describes a mystical experience of

Meister Eckhart, “This encounter, the consummation of mystical culture, is what we mean by contemplation in its highest form. Here we are on the verge of that great self-merging act which is of the essence of pure love: which Reality has sought of us, and we have unknowingly desired of it. Here contemplation and union are one.” Underhill adds, according to Richard Rolle (1290-1349), “Nothing more profitable, nothing merrier than grace of contemplation that lifts us from this low and offers to God. What is grace of contemplation but beginning of joy? What is parfiteness of joy but grace confirmed?” Jan Ruysbroeck (1293-1381) stated, “Contemplation ... places us in a purity and a radiance which is far above our understanding ... and none can attain to it by knowledge, by subtlety, or by any exercise whatsoever: but he whom God chooses to unite to Himself, and to illuminate by Himself, he and no other can contemplate God.... But few men attain to this divine contemplation, because of our incapacity and of the hiddenness of that light in which one sees. And this is why none by his own knowledge, or by subtle consideration will ever really understand these things. For all words and all that one can learn or understand in a creaturely way, are foreign to the truth that I mean and far below it. But he who is united to God, and illumined by this truth—he can understand Truth by Truth.” For Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863), “When contemplation appears, it produces a general condition of indifference, liberty, and peace, an elevation above the world, a sense of beatitude. The Subject ceases to perceive himself in the multiplicity and division of his general consciousness. He is raised above himself. A deeper and a purer soul substitutes itself for the normal self. In this state, in which consciousness of I-hood and consciousness of the world disappear, the mystic is conscious of being in immediate relation with God Himself; of participating in Divinity. Contemplation installs a method of being and of knowing. Moreover, these two things tend at bottom to become one. The mystic has more and more the impression of being that which he knows, and of knowing that which he is.”⁹⁸

Religious experience is an objective event that involves more than subjective feelings. People have dissimilar experiences because they encounter a different aspect of divine reality. It is not that they experience the same reality in different ways. Compared to sense experiences they are far more intense yielding a feeling of certitude.

Today in the West the rajasic guna is predominant, but there is a lack of sattva which meditation can provide. For many people the practice of yogic mediation opens up a whole new world. The vibrational level of their mind has been raised up. For one thing during their pre-yogic period they were unaware of some of their deficiencies that needed to be altered. After beginning yogic practice they become aware that a problem exists, start to seriously think the matter over, and make the decision to develop a self-initiated rigorous plan of self-improvement. This resolve to change oneself requires a shift in attitudes, beliefs, intentions, behavior patterns, lifestyle, self-conception, and environment, along with a commitment of time and energy. Utilizing a yogic method of self-change and mind control they are able to overcome and successfully change their negative behavior patterns. Through the practice of mediation their willpower is enhanced allowing them to gain control over the thought forces of their mind. Yogic treatment gives them the self-confidence that through individual commitment they can change their lives in key ways. It is best if it is bolstered by a social support system of people who think the way we do. Meditate so you can identify with a Divine Incarnation rather than with a famous political leader, intellectual, actor, athlete, etc. Ideally meditation brings about the sattvic qualities of selfless love, goodness, joy, peace, purity, creative intelligence, and humanitarianism. It is important to purify yourself so that you impart spiritual vibrations in your daily life and religious activity; be it when working, lecturing, writing, or through social engagements.

On the negative side in the early stages of yoga practice, the defense mechanisms are apt to break down, as the person enters into their subconscious mind. This exposes some of their personal weaknesses to them that they were previously not aware of. Also, if the mind jumps from one thing to another, we might think of a mentally putting a lock on our mind that prevents it from moving around.

A yogi has a good meditation that inspires the person to live the religious life and to continue to meditate in the future. This is an example of a virtuous circle (or cycle), a chain of events that reinforces itself through a feedback loop, with positive results. Each repetition of beneficial actions reinforces the next one resulting in spiritual progress.

The benefits from spiritual practice follow the Multiplier Principle, meaning they far exceed the amount of effort required to obtain them. This is particularly true, if one receives the grace of the Lord.

The mind of an exemplary yogi enters into a high state of vibration and rises to a blissful heavenly state. To see Brahman-God with spiritual eyes awakens the inner Divinity within oneself and the devotee begins to realize they are a spiritual being. This process leads to liberation-salvation. We want to place the computer chip of the Lord in our mind to maintain a remembrance of the Divine.

Fixation is to remain at one phase of development and not to progress to a higher more mature level. The person is not able to move on to the next stage, lacking the strength to overcome the energies that are holding them back. They might have bad and harmful habits that they cannot overcome and may even regress to a lower level.

For some people meditation is like mental weight lifting, except the pressure of concentration is placed on the psychodynamic forces of the mind instead of the muscles. The meditator must be careful not to overstrain the mind and the weightlifter the body. We might think of the Lord as the master mechanic who works on the forces of our mind.

Even during trying times, yogis are not depressed because of a continuous subtle spiritual current that flows through them. Vivekananda mentions physical illness being due to over or under vibration of pranic energy. We can assume this is also the cause of bad physical and mental health. Under vibration is related to lethargy and over vibration to anger. Before a physical or mental illness arises on the physical (gross) level it already exists in the subtle body in seed form. The medical doctor perceives it or a person experiences it after it has manifested on the gross plane. According to the "Vibration Theory of Health" meditation can help to even out the vibrations if it is detected early enough while in seed form and therefore improve physical and mental health. There is a big difference in destroying the seed of a redwood tree than when it is fully developed. Even if the meditation occurs after the negative vibrations have reached a fair level of intensity, it can improve the situation.

There are a few rare people who are born meditators and yogis, but most of us strive to become meditators and yogis. Some say prayer is speaking to Brahman-God and meditation is listening to Brahman-God. Some people think success in mediation is due to love and devotion, others

to purity, spiritual knowledge, strength of mind, etc. These are different ways of viewing the same thing. One commits the error of reductionism if they reduce the explanation down to only one of these and ignore the others. We might add, one should also pray for protection from oneself, from one's own egocentric ideas that distort the true meaning of a situation and cause a person all kinds of problems. An advantage of group meditation is the low cost of teaching it in groups compared to a psychiatrist who treats each patient individually.

William James' (1842-1910) account of human experience of the present moment is part of a stream of consciousness that he called the "specious present," the subjective "temporal now" awareness of psychological time. Since immediate stimuli are temporary and changing, for consciousness awareness to exist, the duration of the specious present requires a minimum length of time, perhaps a fraction of a second though for a meditator with a concentrated mind it would be longer. More time is required to integrate and organize the experience by imposing order and structure on it.⁹⁹

When meditating on a Chosen Ideal we have to develop an intuitive empathetic understanding (*verstehen*) of the Deity we are focusing on. Meditation involves projecting our consciousness into the Deity. This special type of absorption requires a conscious union with the subject. When meditating it is best to be concentrating on the present moment, and not on past or future events or on reflecting on ideas. A great value of meditation is that it is an aid in developing concentration of the mind. The human mind has a tendency to wonder from one thing to another. Intellectual study also helps in developing a concentrated mind.

Mindfulness Meditation is the concentrated awareness of mental events and emotions that are occurring at the present moment in the mind, rather than thinking of prior or anticipating future events. As a detached observer they do not pass judgment or become involved with them.¹⁰⁰ They are aware of the activity of their own inner mental self, experiencing and observing their stream of thoughts, which they accept without self-judgment. Studies have shown that practicing mindfulness can reduce stress, anxiety, depression, fatigue, and pain. Mindfulness meditation changes the brain structure, including gray matter volume and cortical thickness and reduces the loss of brain tissue. Mindfulness and

meditation practices work well for people of different ages and ranges of ability.¹⁰¹

The ultimate goal of meditation is to develop perfect self-control. To have the mind do what you want it to. It is the samskaras (mental impressions) from the past that make it difficult to renounce prior tendencies. When we want to change, the mind is apt to rebel because of these samskaras. Many people would like to get rid of some of their bad habits but lack the control over their mind to do so. Meditation strengthens the willpower to make this possible. Be detached from the mind and observe the way it is working, so that it does not control you.

A habit is a fixed way of acting, thinking, or feeling acquired through a repetitive process. The process is automatic requiring very little conscious thought. Many of our daily behavioral actions are performed by habit. It is helpful to associate a certain time of the day or a certain location with a specific desired activity. One of the best ways of getting rid of a bad habit is to replace it by a good one. One habit can bring about the formation of other habits.¹⁰² For example, by practicing meditation one will develop other religious virtues.

Habits are developed through positive reinforcement (rewards) that encourages the repetition of the action. The behaviour becomes more automatic with each repetition, so that we perform the action without being consciously aware of it. They are efficient in that they can be performed without wasting time and energy on deliberating about what to do. Through repetition of an action it is possible to deliberately form and maintain new habits. Goal-directed action influence habit formation by initially motivating people to repeat certain actions. Stress and distractions can have a negative effect on habits. A temporal association can be developed, e.g., it is 6 o'clock at night (the stimulus) and its time to meditate (our response). Due to the Law of Association we psychologically associate one time of day and day of a week with a certain activity. So we are best off if we develop the habit of associating particular times of the day with meditation. An example of spatial association is to see a temple and automatically think of meditating.¹⁰³

Instead of thinking about the Chosen ideal the mind reflects on the events of the mediators life or about intellectual ideas. When you mediate you must leave your seculars self and enter into your sacred self. Worldly thoughts exist on the surface of the mind. Plunge deeper and enter the

intellectual sphere and even deeper into the spiritual realm by meditating on your Chosen Ideal. Meditating on the negative vibrations in the mind as forces, and not as ideas or feelings can destroy them. There is a difference between the force of anger or depression and the feeling or idea of these two.

Many scientific studies have shown that meditation practices are associated with improved concentration, self-awareness, and regulation of emotion; and reduction of stress, depression, and anxiety symptoms. MRI studies have revealed that meditation brings about short-term structural changes in the brain, while different types of meditation activate different regions of the brain. Longitudinal studies are necessary to see if there are any long-term neurological changes in brain activity. It would be an important practical scientific discovery if over a five or ten-year period they discovered permanent long-term changes in the structure and functioning of the brain of an excellent meditator. Does the meditating bring about long-lasting structural changes in the brain by increasing the cortical thickness of regions like the prefrontal cortex and insula, activate functional connectivity, and increase activity in various regions of the brain? Are their long-term changes in Alpha, Beta, Delta, and Gamma frequencies, and/or Delta oscillations caused by meditation practices?¹⁰⁴

5. Quiet the Mind to Realize Brahman-God

Indian: “Drawing back the senses from every direction by strength of mind, let a man little by little attain tranquility ... Once the mind is established in the Self [Atman], he should think of nothing else. Let him withdraw the fickle and unquiet mind from whatever causes it to wander away ... Supreme Bliss comes to the yogi whose mind is completely tranquil and whose passions are quieted ” (BG 6:24-27). “Engaged in the yoga of constant practice and not allowing the mind to wander away to anything else” (BG 8:8).

Old Testament: “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).

Using an analogy while commenting on Patanjali’s yoga psychology (YS 1:2), Swami Vivekananda stressed the importance of quieting the mind so that it can concentrate deeply on the intended object, “The bottom of a lake we cannot see, because its surface is covered with ripples. It is only

possible for us to catch a glimpse of the bottom, when the ripples have subsided, and the water is calm. If the water is muddy or is agitated all the time, the bottom will not be seen. If it is clear, and there are no waves, we shall see the bottom. The bottom of the lake is our own true Self; the lake is the Chitta [mind substance] and the waves the Vrittis [thought waves of the mind].” “The purer the mind, the easier it is to control. Purity of the mind must be insisted upon if you would control it.”¹⁰⁵

Swami Brahmananda confirmed, “You will find peace and happiness only if you can remember the Lord. If He is pleased, the world is pleased.... Accept all trials and tribulations boldly. Welcome them, for through them you shall surely find peace.... Know Him as your very own and you will find peace in Him.... Forget the body and its comforts; shake off the delusion of birth and death. Shake off the illusory peace of Maya and find the real peace—the everlasting peace of God.... The greatest strength of character is to live in harmony with all. No one can find peace if he hurts another. Never utter one word that would hurt another. Tell the truth, but never tell a harsh truth.”¹⁰⁶ “When the mind is once freed from craving it becomes your slave.... Know this: without worshiping God you can never have peace of mind. Therefore, spend some time every day in the worship of God, in japam and meditation, and in singing God’s glory. True devotion, faith [shraddha], and knowledge, are the results of long persistence in spiritual practices.... There is the path of the good and the path of the pleasant: one leads to everlasting peace and the other leads to suffering. Choose therefore the path of the good.... Unless you meditate, you cannot control the mind, and unless the mind is controlled, you cannot meditate.... Peace dwells in the heart of one who loves God. Realize that your life without him is barren. Yearn for him, and peace will follow. When a man finds no peace in the world, dispassion grows within him and he is drawn to God.”¹⁰⁷ Silencing the mind during meditation is more important than refraining from speech.

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) noted, “The first thing that you should cause your soul to hold fast onto is that, while reciting the Schema prayer, you should empty your mind of everything and pray thus. You should not content yourself with being intent while reciting the first verse of Schema and saying the first benediction. When this has been carried out correctly and has been practiced consistently for years, cause your soul,

whenever you read or listen to the *Torah*, to be constantly directed—the whole of you and your thought—toward reflection on what you are listening or reading. When this too has been practiced consistently for a certain time, cause your soul to be in such a way that your thought is always quite free of distraction and gives heed to all that you are reading of the other discourses of the prophets.”¹⁰⁸

In 1913, the British writer Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) assisted Rabindranath Tagore in compiling and translating *One Hundred Poems of Kabir* (1914-15, later called *Songs of Kabir*), and authored a scholarly eighteen-page Introduction to the book. In the same year she also wrote the introduction for *The Autobiography of Devendranath Tagore*. Later concerning R. Tagore she wrote in a letter, “This is the first time I have had the privilege of being with one who is a Master in the things I care so much about but know so little of as yet: & I understand now something of what your writers mean when they insist on the necessity and value of the personal teacher and the fact that he gives something which the learner cannot get in any other way.”¹⁰⁹ In her classic book on comparative mysticism Underhill aptly explained, “Contemplation is the mystic’s medium. It is an extreme form of that withdrawal of attention from the external world and total dedication of the mind.... The price of this experience has been a stilling of that surface-mind, a calling in of all our scattered interests: an entire giving of ourselves to this one activity, without self-consciousness, without reflective thought. To reflect is always to distort.... He must call in his faculties by a deliberate exercise of the will, empty his mind of its swarm of images, its riot of thought. In mystical language he must ‘sink into his nothingness’: into that blank abiding place where busy, clever Reason cannot come. The whole of this process, this gathering up and turning ‘inwards’ of the powers of the self, this gazing into the ground of the soul, is that which is called Introversion.... Its method is the method of the mystic life, transcendence: a gradual elimination of sensible images, and bit by bit approximation of the contemplative self to reality, gradually producing within it those conditions in which union can take place. This entails a concentration, a turning inwards, of all those faculties which the normal self has been accustomed to turn outwards, and fritter upon the manifold illusions of daily life. It means, during the hours of introversion, a retreat from and refusal of the Many, in order that the mind may be able to apprehend the One.”¹¹⁰ A

healthy body requires food, fresh air, and exercise to thrive. So in spiritual life: one must have food, meaning, a steady diet of reading Scripture and spiritual classics; fresh air, which is to live with an attitude of praise and gratitude; and, finally, exercise—which requires a disciplined routine. Quoting St. Francis de Sales, “We seldom do well what we only do seldom.”¹¹¹ Evelyn Underhill’s book on *Mysticism* (1911) established her as was one of the greatest Western mystical philosophers of the 20th century. Publishing over 30 books she was not ethnocentric in covering Christian mystics from many countries besides her native England.

The subtle body (mind) operates not only by physical food, but by subtle food. So through the practice of yoga feed your mind with healthy thoughts and emotions and you will be much happier. Food for the Causal (Spiritual) Body includes practicing the four yogas for the purpose of realizing Brahman-God. One has to quiet the mind and go beneath surface consciousness to make contact with the Divine realm.

Some people have creative thoughts when they wake up in the morning after a good nights sleep.

The mind is a set of cognitive faculties that acquire knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and sense perception. Thinking involves reason, memory, recognition, imagination, intuition, and making judgments. Thought also includes feelings and emotions, will, and actions.

6. Utter the Name of the Lord

Indian: “Meditate on Brahman with the help of the syllable OM. Cross the fearful currents of the ocean of worldliness by means of the raft of Brahman-the sacred syllable OM” (Svet. Up.* 2:8). “Uttering the sacred syllable OM and meditating upon me. Such a man reaches the highest goal” (BG* 8:13; cf. Tait. Up. 1:8).

Old Testament: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind

them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Dt. 6:4-9). “Sing the glory of his name” (Ps. 66:2: cf. 5:11; 34:3; Rom. 10:13). New Testament: “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be thy name’” (Lk. 11:2). “For, every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13). “Therefore I will praise thee among the Gentiles, and sing to thy name” (Rom. 15:9).

The Name of God. Old Testament references are so numerous; the citations given below are limited to the book of Psalms. The Lord's name is to be: praised (Ps. 7:17; 9:2; 18:49; 61:8; 68:4; etc.), trusted in (Ps. 33:21), exalted (Ps. 34:3; 148:13), revered (Ps. 61:5; 86:11; 102:15; 111:10), called upon (Ps. 80:18; 99:6; 105:1; 116:13, 17), sought (Ps. 83:16), given thanks to (Ps. 106:47; 122:4; 140:13), remembered (Ps. 119:55), and loved (Ps. 119:132). It is: a protector of people (Ps. 20:1), full of glory and to be glorified (Ps. 29:2; 66:2; 72:19; 86:9, 12; etc.), holy (Ps. 33:21; 103:1; 111:9; 145:21), good (Ps. 54:6), eternal (Ps. 72:17; 135:13), blessed and to be blest (Ps. 72:19; 96:2; 100:4; 113:2; 145:1, 21), a bringer of salvation (Ps. 79:9), a forgiver of sin (Ps. 79:9), great (Ps. 99:3), and our helper (Ps. 124:8). In the *New Testament* demons were cast out by the power of his name (Mk. 9:38; Lk. 9:49), which is hallowed (Mt. 6:9; Lk. 11:2). Jesus will do what you ask in his name (Jn. 14:13-14). The name of the Lord Jesus Christ should be: called upon (1 Cor. 1:2), glorified in you (2 Thes. 1:12), not blasphemed (Jam. 2:7) and believed in (1 Jn. 3:23). In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we: are sanctified and justified by (1 Cor. 6:11), should bow our knee (Phil. 2:10), and speak all words and perform all deeds (Col. 3:17).

Vivekananda stated, “The following are helps to success in Yoga ... Repeating the *Vedas* and other Mantras, by which the Sattva material in the body is purified, is called study, Svadhyaya. There are three sorts of repetitions of these Mantras. One is called the verbal, another semi-verbal, and the third mental. The verbal or audible is the lowest, and the inaudible is the highest of all. The repetition which is loud is the verbal; the next one is where only the lips move, but no sound is heard. The inaudible repetition of the Mantra, accompanied with the thinking of its meaning, is called the ‘mental repetition,’ and is the highest.” “Repeating the names of God has wonderful power. Mantra is a special word, or sacred text, or name of God

chosen by the Guru for repetition and reflection by the disciple. The disciple must concentrate on a personality for prayer and praise, and that is his Ishta. These words (Mantras) are not sounds of words but God Himself, and we have them within us. Think of Him, speak of Him.”¹¹²

Swami Shivananda (1854-1934) of the Ramakrishna Order recommended, “Repeat the name often. The repetition of his name will purify your body and mind, washing away all impurities.” “When one goes on repeating the name of the Chosen Deity with intense love, one becomes gradually filled with an ineffable bliss.”¹¹³ “When this becomes a firm habit, it will continue even during sleep and generate a current of joy in the mind.... You should sit for japa with steadfastness at least twice a day—morning and evening—and repeat the mantra for a definite number of times. It should not be less than a thousand each time in your case.” “To repeat the name of the Lord over the rosary is good; repetition of the name on the fingers is better, but mental repetition of the name is the very best.” “The repetition of the Lord’s name must be practiced very secretly so that no one knows anything about it.” “As you repeat the mantra of a Chosen Deity, think of His form as well; thus you can have both japa and meditation simultaneously.”¹¹⁴

Swami Brahmananda indicated, “The way of japam is the easiest path to follow. By constantly performing japam the mind can easily be made calm and steady, and finally it will lose itself in God. Therefore, I ask you to perform japam regularly and often and at the same time meditate on the Chosen Ideal. This combined practice brings quick success.” “The mantram is charged with spiritual power. The truth of this will be directly revealed to you as you practice”¹¹⁵ “Practice japam unceasingly. Practice it with every breath. Practice it until it becomes your second nature; then you will find yourself chanting the name of God as you fall asleep and again as you awaken.”¹¹⁶

Concerning the practice of japam Swami Saradananda (1865-1927) of the Ramakrishna Order urged, “No special time and place are necessary to repeat the Lord’s name and worship him. You can repeat his name wherever you are.” “Mental repetition is the best. It will purify your mind and help you to keep your thoughts in God.... The name of the Lord you receive at the time of initiation is sacred to you. It is your mantra. You must not speak of it to anybody except your guru.... The repetition of the Divine name will bring into your mind holy associations, the blessed

qualities of God, and take away the blemishes of the heart.... the mantra has the power to bring spiritual progress and ultimately liberation.... when the spiritual power is awakened, the mantra is seen in golden letters and sometimes is heard as clearly as a human voice.... Then the aspirant realizes God in and through the mantra.” “Regularity is very important in spiritual life. Therefore you must try to keep the same hours as far as possible.” It is best to do japa mentally neither moving the tongue nor the lips.” “By practice, a taste for repeating the Lord’s name will come and you will know peace and bliss.”¹¹⁷

Swami Adbhutananda (d. 1920) a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna made these statements about japa, “The nature of the mind can be changed by chanting the name of the Lord. Gradually desires and doubts cease and the mind dissolves into its causality. Then there is none to think or imagine.... Practice japa and be charitable. If you can do this, you will find the Lord showering his grace upon you.... A bhakta meditates on the name and form of the Lord, while a jnani meditates on the identity of the individual soul and Brahman. But whatever the object of meditation may be, eventually both aspirants will reach the same goal. When meditation deepens, both the name and form of the Lord and also the knowledge of the identity of the individual soul and Brahman disappear. That is certain. At that time, only a current of experience which is indescribable remains.... You people don't practice japa sincerely, so you always complain and make excuses. Look, if one makes a habit of repeating the holy name, the name itself will take hold of the mind.... Sri Ramakrishna used to say that before starting to chant the name of the Lord, one should salute the name. One should take refuge in the name of the Lord. The name and the named, that is, the Lord, are one. If one prays wholeheartedly to the name, one's prayer reaches the Lord.... Chant the name of the Lord every morning. First bathe and put on a clean cloth and then sit in the corner of a room or in a solitary place and think of God. Then you will find happiness in this life.”¹¹⁸

The philosophy of chanting Brahman’s (God’s) name is discussed by the Dutch professor Jan Gonda (1905-91), “The sabda or sound of a mantra is conceived as a spiritual sound, produced by the worshipper's mind, heard by the heart and understandable only by the initiated. Each being, in all states of existence, and each inanimate object possesses a bodily form attuned to a certain frequency of vibration. That is to say,

there is associated with each organic creature (sub-human, human and super-human) and with each phenomenal object or element, a particular rate of vibration. If this be known and formulated as sound in a mantra and if it be used expertly it is considered capable of disintegrating the object with which it is in vibratory accord, or of impelling Deities to emit their Divine influence. To know the mantra of any Deity is therefore to know how to set up psychic communication with that Deity. A mantra is from this point of view a syllable or series of syllables, of the same frequency as the (usually invisible) being to which it appertains; by knowing it one is able to command the elements and phenomena of the universe. In employing mantras, one is therefore to concentrate one's mind upon the mystic process of the transmutation which is to result. Realization of a mantra is the union of the consciousness of the sadhaka [chanter] with that consciousness which manifests in the form of the mantra. It is this union which makes the mantra work.... The efficacy of mantras constituting their cardinal tenet, the spiritual background of their worship is primarily an effort to awaken the power (consciousness) of the mantra in order to visualize the Deity from inside. Basing themselves on the belief that there is a natural connection between a name and the object so named, that there is an inseparable relationship between these—the Vishnuists going even so far as to consider the Deity and his name coincident or identical—they describe the mantras, which are full of potentiality, as living representatives of Deities. A mantra is therefore considered to be the rupa (form) of the Deity.”¹¹⁹

Sanjukta Gupta of Oxford University specified that according to the ancient Indian Vedic philosophy, “Each Deity has two forms, that which can be visualized and the sonic form, or mantra; the latter form is the closer to ultimate reality and is thus the more potent.” “All Hindu rituals are accompanied by mantras, whether or not they are uttered aloud. The length of a mantra can be anything from a single syllable to a whole hymn.... The Vedic mantras thus put us in touch with eternal reality; in fact, they emanate from the ground of reality. Their words are unchanging and so have a higher ontological status than the things to which they refer.” From a philosophical standpoint, sound and language precede the existence of the empirical world. The original mantras (sacred utterances) that are found in the *Vedas* are considered to be of an impersonal origin. “The syllable Om [pronounced Aum], to be pronounced at the beginning

and end of a Vedic recitation, came to be regarded in early monistic thought as the symbol of the one reality.”¹²⁰

A saint of the Russian Orthodox Church, Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov (1807-67) recommended that attentive prayer should be performed using a rosary to keep count of the repetitions, with the eyes closed, in a dark room “to keep the mind from distraction and to assist it to concentrate in the heart,” and to sit in a restful position. Brianchaninov quoted Saint Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833), “Those who have truly resolved to serve God must practice the remembrance of God and unceasing pray to the Lord Jesus Christ, saying with the mind: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ By this practice, while guarding oneself from distraction and while maintaining peace of conscience, one can draw near to God and be united with Him.” “This prayer by holding the mind without dreaming, renders it inaccessible and immune to the appeals of the enemy, and daily leads it more and more into love and longing for God.”¹²¹ In the beginning, chanting the Prayer of Jesus may be dry and appear to produce no fruits. In time, “The patient and diligent worker will not fail to be satisfied and consoled; he will rejoice at an infinite abundance of spiritual fruits such as he can form no conception of in his carnal and natural state.” While the diligent worker continues in their practice, they can utter the prayer up to twelve thousand times per day. Continuously repeating this holy name in the depth of the heart, controls the mental waves of the mind, and causes the memory of the Lord Jesus to be the sole object of thought. Oral repetition of the prayer may even occur when one is asleep.¹²²

Commenting on Brianchaninov’s ideas, Alexander d’Agapeyeff writes, “The Jesus Prayer is first repeated aloud again and again. This may be looked upon as the conditioning of the body. It is to gain an external habit of saying the prayer, to make the prayer a continuous background of one’s life. When this has been practiced for some time the next step is taken, which is to say the prayer silently, and this might be looked upon as the conditioning of the mind. The prayer must no longer be repeated by the lips but must be concentrated on as it is being thought.... The third step, when complete concentration has been attained, is then taken. The direct link is created between the body and spirit and the ‘Divine intermediary’ [of] the soul is dispensed with. Now the prayer enters the heart and lives

itself with every heart beat.”¹²³ Repetition of the Jesus Prayer is known as the practice of Hesychasm in Eastern Christianity.

These ideas were also expressed by the saintly Russian mystic Bishop Theophan the Recluse (1815-91), “Standing with consciousness and attention in the heart, cry out unceasingly, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me,’ without having in your mind any visual concept or image, believing that the Lord sees you and listens to you.... The essential part is to dwell in God, and this walking before God means that you live with the conviction ever before your consciousness that God is in you, as he is in everything: you live in the firm assurance that he sees all that is within you, knowing you better than you know yourself. This awareness of the eye of God looking at your inner being must not be accompanied by any visual concept, but must be confined to a simple conviction or feeling.”¹²⁴

For Catholics vocal prayer is private when said alone and public or communal when recited in a group. “The public prayer of the Church is called liturgical prayer and is found in liturgical actions, namely in the Mass, the Sacraments, the Divine Office, the sacramentals, and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.”¹²⁵ “Hail Mary” is an ancient prayer of the Catholic Church often accompanied by the use of the rosary. The prayer is, “Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”¹²⁶

Brahman-God has many forms and expresses Itself through Divine Incarnations (Avataras), religious scriptures, and spiritual thoughts, words, and objects. Words manifest as meanings, as sound vibrations, and as sight vibrations. Japa is the constant repetition of a sacred word or words (mantra) used to increase concentration on a deity. The syllable Aum (Om) is often part of a mantra. It may be performed with or without contemplation on it. While in ritual worship images and symbols are used, in Japa focus is on sacred words that generate spiritual vibrations within us. The mantra may be spoken vocally (Vachka or Vaikhari japa), whispered (Upamsu or Upamshu japa), or thought of silently within the practitioner's mind (Manasa or Manasika japa), the last considered to be the most effective. The goal is 'repetitionless repetition' (Ajapa japa), where the mantra repeats itself automatically without effort in the aspirants mind. It

is best if the mantra comes from a spiritual teacher, who infuses it with spirituality and an awakening power. Mantras are often given to the devotee by their guru, sometimes during initiation. Often the mantra is repeated a specific number of times or hours per day and over time the amount can be gradually increased until the target is reached. To keep count a string of Japa beads (Japamala) can be used, consisting of 108 beads plus the head bead. The virtue of silent japa is that it can be practiced anywhere without need of any external paraphernalia. It can be performed while meditating or during daily activities.¹²⁷

The relatively short prescribed phrases made during a ritualistic ceremony of any religion can be thought of as a mantra, meaning sacred words or a phrase of spiritual significance.

7. Image Worship

It was pointed out by Swami Shivananda, “Whatever is done with devotion pleases the Lord. Don't you see how people fashion images of Shiva with clay and worship them, thereby gaining in faith and devotion and attaining enlightenment and liberation? Although it is only a clay image of Shiva, if it is worshipped with love and devotion, the Lord is pleased and accepts the worship. What is made of inert clay becomes conscious and living. The essence of everything is devotion. Wherever there is devotion, know for certain that the grace of the Lord is there. External worship and things of that sort are just means to an end.” “God is in the images in a special sense. When one makes sufficient progress Godwards, one will see that God is there and even accepts our offerings of food through rays of light touching what is offered. This has been seen by Sri Guru Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] and the Holy Mother.”¹²⁸

Swami Vivekananda taught that all religions utilize external physical images to represent the Divine. For many people it is necessary to have concrete symbols to worship the abstract, since we cannot think of a thing without a mental image of it in our mind. “All these are material images, and so long as you cannot conceive of the abstract as abstract, of the ideal as the ideal, you will have to resort to these forms, these material images.” “Ritual gives to that philosophy a still more concrete form, so that every one may grasp it--ritual is in fact concretised philosophy.” “My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a mental image

than we can live without breathing. By the law of association, the material image calls up the mental idea and *vice versa*. This is why the Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships. He will tell you, it helps to keep his mind fixed on the Being to whom he prays. He knows as well as you do that the image is not God, is not omnipresent.” In a letter of November 1895 he wrote an engineer and grain trader, “want to know the rituals of my creed! This opened my eyes. The world in general must have some form. In fact, in the ordinary sense religion is philosophy concretised through rituals and symbols. It is absolutely necessary to form some ritual and have a Church. That is to say, we must fix on some ritual as fast as we can.”¹²⁹ Religious images are like the words of the scriptures, which are vehicles through which God is venerated. The subjective state is reached through the objective. Sacred images call up thoughts of holiness, purity, and truth in the mind of the spiritual aspirant. Therefore, worship of images can produce the highest levels of spirituality, morality, and love. Through image worship, one can realize their own Divine nature and grasp the higher spiritual truths. “It is also a significant fact that spiritual giants have been produced only in those systems of religion where there is an exuberant growth of rich mythology and ritualism.” “This universe is a symbol, in and through which we are trying to grasp the thing signified, which is beyond and behind.”¹³⁰ “Some require an image outside, others one inside the brain. The man who puts it inside says, ‘I am a superior man. When it is inside it is all right; when it is outside, it is idolatry, I will fight it.’” “We may worship anything by seeing God in it, if we can forget the idol and see God there. We must not project any image upon God. But we may fill any image with that Life which is God. Only forget the image, and you are right enough—for ‘Out of Him comes everything.’ He is everything. We may worship a picture as God, but not God as the picture. God in the picture is right, but the picture as God is wrong. God in the image is perfectly right.”¹³¹ Esteeming a religious image for the purpose of procuring material benefits is a form of idolatry that produces karmic fruits. It does not bring about the love of God or liberation-salvation.¹³²

The traditional historical Tantric view was explained by Sir John Woodroffe (1865-1936), as to how the living presence of the Deity as represented in a religious image is evoked. “Mind as nearly as it can be to that of the Devata [Deity], is projected on to the vital and physical planes. By such projection, lines of mentative energy (or substance-energy) are

made to impinge upon the matter of the Image worshiped. These lines or streams of mentative and vital substance-energy envelop the matter of the Image, create round about it an aura of radiant energy which so acts upon the material crust of the idol that, whilst remaining apparently as matter to the senses, it becomes dematerialized for the worshiper in this sense that Consciousness, Mind and Vital Force ordinarily latent or folded up in it (from the pragmatic standpoint), become evoked, awakened and patent. This is what Pranaprastha, or Life giving rite means ... What the projective action of the worshiper does is to cast the radiant energy of his own inner being over the matter of the Image thereby evoking, unfolding, waking up, adjusting the radiant stuff and energy folded up in it. This is, so to say, piercing the crust of Matter, evoking Consciousness, Life and Mind in it, and bringing the whole into rapport with the Consciousness and Mind of the worshiper.”¹³³

Woodroffe was a member of the Calcutta High Court (1904-22) and its Chief Justice beginning in 1915. After returning to England, he became a Reader in Indian law at the University of Oxford (1923-30). He was initiated into Tantra by an Indian expert. Woodroffe (sometimes writing under the pseudonym of Arthur Avalon) translated from Sanskrit important Tantric texts, adding his own profound commentaries and introductions (1913-22). In addition, he brought out several scholarly manuscripts explaining the philosophy underlying the Indian Tantric texts with emphasis on the kundalini, chakras, and other yogic subjects. He contributed nine publications to the *Prabuddha Bharata* between 1915 and 1928, and an additional thirty-six in the *Vedanta Kesari* during 1916 to 1929. For a time Woodroffe was the President of the Vivekananda Society of Calcutta, where he delivered a series of lectures during the years 1917-18. He wrote, “The qualities I most admire in Vivekananda are his activity, manliness and courage.... His was the attitude of a man. He spoke up and acted. For this, all must honour him, who, whatever be their own religious beliefs, value sincerity, truth and courage, which are the badges of every noble character.”¹³⁴

In the first stage the religious image is a symbol of Brahman-God, which aids in concentration and visualization of the Deity; next it is a repository of spiritual power; and finally it is the dwelling place where the Lord manifests His Divine presence. Projectionist theories used by atheists, assume that religious devotees project their own inner nature onto their

(false) conception of a Divine reality. Conversely, Tantra teaches that the spiritual energy of the worshiper's inner self is projected into the material image, which in turn awakens the Divine consciousness that is latent in the image. It is a meeting place of the consciousness of the worshiper that is projected into the image and the Deity who has entered into it in subtle body form.

Plotinus (c. 205-70) suggests an interesting analogy whereby the religious image is “like a mirror able to catch [the reflection of] a form.” In that way the image is sympathetic with the Deity and is able to receive a portion of it.¹³⁵

For Nicephorus (758-829) the Patriarch of Constantinople a sacred image is “a likeness of an archetype, having impressed upon it the form of what it represents by similarity, differing from it only by the difference of essence in accordance with the materials [of which they are made]; or an imitation and similitude of the archetype, differing [from it] in essence and substance.... The image of Christ is more deserving of honor and reverence than the symbol of the cross.” There is not an identity of essence, but a likeness between the image and its archetype. Physical images bear a resemblance in sight to what they symbolize, while sound-word images are conveyed indirectly through hearing and require reflecting on what they signify.¹³⁶

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) observed that corporeal and sensible images are physical objects used as signs to symbolize the higher spiritual reality, for the purpose of uniting the soul with God. First revere God through external images, then internally through the intellect, and finally contemplate the Essence of God. “The worship of religion is paid to images, not as considered in themselves, nor as things, but as images leading us to God incarnate. Now movement to an image as image does not stop at the image, but goes on to the thing it represents.” “In the Divine worship it is necessary to make use of corporeal things, that man's mind may be aroused thereby, as by signs, to the spiritual acts by means of which he is united to God. Therefore the internal acts of religion take precedence of the others and belong to religion essentially, while its external acts are secondary, and subordinate to the internal acts.”¹³⁷

In modern times Paul Tillich (1886-1965) disclosed, “The symbol [such as a religious image] grows and dies according to the correlation

between that which is symbolized and the persons who receive it as a symbol. Therefore, the religious symbol, the symbol which points to the Divine, can be a true symbol only if it participates in the power of the Divine to which it points.”¹³⁸ Religious symbols “not only open up dimensions and elements of reality which otherwise would remain unapproachable but also unlock dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality.”¹³⁹ By pointing beyond itself to the heavenly realm, it is a vehicle leading to a concrete awareness of God. A genuine religious symbol is translucent to the holy, negating itself in its limited concreteness and expressing ultimate concern. From a pragmatic standpoint, images and symbols are valuable if they foster a genuine mystical experience, evoke a reply, and move a worshiper to action. When they fail to produce a response, the religious symbol is dead. There is a danger of identifying the transparentness of an image, with the force of the Divine that operates through the image, but is not identical with it. “All idolatry is nothing else than the absolutizing of symbols of the Holy, and making them identical with the Holy itself.”¹⁴⁰ What is conditioned, partial, and finite is mistakenly elevated to the level of the unconditional, universal, and infinite.¹⁴¹

Religious ritual has two main purposes. First to create sanctified space, a wonderful spiritual atmosphere and level of vibration that will attract a deity. The second purpose is to create in the worshiper, a long lasting fervent devotional reverence for the deity. Social functions of ritual such as creating a spirit of social solidarity and group unity are of secondary importance.

George Theodorson (1924-2010) defines ritual as a, “standardized set of actions with symbolic significance performed on occasions prescribed by tradition. The acts and words that comprise a ritual are precisely defined and vary very little if at all from one occasion to another. Tradition also determines who may perform the ritual. Rituals often involve the use of sacred objects, and are usually expected to result in the emotional involvement of the participants. The ritual may be believed to have power in itself to produce certain results... Religious rituals usually symbolize a basic belief and are intended to induce a feeling of reverence and awe.” A religious ceremony is a more elaborate sequence of behavior, often consisting of a standardized series of rituals.¹⁴²

Gestures (Mudras) are transmitted through movements of the hands, arms, face, and other parts of the body. It is a form of non-verbal communication or non-vocal communication by which bodily actions communicate particular messages, in place of or in conjunction with speech. Gestures not only symbolically convey a meaning, but they impact the thought of the person who uses them. In Hinduism and Buddhism, a mudra is a symbolic gesture having a specific meaning made with the hand or fingers. Gestures and speech are processed in the same areas of the brain and there is neurological evidence that they work in an efficiently wired and choreographed system.¹⁴³

A religious ritual prescribed by the tradition of a religious community, is performed in sacred space during sacred time on specific dates with a minimum of innovation. Religious ritual involves: images or pictures of deities, repetition of mantras (holy words and the sacred names of Brahman-God), mudras (hand gestures), ringing a bell, and a chamara (a fan made of a yak tail) waved before the holy pictures. Also included are, “recitation of fixed texts, performance of special music, songs or dances, processions, manipulation of certain objects, use of special dresses, and consumption of special food, drink.”¹⁴⁴ Special Items include metal utensils, water, flowers, vases, sandal paste, lighted candles, incense with a holder, linen for the Deity, and prasad (food to be consecrated). Religious ritual is an important conveyer of spiritual power.

Many devotees maintain their own private household shrine consisting of religious pictures and/or images, flower vases, and an incense holder. They can offer flowers, wave incense, and meditate in front of their shrine. Ritual, symbolic images, and mantras are useful for bringing about an inner transformation.

All of the accessories and gestures have symbolic significance connected to the personal and impersonal aspects of the Divine. Worship of a deity is an act of self-surrender to Brahman-God. Each gesture or action is done with the worshiper’s mind concentrated on its symbolic significance. Swami Shivananda a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna stated, “God is in the image in a special sense. When one makes sufficient progress Godwards, one will see that God is there and even accepts our offerings of food through rays of light touching what is offered.”

All religious traditions emphasize the importance of sacred spaces, places set aside as holy and used for worship, prayer, meditation, and

rituals. Each of these four procedures is performed to connect the devotee with the deity. Religious images aid in making the deities presence manifest in a form in which they graciously consent to dwell. Sacred space is a place where one communicates with Brahman-God. The devotee attempts to connect with the spiritual world. Any distance between the worshiper and the worshiped must be removed. The goal is to invest the shrine with the presence of divinity so that it becomes a place of Divine power. To do this the devotee strives to approach the deity with a pure mind. This religious experience can transform a person.¹⁴⁵

In India Mimamsa theologians theorized that the instrumental effects of the performance of the religious sacrifice produce an unseen karmic potency (apurva), which acts as a necessary connection that brings about the desired result. Apurva “issues from the sacrifice and then resides in the soul of the sacrificers. It endures until the desirable effect is produced, and then it becomes nonexistent. For example, performance of a sacrifice could lead to a life in heaven.¹⁴⁶ For more on this subject see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. X. Religious Practices, Section 2. Image Worship.¹⁴⁷

8. Holy Places of Worship

Indian: “Assemble, speak together: let your minds be all of one accord ... The place is common, common the assembly, common the mind, so be their thought united.... be your minds of one accord” (RV 10:191.2-4; cf. AV 6:64). “All jealousies have vanished in the society of the Saints. All are my friends now, there being no enemy or stranger” (Sikhism, Adi Granth, Karara, M:5).

New Testament: “Through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known” (Eph. 3:10; cf. 2 Cor. 8:1; 1 Tim. 3:15). “Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... we are members of his body” (Eph. 5:23, 25, 30).

Vivekananda denoted that the purpose of a Temple as a place of worship is to create a pious atmosphere of holy spiritual vibrations. “Every day of our lives we throw out a mass of good or evil, and everywhere we go the atmosphere is full of these materials. That is how there came to the

human mind, unconsciously, the idea of building temples and churches. Why should man build churches in which to worship God? Why not worship Him anywhere? Even if he did not know the reason, man found that the place where people worshipped God became full of good Tanmatras [vibrations]. Every day people go there, and the more they go the holier they get, and the holier that place becomes. If any man who has not much Sattva [purity, goodness, joy] in him goes there, the place will influence him and arouse his Sattva quality. Here, therefore, is the significance of all temples and holy places, but you must remember that their holiness depends on holy people congregating there. The difficulty with man is that he forgets the original meaning, and puts the cart before the horse. It was men who made these places holy, and then the effect became the cause and made men holy. If the wicked only were to go there, it would become as bad as any other place. It is not the building, but the people that make a church.”¹⁴⁸ “Have a room for this practice alone. Do not sleep in that room, it must be kept holy. You must not enter the room until you have bathed, and are perfectly clean in body and mind. Place flowers in that room always; they are the best surroundings for a Yogi; also pictures that are pleasing. Burn incense morning and evening. Have no quarrelling, nor anger, nor unholy thought in that room. Only allow those persons to enter it who are of the same thought as you. Then gradually there will be an atmosphere of holiness in the room, so that when you are miserable, sorrowful, doubtful, or your mind is disturbed, the very fact of entering that room will make you calm. This was the idea of the temple and the church, and in some temples and churches you will find it even now, but in the majority of them the very idea has been lost. The idea is that by keeping holy vibrations there the place becomes and remains illumined.”¹⁴⁹

Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) informed his congregation in Southern California that in Vrindavan the holy city of Lord Krishna, the atmosphere is charged with joy and frivolity. It is easy to think of God while staying there. Our mind is like an open door that is receptive to various positive and negative thought forms. Holy places create a spiritual atmosphere that positively affects those people who are receptive to them. Not everyone is attuned to those auspicious vibrations.¹⁵⁰

The use of incense drives off ghosts and impure spirits.

For more on this subject see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. VIII. The Religious Order and Ritual, Section 1. Holy Places of

9. Be Instructed by a Teacher (Guru)

Indian: “Only knowledge which is learnt from a teacher leads to the highest good” (Ch. Up. 4:9.3; cf. 6:14.2; Kat. Up. 1:2.7-9). “Approach a guru who is well versed in the *Vedas* and always devoted to Brahman. To that pupil who has duly approached him ... the wise teacher should indeed the rightly impart Knowledge of Brahman” (Mun. Up. 1:2.12-13; cf. Svet. Up. 6:23; cf. BG 4:34; 13:25). “Of him who gives natural birth and him who gives (the knowledge of) the *Veda*, the giver of the *Veda* is the more venerable father” (LM 2:146; cf. 2:144, 148, 200-01, 233-34; 4:162; 12:83).

Old and New Testament: “And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him” (Dt. 34:9; cf. Jn. 20:22-23). “He who walks with wise men become wise” (Prov. 13:20; cf. Mt. 5:14-16; 1 Cor. 4:15-16). “Stand thou in the assembly of the elders, and whoso is wise, cleave unto him. Desire to hear every discourse, and let not a wise proverb escape thee. Look for him who is wise, and seek him out earnestly, and let thy foot wear out his threshold” (Sirach 6:34-36; cf. Acts 8:30-31).

Swami Vivekananda clarifies, “This quickening impulse cannot be derived from books. The soul can only receive impulses from another soul, and from nothing else.” “These sacred mysterious words we all recognize and know, and yet if we merely read them in books, they have no effect on us. To be effective, they must be charged with spirit, touched and used by one who has himself been touched by the Spirit of God and who now lives. It is only he who can set the current in motion. The ‘laying on of hands’ is the continuation of that current which was set in motion by Christ. The one who has the power of transmitting this current is called a Guru.”¹⁵² “The person from whose soul such impulse comes is called the Guru—the teacher; and the person to whose soul the impulse is conveyed is called the Shishya—the student. To convey such an impulse to any soul, in the first place, the soul from which it proceeds must possess the power of transmitting it, as it were to another; and in the second place, the soul to which it is transmitted must be fit to receive it. The seed must be a living

seed, and the field must be ready ploughed; and when both these conditions are fulfilled, a wonderful growth of genuine religion takes place.... it is a mysterious law of nature that as soon as the field is ready, the seed must and does come; as soon as the soul earnestly desires to have religion, the transmitter of the religious force must and does appear to help that soul.”¹⁵³ “Initiation by the Guru is necessary. Why? Because it is the bringing of yourself into connection with that great source of power which has been handed down through generations from one Guru to another, in uninterrupted succession. The devotee must seek and accept the Guru or spiritual preceptor as his counselor, philosopher, friend, and guide. In short, the Guru is the sine qua non of progress in the path of spirituality.”¹⁵⁴

The Swami cautioned that a spiritual aspirant should be very careful in selecting a qualified spiritual guide. “In regard to the teacher, we must see that he knows the spirit of the scriptures.... It is the knowledge of the *spirit* of the scriptures alone that constitutes the true religious teacher.... The second condition necessary in the teacher is sinlessness.... He must be perfectly pure, and then alone comes the value of his words, because he is only then the true ‘transmitter.’ What can he transmit if he has not spiritual power in himself? There must be the worthy vibration of spirituality in the mind of the teacher, so that it may be sympathetically conveyed to the mind of the taught.... The third condition is in regard to the motive. The teacher must not teach with any ulterior selfish motive—for money, name, or fame; his work must be simply out of love, out of pure love for mankind at large. The only medium through which spiritual force can be transmitted is love.... When you see that in your teacher these conditions are all fulfilled, you are safe.... Without faith, humility, submission, and veneration in our hearts towards our religious teacher, there cannot be any growth of religion in us; and it is a significant fact that, where this kind of relation between the teacher and the taught prevails, there alone gigantic spiritual men are growing.” “Intense love for the Guru makes rapid growth possible, he connects us with the internal Guru. Adore your Guru if there be real truth in him; that Guru-bhakti (devotion to the teacher) will quickly lead you to the highest.”¹⁵⁵

His brother monastic disciple Swami Brahmananda told his followers, “Keep association with the holy. Go to one who knows the path, learn about the path, and walk on the path. Then alone you will reach your

destination some day. Then alone will arise faith and devotion.... The aid of the guru is very necessary. He helps the disciple to choose his own particular Ideal, according to his temperament, and then gives the mantra best suited to the attainment of concentration on that Ideal.... Not all men know what is best for them; therefore they should seek the society of holy men. Unless man spends some time in solitude or in the company of the holy, he cannot understand his own mind.... Do you know why you should seek the society of holy men? Their experiences are a great help to a spiritual aspirant. When you visit a strange place, if you have the help of a reliable guide you will quickly see all that is worth seeing there; also he will save you from the dangers and difficulties into which a stranger is likely to fall. Similarly, from the company of advanced souls you will gather many valuable hints, and your efforts will be simplified.... For in their company doubts are removed and pure thoughts are awakened. No scriptures or books can create such pure impressions or transform a man's life as much as contact with an enlightened soul."¹⁵⁶

Brahmananda continues, "If a man has faith in the words of his guru and follows them, then all his doubts and troubles vanish. If a man has faith in the words of his guru, God will meet all of his wants. Holding him by the hand, He will lead him on the right path.... Blessed are those who receive the grace of an illumined guru. The guru shows the way to the other shore, and removes all the obstacles. Have intense faith in the words of the guru, and follow his precepts faithfully. Thus will the impurities of the mind be washed away and the light of knowledge dawn. Enlightenment comes quickly to one who has faith in the guru.... But no man can free himself from the bonds of worldliness if he follows an ignorant teacher. There is suffering for both the disciple and the teacher.... After leaving the body the true guru lives on in the invisible realm; sometimes he reveals himself to his disciples, but at all times he helps and guides them, until they, too, attain illumination."¹⁵⁷ "When the mind has been purified by prayer and contemplation, it will direct you from within. Even in your daily duties, the inner guru will guide you and will continue to help you until the goal is reached."¹⁵⁸

Swami Prabhavananda mentioned, "A great spiritual teacher gathers pure souls around him and teaches them, not only by word of mouth, but by actual transmission of spirituality. He does not simply give them self-confidence; he actually illumines the hearts of his disciples." If the spiritual

instructor is enlightened and teaches from their inner spiritual realization, it is not at all necessary for them to have academic learning. A holy person lights the path that the disciple should follow. They must inspire confidence in their devotees, so that they can unfold the latent divinity within them and help them realize their spiritual potential. Superior gurus know the spiritual potential of their various disciples that will manifest in the future. It is a great blessing to dedicate one's life to such an individual. They can transmit spiritual power and illumine the heart of their followers, and can transform a sinner into a holy person. Spending only five minutes with a man of God can greatly alter a person's life for the better. A superior teacher places the devotee at the feet of the Lord who in turn takes responsibility for the aspirant. Live in the society of the holy, serve them with humility and associate with saintly devotees.¹⁵⁹

One of Swami Brahmananda's main functions was to initiate and train the second generation of monastic disciples who would spread the message of the Ramakrishna Order throughout the world. He could transmit spirituality through silence, that was the power in him.¹⁶⁰ His spiritual power worked through Swami Prabhavananda and that was why he was so successful in the United States. Swamis Swahananda and Sarvadevananda were chosen to become his successors at the Vedanta Society of Southern California because of the people available they were the best-qualified monastics for the job.

Joseph Trigg explained Clement of Alexandria's (c. 150/160-213/220) position on this matter. "Those who are symbolically rich in unruly passions should give to the poor, that is they should entrust themselves to a pastoral adviser who could help them disburden themselves of passions. The person whom they should seek for this delicate task is the genuine Gnostic, the elect of the elect of God. Finding such a person will not necessarily be easy since the genuine Gnostic will be outwardly quite ordinary. Once they have found and tested the Gnostic though, they should put themselves entirely in that person's hands. The Gnostic deserves an implicit trust and obedience that otherwise only God would deserve because the Gnostic participates, by good deeds, in God's saving activity, and has unmatched spiritual insight. By confessing sins to the Gnostic and taking that person's advice, those in need of healing will eventually be liberated from the passions that are the root cause of their

sins.... Genuine Gnostics have a responsibility, according to Clement, ‘to impart to others the hidden things of truth’ as teachers and spiritual guides. This is their highest calling, as it is in their dealings with others that Gnostics have opportunity to imitate God's benevolence. Their knowledge of God obtained through the study of the *Bible* and purity of life obtained through self-discipline make Gnostics, in this role, holy priests of God and successors to the Apostles, Such qualities also make them, ordained or not, genuine Deacons and Presbyters. Because God gives them the insight to meet each person's needs appropriately, Gnostics can foster spiritual healing or, put differently, forgive sins.”¹⁶¹

Clements successor Origen (c. 185-254) a Greek Christian philosopher at the Alexandrian School in Egypt remarked that a few people who belong to the moral and intellectual elite have a privilege access to God, which deep insight into the sacred scriptures has provided them. These charismatic authorities are the mediators of God’s word to the larger religious community. Few Bishops and Presbyters meet these lofty standards. Not the Ecclesiastical clergy who receive worldly honor, but the spiritual elite are the true clergy of the church. Only a saintly individual inspired by the Holy Spirit, the genuine source and agent of sanctification, has the power to forgive sin, and not those who hold high-ranking positions in the church.¹⁶²

In the following quotation Thomas Aquinas formulated, “There is a twofold grace: one whereby man himself is united to God, and this is called ‘sanctifying grace’, the other is that whereby one man cooperates with another in leading him to God, and this gift is called ‘gratuitous grace’, since it is bestowed on a man beyond the capability of nature, and beyond the merit of the person.... Gratuitous grace is ordained to this, viz. that a man may help another to be led to God. Now no man can help in this by moving interiorly (for this belongs to God alone), but only exteriorly by teaching or persuading. Hence gratuitous grace embraces whatever a man needs in order to instruct another in Divine things which are above reason. Now for this three things are required: first, a man must possess the fullness of knowledge of Divine things, so as to be capable of teaching others. Secondly, he must be able to confirm or prove what he says, otherwise his words would have no weight. Thirdly, he must be capable of fittingly presenting to his hearers what he knows.”¹⁶³

The psychologists Alfred Adler (1870-1937) established about 30 child-guidance clinics in Austria. He inspired modern psychological counseling where the purpose is to achieve a high level of self-knowledge and a genuine feeling of self-worth. Counselors employ the skills and personal understanding of Adlerian counseling methods to reorient and re-educate the client. They develop a person-to-person contact with the individual showing genuine respect and understanding. Counselors listen to the person with the aim of responding appropriately. The assessment should not place the person into a preconceived model, but should focus on understanding the distinctive characteristics of the individual. Self-exploration with the goal of increasing their level of self-awareness and self-understanding is the purpose of the counseling. The objective of the conversation is for the person to set goals, develop good habits, and make new choices. Following this approach the individual will attain correct values, attitudes, and behavior patterns that promote positive growth and self-mastery.¹⁶⁴

There is the idea that it is best if spiritual knowledge comes from the lips of a Holy Man. Only after this occurs will the aspirant be able to spiritually understand the scriptures they have read. This is why it is important to get the blessings of a Holy Man by faithfully following his teachings. Through acquaintance with a reliable guru we come to recognize and identify with virtuous properties such as love, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, etc. Internalization of moral standards is due to interaction with suitable role models who exemplify these principles. The guru puts the disciple (shishya, chela) on the right path so they can reach their goal. Some people in this life do not succeed in their ventures because they are on the wrong path. A proficient guru is a teacher, a counselor, an exemplar in life, and an inspirational source who gives assistance in the spiritual evolution of a student. For an advance practitioner one's own Self becomes the guru.¹⁶⁵

Initiation is utilized to prepare a person for entrance into the Vedanta Society and to be accepted as a disciple by the Swami. It is necessary for the individual to become a fully authorized member of the organization. Most often, the recipient is an adult, but in certain cases may be a younger person. The ceremony is most often performed on a holy day and in a spiritual location. Preparation might include fasting, meditating, wearing

new clothes, and body cleaning. The Swami who conducts the process possesses a certain power or state of being, which is transferred over to the initiated person in seed form. Ideally, it will bring about a transformation in the devotee who is eventually reborn into a higher state of consciousness. To be accepted the disciple agrees to live an ethical lifestyle, to meditate, etc. As a result, there is an enhanced feeling of rapport among the members of the Society.¹⁶⁶

One can think of the Chosen Ideal (Ishta Devata; that aspect of divinity that you worship) and guru as a Reference Individual and as a Role Model that motivate a devotee's goals, attitudes, and behavior. A reference individual is an individual "with whom a person identifies and on whose behavior he patterns his own behavior in a variety of situations and roles." The behavior of the reference individual provides a standard used by the other person in determining the appropriate attitudes and actions to be performed. "Many of the values, norms, and attitudes of the reference individual are internalized by the identifying person." An individual's Chosen Ideal and guru whom he/she emulate, have a considerable impact on the devotee's life. The guru provides the method and indicates the attainable goal that the devotee is aspiring for. The reference individual differs from a role model "in that the internalization of the standards of behavior and attitudes" of the "reference individual is more comprehensive, including a wide range of roles"; whereas identification with a "role model is limited to one or a very few roles." People are guided and influenced not only by abstract principles and reference groups, but by a Significant Other like the Chosen Ideal and guru. They are of great importance in the life of a disciple having a strong influence on their behavior, acceptance and rejection of social norms, and self-concept and evaluation.¹⁶⁷ Emulated by others

Guru's awaken the spiritual consciousness of their disciples by imparting knowledge to them, explaining the path they are to follow, telling when they are making mistakes, and guiding them along the spiritual path.¹⁶⁸

An outstanding guru can work through silence. The devotee has a pleasant interview with their guru for spiritual consultation. The devotee goes home and the rest of the day they feel a spiritual bliss they have never felt before in their life. Through silence the guru has lifted their kundalini to a higher level. Due to the nature of their mind in time the

devotee returns to their natural level of consciousness, though they have made some progress. A competent guru can view the world from the standpoint of their disciple and give different advice to different people. Many people lack this facility of empathy and give advice to others that relates only to their own personality and life-situation.

A guru in the Ramakrishna Order must meet certain qualifications. They must have completed monastic training as a Brahmacharya or Brahmacharini and as a Swami or Pravrajika. After that, they gained experience in serving the Order in various capacities. They serve as a role model and need proper discrimination to know who to initiate. A guru has the desire and ability to be of benefit to the people they have initiated and are presently counseling and instructing. They have the ability to council and interrelate with many different types of people, of different ages, genders, and backgrounds. A guru concentrates on different personalized learning goals and activities for various people. Their advice must fit the particular needs of the person.

The Mother-Lord works through two different types of teachers. One teacher excels at communicating with the mass of people, uses a basic language, is sincere, and has a strong personality. Another type is highly intellectual, understood only by the well-educated devotees. If they have something important to say their ideas could be influential many years in the future.

The best disciples are those that add to the “Treasury of Merit (auspicious spiritual karma) of the Order, rather than subtract from it.

The guru has the important role in Indian culture of helping to preserve and continue the religion and traditional way of life.

For more on this subject see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. VIII. The Religious Order and Ritual, Section 4. Be Instructed by a Teacher (Guru).¹⁶⁹

10. The Heart Yogic Center (Anahata Chakra) Behavioral Patterns

The anahata chakra is situated near the heart and is connected with the cardiac plexus and the thymus gland. It corresponds to air and the sense of touch. This chakra is identified with the intellectual sheath (vijnanamaya-kosha) that is both rajasic and sattvic in nature.¹⁷⁰

Anahata consciousness is characterized by the sattvic virtues of kindness, selfless service, humility, joy and self-control. Religious experiences in the heart center are associated with the presence of a Divine light, faith, devotion and thoughts of divinity. Yoga therapy aims at teaching a person to: not identify with the gross material level of existence, transcend sensuality and egocentrism, feel empathetic love for other people, give without any thought of receiving something in return, and to seek unitary consciousness.¹⁷¹

There are several ethical psychologies and philosophies that if properly practiced will lead to anahata consciousness. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) concluded that compassion represents a higher expression of the will to power, than controlling other people. A just person fulfills his own moral obligations and harms no innocent person, while the compassionate person of loving kindness makes personal self-sacrifices for the purpose of helping others. Boundless compassion for all living beings is the firmest and surest guarantee of pure moral conduct. Whoever is inspired by it, will help and forgive others, and all their actions will bear the stamp of justice, philanthropy, and loving-kindness. The psychological ground of all ethics is the experience of oneness, whereby an individual recognizes that their own true inner being-in-itself exists in all people. Virtue and compassion proceed from this intuitive knowledge of the psychological identity of all beings. When we identify and empathize with other people, there is an immediate participation in their suffering. Compassion requires that a person “takes as much interest in the sufferings of other individuals as in his own ... recognizing in all beings his own true innermost self.”¹⁷² The more a person overcomes the egoistic principle of separateness; the more they regard the suffering of others as their own.¹⁷³

Aesthetic contemplation is another approach that Schopenhauer recommended for overcoming self-centeredness. Rising above the temporal and changing phenomena, the artist comprehends the eternal and immutable state of existence. Lost in contemplation of the aesthetic object, the artistic virtuoso temporarily becomes the will-less and desireless subject of knowledge, dwelling in a realm of pure knowledge without any afflictions.¹⁷⁴ Creative genius’ subordinates their ego and self-interests to the intellect, in striving for an objective end. People that error,

have an intellect that remains under the servitude of the ego. The genius whose interests lie in the objective and theoretical, not in the personal and practical, is in a position to apprehend the true nature of things being free from self-concern.¹⁷⁵

Schopenhauer relates, "When we enter the state of pure contemplation, we are raised for the moment above all willing, above all desires and cares; we are, so to speak, rid of ourselves."¹⁷⁶ A person can transcend the world by withdrawing their mind from empirical experience and cognition. This state is free from particularizing forms, which reveal the inner essence and character of things. In the state of contemplation, the person is unaware of their individuality or personal desires and become the pure eternal subject of awareness. What is contemplated in joy and tranquility is not the empirical object, but the eternal form, the primary manifestation of the transcendental Will. All forces of the mind are directed toward a single image of perception in an act of intense mental concentration. Mystics from various religions, describe an experience of the identity of their inner reality with the oneness of existence. They experience the inner nature of things, independent of the perceptual and conceptual limitations of space, time and causality.¹⁷⁷

According to Erich Fromm, "in the realm of feeling, the productive orientation is expressed in love, which is the experience of union with another person ... retaining one's sense of integrity and independence.... two people become one, and remain two at the same time."¹⁷⁸ Experiencing higher forms of love we transcend our own egoistic existence and apprehend ourself as bearers of an active power that constitutes the act of loving. Giving is the highest sense of potency, because the giver experiences himself as overflowing, alive and joyous. Enveloping the power of love, the person feels secure in himself and the master of his life. The goal is to overcome separation, to achieve union, to transcend egocentrism and attain at-one-ment. The ultimate goal of both modern psychology and meditation is to make the unconscious conscious, by removing repressions in order to gain a new insight into reality. One must do away with false consciousness, irrational fictions and distorted mental constructs projected by the unconscious mind on the external reality.¹⁷⁹

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- ²⁶ *Reminiscences*, pp. 249-50.
- ²⁷ BRMIC (Feb. 1986), pp. 51-53; Tathagatananda, pp. 523-24.
- ²⁸ Burke, VI, pp. 286-87, 325, 327-28, 331-32, 346-47, 366; PB (Mar. 1986), pp. 129-35; WARHD, pp. 441-42.

²⁹ PB (May 1917), pp. 90-91.

³⁰ Sidney Spencer, "Swami Vivekananda on the Harmony of Religions," VFEW (Sept-Oct. 1963), pp. 205-06; reprinted in *PB* (Dec. 1964), pp. 392-93.

³¹ Ghanananda, p. 181.

³² Marie Louise Burke, "Science, Religion, and Swami Vivekananda-II," *PB* (April 1979), p. 173.

³³ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meditation

³⁴ Web: <http://media.yogajournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2016YIAS-Release-Final.pdf>; <http://media.yogajournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2016-Yoga-in-America-Study-Comprehensive-RESULTS.pdf>; <https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/NHIS/mind-body/meditation>; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoga

³⁵ I was told when he was young Modi wanted to become a monk of the Ramakrishna order. He was turned down (possibly three times) because he had other important things to do with his life.

³⁶ Web: www.thehindu.com/news/international/Revealed-Obama-always-carries-Hanuman-statuettes-in-pocket/article14001552.ece; <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=HYa8v3P5clo>

³⁷ Web: <http://www.badyogi.com/blog/praise-hillary-clintons-yoga/>; <https://www.insider.com/how-does-ivanka-trump-stay-in-shape-exercise-diet-2018-8>

³⁸ CW, VIII:46, 52; cf. I:169-70; VI:130.

³⁹ Web: yogauonline.com/yoga-anatomy/science-third-eye-symbolism-pineal-gland-yoga-and-its-importance-our-health; <https://mindbliss.com/pineal-gland-function-and-activation>

⁴⁰ Web: www.yogajournal.com/article/health/count-yoga-38-ways-yoga-keeps-fit

⁴¹ Web: www.psychologydiscussion.net/personality/integration-and-disintegration-of-personality-psychology/1683

⁴² Web: renee-phillips.com/the-art-of-creating-positive-grooves-in-the-brain

⁴³ CW, I:129-31.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I:157.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I:164-65.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I:181, 183, 185, 257; II:35.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, II:466; I:360-61; cf., I:506; II:265.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, II:13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I:132.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I:147-48, 150-52.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I:119-313.

⁵² Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/psychology_of_religion

⁵³ WARHD, p. 428.

⁵⁴ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 21-23, 157.

⁵⁵ Warhd, pp. 423-24.

⁵⁶ WARHD, pp. 428, 439, 671.

⁵⁷ WARHD, p. 788; Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Rockwell_Lanman

⁵⁸ WARHD, pp. 428-29.

⁵⁹ Tathagatananda, p. 416; E. Taylor, "Swami Vivekananda and William James," PB (Sept. 1986), pp. 383-84.

⁶⁰ WARHD, p. 806.

⁶¹ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology_of_Religion

⁶² Web: plato.stanford.edu/entries/royce/

⁶³ Josiah Royce, *The World and the Individual* (New York, Dover, 1959), I, pp. 159, 167, 170-71, 174-75.

⁶⁴ J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 116.

⁶⁵ CW, I:415.

⁶⁶ CW, IV:34.

⁶⁷ CW, III:253; This and the prior references is in, Anantanand Rambachan, "Where Words Fail: The limits of Scriptural Authority in the Hermeneutics of a Contemporary Advaitin," *Philosophy East and West* (Oct. 1987), pp. 363-67.

⁶⁸ CW, II:165.

⁶⁹ CW, I:150, 183; II:162.

⁷⁰ Web: www.focuspress.org/2018/01/06/into-the-light

⁷¹ Life, I, pp. 60, 77. For an overview of religious experience as a source of justified belief in the existence of God see: William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). A good portion of this section appeared in an article by G. Stavig in the PB (Jan. 2019), pp. 202-13.

⁷² Most Biblical quotations cited are from *The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version* (hereafter HB) (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1952). To create a list of parallel Indian-Christian scriptural passages used in this book the most used sources were: F. Lorinser, *Die Bhagavad-Gita* (Breslau: G. Porsch, 1869), pp. 273-85; Adolf Kaegi, *The Rigveda* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1886), pp. 197-98; E. Washburn Hopkins, *India Old and New* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), pp. 149-57; George Haas, "Recurrent and Parallel Passages in the Principal *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 42 (1922), pp. 1-43; Wade Hatcher, ed., *The Bhagavad Gita and the Bible* (Seattle: Peanut Butter Publishing, 1992); Andrew Wilson, ed., *World Scripture* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1995).

⁷³ CW, V:253.

⁷⁴ CW, VIII:253-54.

⁷⁵ CW, I:186-87.

⁷⁶ Prabhavananda2, p. 83.

⁷⁷ Christopher Isherwood, ed., *Vedanta for the Western World* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), p. 179.

⁷⁸ Clement of Alexandria, "On Spiritual Perfection," in Oulton, John and Henry Chadwick, *Alexandrian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press,

1954), pp. 117-18.

⁷⁹ Clement of Alexandria (1954), pp. 117-24, 139-40.

⁸⁰ Isidore Singer, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (12 vols.; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901-16), II, pp. 384-85; VI, pp. 252-53.

⁸¹ *History of Science and Philosophy of Science: A Philosophical Perspective*, ed. Pradip Sengupta (Delhi: Longman, 2012), pp. 57-60.

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⁸⁴ NCE, I, p. 141.

⁸⁵ Gordon Wakefield, ed., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), pp. 307-13.

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⁸⁷ Prabhavananda2, p. 83.

⁸⁸ Gallup Poll, *Religion in America* (Princeton: Princeton Research Center, June/July, 1982), p. 107.

⁸⁹ Swami Swahananda, *Meditation and Other Spiritual Disciplines* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1997), p. 34.

⁹⁰ Swahananda (1997), p. 39.

⁹¹ Swahananda (1997), pp. 33-42.

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⁹³ *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, eds. P. Zelazo, et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 520.

⁹⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_mysticism

⁹⁵ Theodorson, pp. 194-95, 212-13, 215.

⁹⁶ Web: www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/mindfulness;
www.healthline.com/health/mind-body/what-is-mindfulness

⁹⁷ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_meditation;
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¹⁰⁵ CW, I:202; VI:126..

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¹⁰⁷ Prabhavananda3, pp. 229, 247, 250-51, 255, 259; Tipple, p. 394.

¹⁰⁸ GTP, III, sect.51.

¹⁰⁹ WARHD, p. 360; Between the years 1912 and 1930, Rabindranath Tagore made five trips to the West, totaling a time period of about seventeen months. As an ambassador of good he made held conversations with former president of the United States Calvin Coolidge, president Herbert Hoover, and future president Franklin D. Roosevelt; Henry Ford, Sigmund Freud, Henry Morgenthau, William Rothenstein, Ruth St. Denis, and Emma Thursby; professors Will Durant, Albert Einstein, William Hocking, Sylvain Levi, James Pratt, Josiah Royce, Rufus von Klein Schmidt, Giuseppe Tucci, and J. H. Woods; and writers Jane Addams, Rev. C. F. Andrews, Jules Bois, James Cousins, Theodore Dreiser, T. S. Eliot, Rev. John H. Holmes, Helen Keller, Hermann Keyserling, Sinclair Lewis, Thomas Mann, Harriet Monroe, Myron Phelps, Ezra Pound, Gertrude E. Sen, Rev. Jabez Sunderland, William Yeats, and Francis Yeats-Brown (WARHD, p. 359 or Panchanan Saha, *Tagore and America* (Kolkata: Jay Sarkar, 2001; Stephen Hay, "Rabindranath Tagore in America," *American Quarterly* (1962), pp. 439-63).

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¹²¹ Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On the Prayers of Jesus* (London: John M Watkins, 1965), pp. 58, 79, 88-89.

¹²² Brianchaninov (1965), pp. 35, 73.

¹²³ Brianchaninov (1965), p. 8.

¹²⁴ Kallistos Ware, "The Jesus Prayer of St Gregory of Sinai," *Eastern Churches Review* 4 (1972), pp. 17-18.

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¹²⁶ Wilhelm (1985), p. 81.

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en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japa
- ¹²⁸ Shivananda, p. 73; Tipple, pp. 620-21.
- ¹²⁹ CW, II:40; I:72, 16; VIII:356 (October 1895).
- ¹³⁰ CW, III:44; II:39.
- ¹³¹ CW, IV:36, 47.
- ¹³² CW, II:39-40; III:44, 60-62.
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¹⁷⁶ WWR, I, 390.

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