

Appendix 2: Talk by Barbara Slemon Ryan, RN**ACT Post Conference Talk on 'Energy'**

Since 1992, the federal government, through the National Institute of Health, has funded research into the effectiveness of alternative medicine, particularly in the areas of stress, chronic pain and life-threatening illnesses. Known as the Office of Alternative Medicine, it has given out money to researchers testing acupuncture, hypnosis to relieve pain and heal bones, massage therapy for surgical patients, dance movements for cystic fibrosis, macrobiotic treatments for cancer, biofeedback for diabetes, yoga for heroin addiction, tai chi for balance disorders and massage therapy for AIDS babies.

The NIH definition of alternative medicine is: "any method that is not taught in medical schools, not covered by insurance, and not considered to have sufficient documentation in the US to prove its safety and effectiveness."

Questions**Is it the work of God or the devil?**

Does the therapy glorify God? Beware the practitioner who glorifies himself/herself, however subtly. (ACT 8:9-13) "Now a man called Simon had already practiced magic arts in the town and astounded the Samaritan people. He had given it out that he was someone momentous and everyone believed what he said; eminent citizens and ordinary people alike had declared, 'He is the divine power that is called Great'. They had only been won over to him because of the long time he had spent working on them with his magic. But when they believed Philip's preaching of the Good News about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women and even Simon himself became a believer. After his baptism Simon, who went round constantly with Philip, was astonished when he saw the wonders and great miracles that took place."

Does the form of therapy draw the recipient closer to God? Does he/she feel a deeper desire to read scripture, attend church services, read devotional literature, fellowship with other Christians, etc?

Does the therapist welcome 'external verification' of a cure of healing? Is he/she willing to encourage the opinion of competent medical authorities? Even Jesus sent the ten lepers to show themselves to the priest in accordance to the Jewish law.

Nowadays one finds more articles on mysticism in journals of science and transpersonal psychology than in journals of Christian spirituality. In the past 200 yrs., mysticism has emigrated from the Christian churches. This may be one

reason why so many people today are dissatisfied with their church. There are more mystics in our time than most of us suppose. Mysticism has always transcended narrow dogmatic thinking, even though it was often forced into the confines of traditional concepts and symbols. Ever since gnosticism was banished from Christianity, mysticism has surfaced in peripheral movements such as alchemy and astrology, but also in theosophy, and parts of psychology, particularly Jungian.

People who have been exposed to deeply moving religious experiences often look for help from professional therapists when they cannot receive the validation they are seeking from their minister or priest. There is an international organization called the Spiritual Emergency Network, which links a variety of people, mostly psychologists, counselors, social workers. The organization supplies the addresses of persons to whom you can turn if you're having problems dealing with a transpersonal experience.

The Ultimate Reality cannot be fenced in. It happens to people at a time when they aren't thinking about it. In fact, they are often totally unprepared for it. It comes over them suddenly in ways they didn't foresee. *"I have known religious who were disappointed that their experience had nothing to do with Christianity, and I have known agnostics who were surprised by a deeply Christian experience."* Willigis Jager in his book, "Searching for the Meaning of Life".

At one time it was one of the main functions of religion to help people find the true ecstasy, that is, to offer ways in which a person could leave for the time being the usual boundaries and structures in which we are for the most part confined, so we could, through ecstasy, find a transforming and enlivening relationship with the creative powers within us. John Sanford in his book, "Mystical Christianity", believes that a considerable amount of alcoholism, drug addiction and the addiction to sexuality may be a result of the unrecognized need of the soul for the experience of ecstasy. It's interesting to note that one of the most popular drugs being ingested by today's young people is called "Ecstasy". [Editor's note: This is also being discovered in therapeutic circles. Richard Schwartz sees the centrality of centering in the "Self," the point of contact with our spirituality or God, for the effectiveness of Internal Family Systems Therapy. Verge has a similar insight into the importance of spirituality for healing.]

True ecstatic experience is to be found through union with God which is the practical goal of all true mystical endeavor. In psychological language, in true union with Christ, one no longer lives confined within the ego, but has a connection to the endless creativity of the Creator.

John Sanford (Mystical Christianity, Crossroads Books) "In early Christianity, Christ offered to the soul the way to a higher knowledge of God through ecstasy. For this reason the worship of Christ in the early church was through

the celebration of the "Mysteries". Christ himself was a mystery, the way the truth and the life. The worshipper, through participating mystically in Christ's death and resurrection and through being grafted onto Christ's life as the branches to the vine, achieved a knowledge of God via ecstasy. In this experience the old, tired, rigid ego was dissolved, and a new ego could be formed by the upsurge of creative powers from within.

Mystical experience has a variety of expressions. Sometimes it's an experience of 'light' and 'oneness'. But it's not the usual light, and it's not one with something, but only 'oneness'. A second form of experience is solidarity with everything that lives, out of which grows a deep caring and love for all creatures. The experience is often highly unspecific and enters our consciousness as a strong jolt of energy, which can be felt as very painful. Generally it is connected with the process of purification. The person feels handed over, lonely, abandoned. It is the dark night that knows not a moment of comfort. After such an experience, everyday life can long be altered until the usual routines again get the upper hand.

The phenomena of mysticism is the same for both the East and the West. Practices of meditation, biofeedback, relaxation therapy, hypnosis or mystical prayer are common factors. The body is trained to relax through proper body posture, breathing techniques are employed to bring the mind to rest, a focal point of attention is used (Jesus prayer, mantra, charismatic tongues) and an altered state of consciousness is induced. Some questions will help discern the source and agreement with Christianity of forms of mysticism:

1. Who is their God?

Those who embrace non-Christian forms of mysticism have parted ways with traditional Christian orthodox doctrine concerning the nature of God. Practitioners do not believe God created the material world. They believe the earth and our bodies are illusions produced by the ego as an escape from turning within to abandon illusory guilt over our imagined separation from God. This is contrary to the first article of all Christian creeds, "I believe in one God...Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible..."

2. Whose power do they claim to use?

Power can come from three sources: God, Satan or one's own ego. Christians recognize Jesus Christ as the source of their power.

Marilyn Ferguson in her book "The Aquarian Conspiracy" states "The discoveries of transformation inevitably alter our perception of power. Power flows from an inner center, a mysterious sanctuary more secure than money, name or achievement. The power over one's life is seen as a birthright, not a luxury." (p. 192) When a person owns such power, they have no need of God.

3. What is the fruit of their work?

Gal 5:22, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness, and chastity. Does the form of meditation lead the practitioner closer to the God of Scripture? Is it creating selflessness or selfishness for its followers? Is charity and love for humankind a hallmark of service to others?"

THE CHRISTIAN MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Teresa of Avila distinguishes four stages or degrees of spiritual ascent in the mystic union:

1. The incomplete mystic union or the prayer of quiet (from the Latin *quies*, repose, which expresses the impression experienced in this state)
2. The full or semi-ecstatic union, called also by St. Teresa, the prayer of union
3. The ecstatic union or ecstasy
4. The transforming or deifying union, the spiritual marriage of the soul.

The Christian life of prayer normally does not begin passively like Zen, but with active meditation on the scriptures and the life of Christ. This is the so-called discursive prayer of the three powers of the soul (memory, understanding and will) which occupies the initial stages of the life of prayer. But as progress is made, all this tends to simplify. That is to say, reasoning decreases and one comes to rest quietly in God without laborious intellectual efforts. In this way what is called "affective prayer" begins, in which one makes aspirations, acts of love of God and of gratitude. If one continues, this simplification continues until there is only one aspiration repeated again and again, i.e., "The Jesus Prayer". St. Francis Xavier spent whole nights repeating, "My God and my All". This type of prayer is generally considered the last stage prior to entrance into the mystical life.

The transformation into infused contemplation, which is the beginning of the mystical life, is rather simple. One has been repeating the same word, aspiration, or charismatic prayer again and again (maybe thousands of times). And then the person pauses in this rhythm and remains in silence. It is no mere emptiness, it is richly filled with the Presence of Something or Someone beyond the grasp of words and ideas. The contemplative has a sense or a feeling that God is present; God is somehow HERE; God is in me and around me; dwelling in my heart; the very core of everything that is; and I am like a sponge in the great sea which is God. God is somehow grasped with a 6th sense and one knows with certainty

that the world around is electrified with the Divine Presence. There is nothing to say; reasoning is useless.

This prayer of silence is often spoken of as 'dark' or 'obscure', because when the mind is void of clear and distinct images, one knows without being sure of what one knows: one does not see clearly even though the certainty of God's Presence is unshakable. It is precisely this mystical darkness that is the 'cloud of unknowing'; for the contemplative feels that he is in a cloud, unable to see clearly, unable to reason clearly, calling out in anguish to Someone whom he cannot see but can only love. John of the Cross calls this the "living flame of love". For if the contemplative remains passively attentive to this silent stirring of love, it will develop into a raging fire, possessing one's entire being and governing one's whole life. Self-will will die and the love of God will take over.

Quote from Catherine of Siena, "The Dialogue"

This flame of love gradually descends deeper into the caverns of the soul causing ecstasy.

1. The senses cease to act.
2. As a general rule, the limbs become immovable, and one can neither speak nor walk nor make any gestures unless God restores this power miraculously.
3. The respirations are almost arrested, sometimes it seems completely so. Pulse and heart beat slows dramatically.
4. The limbs become cold to the touch

Everything seems as if the soul were losing its vital strength. It is generally agreed among theologians that this phenomenon is not of great significance. Its existence will depend greatly on psychological and physiological factors. Some who have no ecstasy may possess a higher degree of mystical union than those who have. Traditional spiritual direction is filled with warnings against desiring such anomalies which can easily lead to illusion and self-complacency.

The last phase of Christian mysticism is the mystical marriage of the Soul. This is the state of complete and utter unity beyond subject and object. Self is totally forgotten and there remains only God. The author of the "Cloud of Unknowing" seems to be leading his disciples precisely into something of this nature when he writes, "Strip, spoil, and utterly uncliothe thyself of all manner of feeling of thyself, that thou mayest be able to be clothed with the gracious feeling of God Himself. And this is the true condition of a perfect lover, only and utterly to spoil himself for that thing that he loveth, and not admit nor suffer to be clothed but only in that thing that he loveth; and that not only for a time, but endlessly to be enwrapped in full and final forgetting of himself".

ZEN MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

The conscious mind is, to all appearances brought to a standstill. The stream is halted; it is blocked; instead of entertaining pictures and images, the practitioner endeavors to be *Mu* or nothing. Or, alternatively, the person attempts to smash the reasoning process with the illogical problem called the koan which are kept before the mind day and night. "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" "Buddha preached for 49 years, yet his tongue never moved." "Has a dog a Buddha nature?" There are 1,700 koans that are calculated to instill contempt for logic. The answers to these questions must not come from the mind, for reason is repudiated, but from the depth of one's being, spontaneously, like a ball bouncing back from a wall.

All this technique is aimed at the rejection of dualism, the repudiation of subject-object relationship. I am identified with *Mu*; I am one with the rain pattering on the roof and the clouds floating in the sky. No longer "I" and "it" or "I" and "thou" but only "is".

And in this way the conscious mind is swept clean of all pictures, remaining in total darkness, or else is rendered incapable of thinking. A new kind of concentration sets in and the mind begins to work vigorously at another level. The mind goes down, down, down or the unconscious rises up as though from another world.

Zen literature is filled with terminology that suggests 'going down'. The Zen masters speak of 'breaking through' layer after layer of consciousness. Buddhist psychology divides the mind into nine layers of consciousness. When one reaches the bottom layer, one is identified with the universe and has attained *satori*, enlightenment.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM AND NON-CHRISTIAN

PARALLELS

Both are forms of vertical meditation, somewhat similar processes. Both require long hours devoted to preparatory thought and intense concentration, which culminates in a momentary flash of tremendous light. Both demand ascetical preparation and the practice of virtue. The silence, rejection of words and thoughts, obscurity or darkness of the mind, the thinking of nothing, the emptiness or the void are all point to a similar psychological orientation of the mind. There is a going down or descent, breaking through various levels of consciousness to the center of the soul, the seeing into one's nature, the loss of ego, the enlightenment experience often provoked by intense anxiety. Both promote some type of psychic wholeness and unification.

People of a comparable temperament seem to be attracted to both.

As a *form of concentration* there is great similarity.

CHRISTIAN

To forget self so that only God remains. [Editor's note: It is also true that Trinity frees us to be ourselves as well as to be centered in God. So this is an experienced forgetfulness of self.]

“Anointed with the virtue of true humility and set ablaze with divine charity”
(Catherine of Siena, “The Dialogue”)

Going down into the heart of God

Professes dependence of “Someone” beyond the self

The two natures remain distinct,

the nature of man does not become the nature of God.

Desired outcome: to honor the heavenly Father and seek His blessings

Suppositions are the key to the entire exercise. The concentration is induced by love rising out of faith in Jesus Christ

Enlightenment occurs when I am conscious of only God.

Christian mysticism is always a way to, or an expression of, charity. In the canonization of a saint, the church never asks about the depth of her mysticism but only about her practice of compassion toward others.

St. John of the Cross states, “all visions, revelations, and feelings coming from heaven, and any thoughts that may proceed from these, are of less worth than the least act of humility

Mysticism which arises from and culminates in love of God in Christ is Christian..”

NON-CHRISTIAN

The psychic state is induced by the sitting, the breathing, the irrational koan, in other words, it has been artificially provoked.

Practitioners believe all wisdom is contained within oneself

A tremendous effort is needed to rid the person of all metaphysical or dogmatic suppositions.

Does not profess dependence on a Deity.

Desires to liberate the self from all things spiritual and material

To forget everything until only self remains

Emptying of the mind, preoccupation with Mu, doubt and anxiety caused by the koan.

The conscious mind is brought to a standstill

Desired outcome: to escape anxiety, suffering and stress in order to attain ‘psychic wholeness’

“Devoid of any burning desire for virtue, not anointed with humility, not set ablaze in the furnace of God’s Divine charity” (Catherine of Siena, “The Dialogue”)

Breaking through to the ground of one’s being

Enlightenment occurs when the ego is forgotten and I am conscious only of being. This is called the “Cosmic Self” or Nothing

Mysticism which disregards any relationship with God but remains a simple intuition of truth is non-Christian.

[Editor’s note: Space did not allow Barbara to show the link of mysticism with healing. The work of Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1994) shows how centering in God and letting God come into one’s own depths releases unconscious sins and blocks. The resurrection of Jesus is the deepest system of energy and affects every other level. Mystical union with God brings about this deep transformation, often through “dark nights” and desert experiences, which opens on to God’s love which is our ultimate healing.]