

The Inner Journey

A Glossary

Asceticism

- Devotion to practices or a lifestyle characterized by simplicity, austerity, and self-discipline for the purpose of spiritual growth and becoming more Christlike.
- Note: As with every virtue, asceticism can be distorted.
 - ▶ Extreme asceticism can include acts of self-mortification or even masochism.
 - ▶ Typically, this characterizes those who believe they earn or merit salvation through their own devotional efforts.

Discursive Prayer

- One's active communication with God (either internal and quiet or external and vocal) whereby we praise and thank him for his grace and goodness, and ask his intervention and help regarding our concerns and requests on behalf of ourselves and others.

Contemplation (Latin: *contemplatio*; Greek: *theoria*)

- Thoughtful reflection, rumination, or spiritual introspection.
- Contemplative prayer is one devoted to focused reflection on a Bible verse or a biblical concept so as to absorb and integrate its full meaning with the ultimate purpose of changing one's heart, mind, thoughts, speech, and behavior.

Meditation

- Extended thought, reflection, contemplation, or spiritual introspection.
- In the Christian spiritual tradition, there is no definite distinction between contemplation and meditation – and even the subtle nuances intermingle.
- **Biblical/Christian meditation:** A form of prayer in which one seeks guidance and insight through extended thought, reflection or contemplation on a biblical text or a biblically-based concept.
 - ▶ **Ps. 1:1-2** – Blessed are those who do not follow the ways of the wicked, but who delight in the law of the Lord; and on this law they meditate constantly.
 - ▶ **Ps. 4:4** – “When you are in bed, search your heart and be silent.”
 - ▶ **Ps. 119:11** – “I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”
 - ▶ **Ps. 119:15** – “I meditate on your precepts and consider [reflect, or ruminate] on your ways.”
 - ▶ **Ps. 119:27-29** – “Let me understand your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders. My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word. Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious unto me.... I have chosen the way of truth; [and] I have set my heart on your laws.”
 - ▶ **Ps. 119: 48:9** – “Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love.”

- ▶ **Ps. 119: 77-78** – “I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord...
“I will remember the deeds of the Lord.... I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds....”
- ▶ **Ps. 119:97-99, 105** – “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser.... I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes....
“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”
- ▶ **Ps. 119:148** – “My eyes stay open all through the night, that I may meditate on your promises.”
- ▶ **Ps. 143:5-6** – I meditate on all your works and ponder what you have done. “I spread out my hands to you, and my soul thirst for you like a parched land.”
- ▶ **Gen. 24:63** – As Jacob “went out in the field one evening to meditate,” he looked up and saw his future wife Rebekah approaching.
- ▶ **Josh. 1:8** – Following the death of Moses, God tells Joshua: “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous.... Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you.... Do not let this Book of the Law [Leviticus?] depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night....”
- ▶ **II Cor. 13:5** – “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.”
- ▶ **Phil. 4:8** – “Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think [ruminate, meditate] on such things.”
- Biblical/Christian meditation:
 - ▶ The theologian and monk **John Cassian** (c. 360-435) recommended using short phrases to center the mind such as: “*Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me, a sinner*” (**Luke 18:13**) or “*Create in me a pure heart, and renew a steadfast spirit within me*” (**Ps. 51:10**).
 - ▶ Centuries later, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* recommended using a short name or word such as “*Yeshua*” [“Jesus”].

NOTE: Christian meditation is antithetical to **Transcendental Meditation (TM)**.

Based on Hindu spiritual principles, TM seeks to achieve a relaxed state of mind by concentrating on a *mantra* – a Sanskrit word or sound repeatedly chanted or sung as an incantation or prayer so as to induce a semi-hypnotic state. Some believe a *mantra* to be a nonsense word (or sound), while others suspect it may be the name of a Hindu god, a goddess, or a demon.

See Jeffrey Breshears, “Christian and Eastern Spirituality: The Fundamental Differences.”]

Mysticism

- Belief in a sense of spiritual intuition that transcends ordinary rationality and understanding.
- Historically, “mystics” have often held that they receive direct “revelations” from God through intimate communion with him.
- Belief in a direct and intimate union of one’s soul with God through contemplation or ecstasy.

- In early Christianity the term *mystikos* referred to three dimensions of revelation:
 - (1) The biblical dimension referred to “hidden” or allegorical interpretations of Scripture.
 - Therefore, some early Church Fathers came to believe that many (or all?) Biblical passages had a double meaning: the literal/ historical meaning and a deeper allegorical (“spiritual”) meaning.
 - (2) The liturgical dimension referred to the mystery of the Eucharist – the literal(?) presence of Christ in the bread and wine through the miracle of transubstantiation.
 - (3) The contemplative dimension related to the experiential (or spiritual) knowledge of God.
- In the teachings of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the ultimate goal of the Christian life is to attain *theosis* or “deification” – i.e., “**union with God.**”
 - ▶ *Theosis* is expressed as “pure Being” or “union with God” – a relationship or **synergy** between God and man.
 - ▶ *Theosis* is obtained by engaging in contemplative prayer, the first stage of *theoria*. (In the Eastern traditions, *theoria* is not necessary for one’s salvation, but it is the most critical component needed for a person to be considered a theologian.)
 - ▶ This knowledge of God is not intellectual, but existential.

[NOTE: If “union with God” denotes a spiritual relationship with God as a result of a true spiritual conversion (“born again”) in which the Holy Spirit becomes a living reality in the heart of the believer – and one’s soul is constantly enlightened and purified through communion with God and the practice of certain spiritual disciplines – then “union with God” is a legitimate concept.

If, however, “union with God” denotes some kind of ontological union with God in which one’s human nature is fused with the divine nature or one is transformed into a divine being, then it is false and deceptive. This was Satan’s original lie to deceive Eve: “Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God” – **Gen. 3:5.]**

Hesychasm (Greek: *hesychia*)

- Hesychasm refers to stillness, quiet, rest and/or silence as in **Psalm 46:10** – “Be still, and know that I am God.”
- The goal of hesychasm is deep contemplation (*theoria*), which develops out of quietism.
- Wikipedia: The basic term *hesychia* and its various derivatives appear some 60 times in the Septuagint (LXX) – the Greek translation of the Hebrew Tanakh (Old Testament). Through the Septuagint it entered the Judaic vocabulary as early as the 3rd century BC. In the Greek New Testament the term if used 11 times.