ness (*śūnyatā*), the central components of the Buddhist philosophical worldview.

More esoteric and much more complicated are the form meditations typical of Tantric Buddhism, both in Tibet and in Japan. The meditator's complete body, speech, and mind are taken over in these meditations. The mind is occupied with ongoing visualizations, speech with chanting a liturgy or reciting a mantra, and the body with both sitting posture and numerous ritual gestures that punctuate the meditation, often to the accompaniment of musical instruments. This style of meditation often alternates with formless sitting meditation, which is the essential counterpart of the complex form meditations.

Visualization practice often involves maintaining one's attention on a *yidam* (meditation deity), an anthropomorphic, personified portrayal of the meditator's own enlightened mind. There are many *yidams* in the Tantric Buddhist pantheon; the *yidam* that is the focus of one's meditation is assigned in an initiation ritual in which the guru empowers the student to practice this form of meditation and teaches him or her how to do it. The chanted liturgy describes the visualization in great detail, elaborating the symbolic meanings of each detail of the visualization. When the liturgy has completely described the visualization, a period of mantra recitation follows. A mantra is a short string of syllables, usually in Sanskrit. Because the verbal meaning of a mantra is irrelevant, it is not translated from Sanskrit into any of the Buddhist vernaculars. The mantra's meaning is that it encapsulates the visualization in sound so that the mantra, and especially its most important syllable, becomes the aural form the *yidam*. Finally, a sign language of hand gestures is used to accentuate parts of the liturgy to exteriorize its meaning while also proclaiming that meaning.

These complex meditations serve the purpose of transforming both the meditator and the world that he or she perceives from a mundane form into the true, sacred form. This transformation is a matter of purifying the meditator's perceptions and developing a sacred outlook through these meditations. One's self and the world appear one way to those who have not practiced meditation and another way to those who have practiced meditation intensively for a long time. According to Buddhist perspective the meditator's perceptions correspond to things "as they are." Discovering things "as they are" is always the point of Buddhist meditation or philosophy.

Meditation, the central spiritual discipline of Buddhism, must be practiced regularly and intensively to be effective. Monasteries and nunneries can be dedicated to this discipline; for laypeople who have jobs and family responsibilities, finding time for this discipline can be much more difficult, but many nevertheless do take on these disciplines. In the context of monastic institutions or the meditation centers that often replace them in the West, the minimal schedule of meditation would include two periods of meditation, one in the morning and one at sunset or in the evening. Each school of Buddhism recommends different meditation intensives, but all schools agree that it is imperative to spend longer periods of time in which one meditates all day. The Vipassanā movement requires a minimum of a ten-day retreat. Vipassanā centers hold three-month retreats periodically. Zen Buddhists frequently participate in *sesshin*. These intensives can be of varying lengths. Five- or seven-day *sesshins* are common, and some Zen monasteries offer yearlong training periods. Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism has a large repertoire of meditation intensives. In Tibet it was quite common for the greatest meditation masters to spend years in solitary retreat in the mountains. All fully trained monastic meditators completed the traditional three-year, three-month, and three-day retreats, which is often a prerequisite for becoming a teacher. Western Vajrayāna centers host retreats of many lengths, including the traditional three-year retreat. Week- or month-long intensives are frequently undertaken and are required of more serious students by many meditation teachers. However, in every case it is also emphasized that daily practice is essential for success at meditation.

RITA M. GROSS

See also Body: Buddhist Perspectives; Buddhism: Western; Celibacy: Buddhist; Chan/Zen: Japan; Deities, Buddhist; Dialogue, Intermonastic: Buddhist Perspectives; Ennin; Gestures, Buddhist; Hakuin; Kōan; Mount Meru; Prayer: Buddhist Perspectives; Saichō; Stūpa; Zen, Arts of

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Meditation: Christian Perspectives

In the Christian tradition the term *meditation* currently refers to the entire process of contemplative prayer. Under the influence of various forms of meditation characteristic especially of Buddhism and Hinduism, the term has recently been reappropriated in a Christian context to designate a similar spectrum of processes and practices long taught in the Western monastic tradition. These had become obscured since the 16th century by restricting the term *meditation* to activities of thinking, reflecting, reasoning, imagining, and resolving. Thus, within classical Christian texts the word *meditation* might refer to one among many practices that promote contemplative experience. In a broader sense the term denotes any practice for focusing intention and attention that disposes the seeker to be aware of the

Divine Presence and as a result to become receptive to transformatiou of consciousness and action.

The Latin word *meditatio* translates the Hebrew word *haga*, which denotes reciration of the word of God in a somaric, rhyrhmic process that facilirates being affected by thar word and by God. This ancienr Jewish pracrice of recitation, memorization, and repetition of a word or phrase is found in mauy orber religions traditions. Examples include *dhikr* among the Sufis, mantras among the Hindus, and the "brief prayer" discovered by John Cassian (c. 360–after 430) iu rhe Egyptian desert and recommended in his *Conferences*. Western monasricism developed rhis form of meditation through the fourfold organic process of *lectio divina* and later in a musical form in Gregorian chanr. Popular piery retained elements of these meditarive practices through the recitation of litanies and the rosary.

The Greeks rranslated *haga* with the word *melete*, implying a movement inro the depths of rhe human heart, thereby opening the self to the action of the Spirit. Recitation of the word-prayer in the hearr continued in an unbroken lineage in Greek and Rnssian Hesychasm, where it was known as the Jesus Prayer. Iu the 20th century the anonymous *Way of the Pilgrim* reintrodnced this practice to the West in its Russian eremetical form. In this practice some form of the name of Jesus or the entire phrase "Lord Jesns Christ, have mercy on me a sinner" becomes the word focns. The 14th-century aurhor of *The Cloud of Unknowing* recommended a focus word of only one syllable, such as "God" or "love," rather than a lengthy phrase. In rhe 20th century two Cistercians, Basil Pennington and Thomas Keating (b. 1923), have taught and promoted this practice under the name of "centering prayer." A Benedictine, John Main (1926–1982), and his disciple Laurence Freeman have likewise taught a Christian form of meditation based on the recitation of a single mantra, "Maranatha," largely influenced by Hindu mantra practice. This monologistic form of prayer represents a simplification by the meditator, thus increasing receptivity to the Spirit's action and presence. The focus word provides a transition into the experience of contemplarion – a resting in God or a simple experience of peaceful qniet in the self amid a sense of God's presence.

Within Christian contemplative practice reading aloud or silently in a meditative artitude is rooted in the entire practice of religion. This requires three elements: an ethical way of living, a form of public worship in the liturgy that is expressed not only in words bnt in a wide variety of religious art forms, and a commnnity life focused on love of God and love of neighbor. These specialized processes relared to assimilating a "word" presuppose an intense desire ro live in harmony with God and to seek experience of the presence of God. Unlike Buddhism, Christian meditation has not emphasized the attainment of specific states of consciousness thar are likely to resnlt from correct and diligent performance of a meditative practice as mnch as it has emphasized a focus away from self-absorption, self-centeredness, and ego preoccupations. Focns on the word promotes listening to God's speech, as recorded in sacred texts and incarnated in rhe life, actions, and teachings of Jesus. The focus falls on a form of God absorption rhrough atrentiveness eirber ro God's utrerance or to His incarnation until the meditaror becomes Godlike or Jesuslike in thoughr, behavior, and presence. Spiritual teachers such as the ancient imas and abbas of the Egyptian deserr could also mediare the divine hy speaking a personalized word to their disciples, who in turn took this word back to meditation.

Anorher way of using a word or phrase is responsive rather rhan receptive. Here the meditator repeats a word or phrase rhat he or she has adopted as an effective prayer from the Scriptures or some other text. Through such a phrase the meditator seeks something from God in an open and receptive way but, even more important, becomes presenr to God. He allows himself to be affected as much by God's reciprocal presence in consciousness as by the fulfillmenr of the prayer desire.

Contemporary psychological srudies analyze and describe common features of meditation practices from all religions traditions. Studies in consciousness and structural analysis of the pracrices have provided some of rhe most fruitful areas of interreligious monastic exploration. Notwithstanding the emphasis on method and technique characteristic of the Western cultnres, rhese studies recognize that men and women who have practiced the disciplines of meditation escape the conditioned self of ego consciousness and thereby open themselves to other realms of experience resnlting in personal transformation. Thns, it is important to recognize that both Easrern and Western meditation have a goal beyond particular procednre. Naranjo and Ornstein (1971) assert,

> If we take this step heyond a behavioral definition of meditation in terms of a *procedure*, external or even internal, we may be able to see that meditation cannot be eqnated with thinking or non-thinking, with sitting still or dancing, with withdrawing from the senses or waking np rhe senses: meditarion is concerned with the developmenr of a *presence*, a modaliry of being, which may be expressed or developed in whatever situation the individnal may be involved.

As contemporary commentators on mysricism have noted, texts that discnss contemplative prayer or describe mystical experience have a performative aspecr. Their authors intend not only to offer ideas about prayer, contemplation, or meditation bnt also invire or incite the reader to a similar experience.

Christianity recognizes that a wide variety of practices might achieve roughly the same results. Some of these practices are gradnated according to a meditator's spiritual development acqnired through concentraring attention on a particnlar object of consciousness while focusing intention toward relarionship with God. Other practices might be appropriare at any stage of spiritual development but will be pursued to ever greater degrees by a person with real facility for focusing attention and relaxing ego control. Meditation practices in both the East and the West seek first to develop concentration and focnsed attenrion and then proceed to deconstruct conditioning and false conscionsness. Meditative practices can themselves become a form of condition-

Discalced Carmelite nun in meditation.
Photo courtesy of Jim Young

ing that needs to be changed from time to time to release the meditator from habitual emotional, physical, and mental attitudes that might have developed.

Lectio divina merits further elaboration. Guigo II's (d. c. 1188) *The Ladder of Monks* (late 12th century) names the four stages of the process as *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. These he compares to four rungs of a ladder connecting earth to heaven by which the monk can "touch heavenly secrets." He then describes each of the stages of the process circling through them several times, elaborating different facets of the stage and offering an extended example using one of the Beatitudes:

> Reading is the careful study of the Scriptures, concentrating all one's powers on it. Meditation is the busy application of the mind to seek with the help of one's own reason for knowledge of hidden truth. Prayer is the heart's devoted turning to God to drive away evil and obtain what is good. Contemplation is when the mind is in some sort lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness. . . .
>
> Reading seeks for the sweetness of a blessed life, meditation perceives it, prayer asks for it, contemplation tastes it. Reading, as it were, puts food whole into the mouth, meditation chews it and breaks it up, prayer extracts its flavor, contemplation is the sweetness itself which gladdens and refreshes. Reading works on the outside, meditation on the pith, prayer asks for what we long for, contemplation gives us delight in the sweetness which we have found.

Within the monastic setting the text so chosen emerged either from public recitation or chanting of the Psalms or from other readings from the liturgy. It might also come from a monastic's personal reading of texts in this slow and deliberate fashion. Thus, in the Rule of St. Benedict the monastic was encouraged to savor a word or text that had touched the heart in the Divine Office and continue afterward in private contemplation. The monastic schedule specified time to be given to the practice of *lectio*. The text was often vocalized aloud, repeated, and memorized as part of the process. This assimilation of key passages and phrases literally permeated the entire consciousness of the

monastic. The *meditatio* phase included not only apprehending the meaning of the text but also placing oneself in the narrative, imaging the scene interiorly, or contemplating a painting in the monastery or in an illuminated manuscript. Monastic calligraphers continued their meditation in the scribal process and in designing their illuminations. These first two phases lead to the personal response of *oratio*, either praise or petition. Finally, after words and feelings of response have subsided, the monastic simply rests in God, savoring the Divine presence. This fourfold process constitutes one organic whole. As the contemplative process develops, more time is spent in the latter phases of *contemplatio*, which Christian tradition considers to result from God's gift rather than from human effort. The *oratio* phase tends to become very simple, focusing on the single word, phrase, or sentence described previously. Thus, for Christian monastics meditation can be defined as that part of the prayer process initiated and sustained through human effort, whereas contemplation is God's response to that effort. Only from the 12th century on did these practices become somewhat systematized and mystical states or experiences categorized and described. From the 16th century on, methods of prayer that overemphasized thought, reflection, or imagination gradually eclipsed the understanding of meditation in a more holistic sense.

Naranjo discovered that a trait characteristic of all types of meditation at the procedural level is "a *dwelling upon* something." Generally, meditative practices involve focusing attention "upon a single object, sensation, utterance, issue, mental state, or activity." In Eastern meditation practice this focusing of attention is sometimes called "one-pointing" or "mindfulness." It results in integrating and concentrating the mind. In this process other states of awareness open up. Western monastic experience employed a variety of such techniques but embedded them in a whole way of life. Monastic treatises on prayer and meditation tended to focus on a limited range of these practices.

Naranjo helpfully described three distinct types of meditation practice. Various monastic traditions tended to specialize in one or another of these types, teaching only one explicitly while sometimes employing another in a less conscious and explicit way. He named these types the Way of Forms, the Expressive Way, and the Negative Way. The Way of Forms refers to meditations on externally given symbolic objects. This way contrasts with the Expressive Way, which focuses attention on spontaneously arising contents of consciousness. In the first way one confronts an other (e.g., a symbol or God) and eventually discovers oneself as related to or a reflection of the other. In the Expressive Way one identifies oneself with the mirror of the symbol, seeking the formless ground from which all images emerge in an unprogrammed spontaneity. In contrast to these two types, the third is a purely negative way. This is not a "reaching out or a reaching in but a self-emptying." This type cultivates detachment from all contents of consciousness and from psychological processes altogether.

This threefold typology interprets monastic arts and other expressive forms, such as visions and movement, as legitimate forms of meditation practice. As practices from Asian monasticism are embraced in the West, traditional Western monastic practices are too easily overlooked.

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See also Cassian, John; Devotions, Western Christian; Dialogue, Intermonastic: Buddhist Perspectives; Hesychasm; Keating, Thomas; Lectio Divina; Liturgy: Eastern Christian; Main, John; Mantras; Vision, Mystical: Eastern Christian

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Melk, Austria

Sprawled majestically on a high, rocky promontory overlooking the Danube River in lower Austria, the Benedictine abbey of Melk is today most celebrated for its vast complex of palatial, 18th-century buildings and regarded by many as the epitome of the Austrian High Baroque.

However, because of its strategic position and defensive possibilities, the site, first mentioned in 831, was originally occupied by a fortress, and its Benedictine history did not begin until 1089. In March of that year, the Babenberg ruler of Austria, Leopold II (1075–1095), brought a colony of monks from Lambach (in upper Austria) to replace the secular canons who had hitherto cared for the church at Melk, with its relics (of the Irish saint, Colman, and of the Holy Cross) and its Babenberg family tombs. Generously endowed with lands and secure in a papal exemption, the monastery continued to flourish even after the ruling family had transferred its residence to Vienna. A school is mentioned in 1160, and a scriptorium was certainly active dur-