ness (śānyāta), 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 maintraining 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 of 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 sesshins. 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, Inermonastic: Buddhist Perspectives; Ennin; Gestures, Buddhist; Hakunin; Köan; 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 transformation of consciousness and action.

The Latin word *meditatio* translates the Hebrew word *hagya*, which denotes recitation of the word of God in a somatic, rhythmic process that facilitates being affected by that word and by God. This ancient Jewish practice of recitation, memorization, and repetition of a word or phrase is found in many other religious traditions. Examples include dhikr among the Sufis, mantras among the Hindus, and the “brief prayer” discovered by John Cassian (c. 360–after 430) in the Egyptian desert and recommended in his *Conferences*. Western monasticism developed this form of meditation through the fourfold organic process of *lectio divina* and later in a musical form in Gregorian chant. Popular piety retained elements of these meditative practices through the recitation of litanies and the rosary.

The Greeks translated *hagya* with the word *melete*, implying a movement into the depths of the human heart, thereby opening the self to the action of the Spirit. Recitation of the word-prayer in the heart continued in an unbroken lineage in Greek and Russian Hesychasm, where it was known as the Jesus Prayer. In the 20th century the anonymous *Way of the Pilgrim* reintroduced this practice to the West in its Russian heretical form. In this practice some form of the name of Jesus or the entire phrase “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner” becomes the word focus. The 14th-century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* recommended a focus word of only one syllable, such as “God” or “love,” rather than a lengthy phrase. In the 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 monologic 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 contemplation—a resting in God or a simple experience of peaceful quiet in the self amid a sense of God’s presence.

Within Christian contemplative practice reading aloud or silently in a meditative attitude 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 but in a wide variety of religious art forms, and a community life focused on love of God and love of neighbor. These specialized processes related to assimilating a “word” presuppose an intense desire to 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 that are likely to result from correct and diligent performance of a meditative practice as much as it has emphasized a focus away from self-absorption, self-centeredness, and ego preoccupations. Focus on the word promotes listening to God’s speech, as recorded in sacred texts and incarnated in the life, actions, and teachings of Jesus. The focus falls on a form of God absorption through attentiveness either to God’s utterance or to His incarnation until the meditator becomes Godlike or Jesuslike in thought, behavior, and presence. Spiritual teachers such as the ancient imams and abbots of the Egyptian desert could also mediate the divine by speaking a personalized word to their disciples, who in turn took this word back to meditation.

Another way of using a word or phrase is responsive rather than receptive. Here the meditator repeats a word or phrase that 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 present to God. He allows himself to be affected as much by God’s reciprocal presence in consciousness as by the fulfillment of the prayer desire.

Contemporary psychological studies analyze and describe common features of meditation practices from all religions traditions. Studies in consciousness and structural analysis of the practices have provided some of the most fruitful areas of interreligious monastic exploration. Notwithstanding the emphasis on method and technique characteristic of the Western cultures, these 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 resulting in personal transformation. Thus, it is important to recognize that both Eastern and Western meditation have a goal beyond particular procedure. Naranjo and Ornstein (1971) assert,

If we take this step beyond a behavioral definition of meditation in terms of a procedure, external or even internal, we may be able to see that meditation cannot be equated with thinking or non-thinking, with sitting still or dancing, with withdrawing from the senses or waking up the senses: meditation is concerned with the development of a presence, a modality of being, which may be expressed or developed in whatever situation the individual may be involved.

As contemporary commentators on mysticism have noted, texts that discuss contemplative prayer or describe mystical experience have a performative aspect. Their authors intend not only to offer ideas about prayer, contemplation, or meditation but also to invite 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 graduated according to a meditator’s spiritual development acquired through concentrating attention on a particular object of consciousness while focusing intention toward relationship with God. Other practices might be appropriate 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 focused attention and then proceed to deconstruct conditioning and false consciousness. Meditative practices can themselves become a form of condition-
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....

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 calligraphy 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 helpfully described three distinct types of meditation practice. Various monastic traditions tend to specialize in one or another of these types, reaching 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 object (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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Melm, 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-