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**MEDITATION TECHNIQUES IN THE QUEST FOR
BALANCE AND AUTHENTICITY**

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Abstract: Meditation has become a common instrument used by Western man in personal and professional contexts, or in the ones in which relationships with alterity are reconstructed. To understand the importance of meditation techniques I started off from Mircea Eliade's fascination with the Indian culture and his attempt to explain the need to abandon a Eurocentrist perspective of values and spiritual practices hierarchy. On the grounds of the mystical imaginary that came to the West from Oriental spirituality, I showcased a few meditation techniques for personal development purposes. Focusing on the four existential dimensions (physical, social, personal and spiritual), I have highlighted the fact that for each of these, meditation techniques may be used to build up balance and authenticity. Corporeality, love, interiority and contemplative vocation are engaged in the meditation process aimed to recover man's fundamental unity in the digital society. The dialectic of the sacred and the profane perspective, as captured in Eliade's writings, was put to work to reveal the metamorphosis of significance and traditional symbolic practice when assumed as initiation by contemporary man. Meditation techniques become important because they are instrumental in the process of bettering the daily life.

Key words: meditation techniques, authenticity, love, contemplation, spiritual experiences, mystic physiology, the hesychast methods, secularization, Mircea Eliade.

1. Initiation and existential reunification

The discovery of one's being at the intersection of several dimensions has taken the Western man of digital era to the need to integrate them into one whole, as a referent of harmony and existential authenticity. To this purpose, man perpetually sought a series of therapies and existential techniques to escape disharmony and lack of authenticity. Probably one would have easily found the resources to regain oneself in the Western culture spirituality or in the spirituality of various schools of interpretation and practice of Christianity. However, postmodern man was rather „tempted” by a series of esoteric or spiritual practices beyond Western culture that he integrated into his own mode of reflection, action and improvement of his own life. A frequent way to express this passion for the resources of cultures beyond the Christian West is the enthusiastic embracing of meditation techniques typical of the Far East.

Reading Mircea Eliade, we note that the shift away from the position of a spiritual authenticity solely within the Western culture is older than a century (Eliade 1993; Eliade 1994a). It does not imply less of a value to Western culture spiritualities but rather a valorizing of symbolic thought and mystic and magic practices in Oriental cultures. Far from taking an anti-West attitude, it is an initiation opening triggered in the Western man by the awareness of his culture's religious and spiritual values affected by secularization.

To understand the initiation nature of such a spiritual quest in the East, I think we may mention here a story we find in Martin Buber and Heinrich Zimmer, which is also told by Mircea Eliade. It is the story of Rabbi Eisik in Krakow, who dreams three times that a voice tells him to go under the bridge in Prague leading to the royal castle and dig for a treasure. He decides to make that trip. But when he gets there, he finds that the bridge is well guarded. His walking around the bridge makes the guards' Captain notice him. The Captain calls him and asks politely what he is doing there. The Rabbi reveals his dreams, and the Captain laughs and tells him to go home as there is no treasure under the bridge. To persuade him of the uselessness of his action, the Captain says he too has had a dream in which a voice told him to go to Krakow and search for a hidden treasure in Rabbi Eisik's house, in the corner behind the stove; he should dig and find the treasure. It seemed absurd to him to believe in such a dream and take that trip. The Rabbi thanks the Captain graciously and goes home. He digs in the corner of his house, as the Captain indicated, and finds the treasure (Eliade 1993a, 114-115). We have here an initiation story. Read in the spiritual key, the story should tell us that sometimes we need to leave our own culture and seek beyond it, in an initiation voyage to far away cultures,

only to discover that the desired spiritual treasure is actually at home, in a forgotten corner, ignored but always present. I believe that Western man is already valorizing cultural alterity and regaining his own spiritual resources.

One way for postmodern man to take advantage of the initiation voyage to other cultures is the one by which, according to Mircea Eliade, „the cardinal problems of metaphysics could be renewed through a knowledge of archaic ontology” (Eliade 1991, 12). It is the main reason for which, in this paper, the reflections of the historian and philosopher of religions are with us as a clarifying referent revealing the initiation process of meditation techniques by which the human being strives for the balance of the reality of his/her own life. Of course, we cannot ignore the fact that postmodern man claims a post-metaphysical stance. However, the condition of digital era man denotes a thirst in contemporary man for the passion of reality and authenticity. In this context, to regain the symbolic dimension of life is a perpetual search in which the digital era man is engaged. Contemporary man is for the development as a digital self, partaking in the construction of several reality zones that he explores as possible worlds, at the crossroads of the real, the imaginary and the virtual (Frunză 2019, 156-169). In this way, the digital self is set to communicate and reintegrate into the real life. Human being finds himself/herself in the entire complexity showcased by the four dimensions of existence: physical, social, personal and spiritual. Meditation techniques – as philosophical exercises and technologies of the self – may constitute an instrument to use a symbolic background acting as structures to join together cultures, even when, apparently, abandoning culture for the sake of the infinite horizon of the spirit is proposed.

2. The physical dimension and corporeal techniques of initiation

As a consequence of rediscovering the importance of the physical dimension in man’s definition and accomplishment is the deep awareness of corporeality and finitude. Being limited in his own corporeal and natural condition, man is especially concerned with freedom and immortality. Although it has a spiritual relevance, any approach of the anguish with finitude should be centered on the body and corporeality discussion. Mircea Eliade brings us into a symbolic thinking milieu typical of archaic man when he notes that in a universe such as the one of metaphysics and meditation practices, “In tantrism, the human body acquires an importance it had never before attained in the spiritual history of India... the body is no longer the source of pain, but the most reliable and effective instrument at man’s disposal „to conquer death”” (Eliade 1992, 188). This transcending opens one

towards the inner mystery of one's own body at the border between reality and its absence, between authenticity and inauthenticity. Although we talk about the body, we evidently perceive it as *something* embodied.

This embodiment shows that from the beginning our imaginary of the human condition has attached to our biological dimension also a dimension beyond it. Therefore, man as embodies being should be perceived at the same time as a spiritual being. For explanatory reasons, we detach here the two dimensions, physical and spiritual. They are, however, always together and cannot be separated from the other dimensions that are a given of human condition.

We can see the importance that Eliade attributes to this topic when he talks about mystical eroticism in Bengal, namely about corporeal and spiritual techniques typical of tantrism. On this occasion, we are presented a series of preparatory steps loaded with erotic play, aimed to take the neophyte to the stage of his emancipation from carnal voluptuousness, from immediate maximal pleasure, for „a liberation of sensual joy, raised to the level of play – either free or ceremonial; anyhow, a liberation of voluptuousness from biological determinism” (Eliade 1993a, 102). Such a situating above the pleasure of seminal flow is deemed as a way to turn a human into a being similar to a god. Attaining the godlike feature seems easier than in Christian doctrines that talk about man becoming like God, because in Hinduism, between man and god there is no qualitative difference but rather a quantitative one. What with a god is a macrocosmic dimension, with humans it is microcosmic. This deification of man in the Oriental view supposes, among others, a spiritual reintegration of the human being through ceremonial techniques engaging the human body. Thus, Eliade says, „One becomes god, attains supreme freedom, not by annihilation of the flesh – but by its transfiguration and glorification”. In such erotic mysticism, sexual act must be „trans-substantiated... from instinct it should be turned into a ritual” (Eliade 1993a, 103). Part of this ritualizing of eroticism is also the initiation symbolism of death and revival.

In Eliade's analysis, a significant symbolic structure – that may come from the archaic man to meet the need of postmodern man to recover the cosmic dimension of existence – is the one of the natural cycles of vegetal death and regeneration. An important stage in understanding this symbolic structure is, according to the historian of religions, the passage from vegetal development ceremonies – with their role in the community life practices – to the new interest in what is individual, in what may be associated to the idea of the awareness of personal life importance (Eliade 1998, 152). Moreover, Eliade speaks about a certain religious evolution within these practices. Therefore, the growing attention paid to the gods that die and live again. They

become a model of a possible personal evolution interpreted in the key of individual death and revival. Assumed at an individual level, these symbolic manifestations place the individual in a close connection with the archetypal model of a god. And the human being may feel them as a personal spiritual experience. Here various modes of initiation into mysteries are implied that make the life, death and revival of a god be perceived as an individual spiritual experience. They may be reproduced allegorically in the life of the person going through the initiation into and practice of the mystery. This religious experience felt by the initiated has an exoteric and an esoteric part. The historian of religions notes one's difficulty in deciding whether the respective occurrence has occurred „by hallucination, subjective experience or certain occult practices” (Eliade 1998, 153). However, we notice that the imaginary of these practices is such that it always involves corporeal practices, human being participation with body manifestation. The body is a support that makes initiation possible. This statement does not at all disagree the fact that „these initiations... possessed secret doctrines and looked to develop ecstasy in the spirit of the initiated to lift to the worlds beyond feelings” (Eliade 1998, 154).

We can, nevertheless, look at corporeality and the dynamics of its renewal also in the perspective of profane experiences, that keep the deep structures of a religious behavior. Once they penetrated the Western culture ground, a vast part of India's meditation and spiritual renewal techniques were emptied of their strictly religious content and adopted as personal development techniques, used to find oneself, or as body fitness techniques. There is a dialectic of the sacred and the profane (Rennie 1996, 27) that makes these processes easy to integrate culturally. According to Eliade, „the secularization of religious values constitutes only a religious phenomenon ultimately illustrating the law of the universal transformation of human values, the ‚profane’ nature of a behavior that was ‚sacred’ before does not imply a continuity solution: the ‚profane’ is but a new manifestation of the same constitutive structure of man that before manifested in ‚sacred’ expressions” (Eliade 1992a, 9).

A meditation technique illustrating this dialectic of the sacred and the profane is described by Christophe André in a meditation exercise in which we are urged to „reflect with the whole body.” Despite all these, or perhaps because of them, to stir our interest in corporeality, he does not guide us directly to Oriental experiences. His encouragement to meditate starts with a quote from Nietzsche: „I have a word for those who despise their body. I do not ask that they change their opinion, or doctrine, but to separate from their own body; they will be speechless” (Nietzsche apud André 2018, 192). The French thinker proposes when we do not succeed to solve our problems through traditional reflection, that we reflect with our whole body. Such

meditation practice encourages us to take a little detour through our entire body before resuming the meditation set to play by our thinking mechanisms. Christophe André's method suggests when we encounter a difficulty and the brain is not helping that we: 1) stop any activity, sit down and close our eyes; 2) pay attention to our thoughts, let them flow but not feed them; 3) be aware of our breathing, of all that is happening to us, live in the present without wishing for anything else; 4) notice what is happening inside our body, take care of it to be relaxed; 5) identify parts of our body that are tense or uncomfortable and reach them with our breath, going through them without intending to eliminate the tensions; 6) widen the consciousness space towards the other parts of the body; 7) not look for a solution momentarily, simply be present in our own body; 8) let thoughts run in this consciousness space, without putting them into the center of attention; 9) breathe, feel, stay so for a few minutes... through such meditative technique, André wishes to help us put aside inhibiting thoughts and focus on what we feel in the body, reflect with the whole body so as to reach an excellent good state that will support us in solving the problems we are facing (André 2018, 192-196).

From the outside, this corporeal meditation technique reminds us of the awareness raising procedures typical of mindfulness, whose origins stem from the Buddhist practices of reality exploration and situating inside our own body. However, if we have any doubt about the spiritual value of such corporeal techniques, we may remember Marc de Smedt's idea that the great wise men, the great mystics speak about the meditation experience as „a spiritual adventure, never separated from life, but deeply rooted in it” (Smedt 1998, 7).

3. Love and social dimension shaping

Mircea Eliade points out that there is also a possibility when taking upon oneself such ecstatic practices for one to fall prey to experiences at the level of „inferior mysticism.” Alienation is also possible due to the transformations occurring with modernity in the social imaginary and in the social and individual practices under the action of secularization (Moniz 2019; López 2020). This is related to the social dimension as it is construed by Western modernity man, for whom the camouflage of the sacred into the profane is accompanied by a diminished perception and assuming of the presence of hierophanies in their original state. This enables the historian of religions note: it is possible for the practitioner to resort to „inferior forms of mysticism” because when he cannot or feels that he cannot „lose himself in God”, he may use surrogates of religious experiences and be limited to the effects these cause. But, even when it is about mystic simulacra, such as alcohol or some collective hysterias, the phenomenologist of religion submits that

in a sense, „Mysticism remains, because the human instinct to lose oneself, to surrender, is as organic and strong as the preservation instinct. One must go out of oneself, one way or another. And when love cannot rescue one – alcohol, opium or cocaine do” (Eliade 1994, 155). Limitation to „inferior” forms of mystic practices may be avoided and overcome through practitioner’s effort to stay at the horizon that love can still save him.

Quite importantly, Eliade invokes love as a measure of authenticity in meditation practice. Where the energy of love is no longer functional, all sorts of substitutes to the divine energy of salvaging love interfere.

Even if they take us beyond what we accept to be spiritual authenticity, such degraded substitutes of experience may be explained to function, each in its own way, if we agree that with modernity, the border between religious experiences and profane experiences is very fragile. It undergoes an ambiguity that may lead to diminished differences between the two types of experience. The phenomenon should be considered well in the terms of secularization, affecting in various degrees, the social dimension. This way, we may note that the metamorphoses of religious imaginary and of religious experience occur not only with Oriental symbolic thinking that penetrates Western culture, but also similarly with the thinking and religious experience of Christian communities. In a passage from his *Journal*, commenting upon Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Eliade says „Radical secularization of life should not take place *against* Christianity but *in its name*. Christians have the duty to accept and assume this secularization” (Eliade 1993b, 423). The experience of modernity and the postmodern mentality construction make secularization a typical Christian culture value. Therefore, if secularization is not specifically assumed by Christians, at least they cannot ignore its presence and benefits in social manifestation, political action and public communication. It is true that secularization is not a uniform phenomenon globally as much as it is not homogeneous in the Western culture. We have to also remember that while in the public sphere we suppose secular shaping should be dominant, in the private one, the intensity of assumed religious values is available to each person. While secularization is more visible in the public life administration institutions, it may be less so at the private level dealing with aspects of traditional groups’ life.

An important value in the social dimension is love as a relational universe of life with the other. To understand a part of the metamorphosis in love’s signification mode, I believe Mircea Eliade’s idea in the *Journal* is relevant: „Now young people are kissing on the grass, and hugging – and you see them everywhere walking close or hand in hand. And yet I am not convinced that they love each other, or desire. They do this because it is the thing to do –especially to prove they are not like their parents, they are different, free, they can do

whatever they want..." (Eliade 1993b, 493).

We notice here that something is lost in the interpersonal significance of love, in the transfiguring intensity we perceive in the presence of love, or we represent in Christian terms (Nygren 1953; Templeton 1999; Stăniloae 1993a). However, according to Eliade, freedom is manifested in this love. As regards the principle of freedom, probably, the historian of religions has in mind the Indian experience, as for him „India has the merit to add a new dimension to the Universe: that of being free” (Eliade 1990, 60). But we know that in Christian interpretation, love, as much as truth, has the power to make us free. It is something originating in the initiation and transformational power of love. The freedom associated to or created by love makes love keep its inherent cosmic feeling, leading ultimately to a way to recover the real, to situate in reality, at the core of being.

Love may also be an instrument of knowledge and perfection even in the circumstances of postmodern man’s life. A meditation practice that Eliade analyzes is the hesychasm. He notes certain similarities between ascetic and prayer practices in the Indian cultural space and the hesychast prayers of Christianity. Especially, a series of mystic physiology elements makes him speak about the influence of Oriental meditation practices upon hesychast meditation practices (Eliade 1992, 79-82). It is the ascetic and mystic practice of those who wish to withdraw into the universe of prayer and meditation. But it is accessible to any human being willing to engage in an initiation process cultivating love to attain various levels of knowledge of God and improved human being – to whom the way of becoming like God is thus open.

Interest in hesychast practices has been growing (Bunge 2015; Johnson 2010; Vasile de la Poiana Mărului 2009; Meyendorff 1973). The hesychast meditation method is known under various forms. It runs according to a general plan supposed by the three dimensions of mystic initiation: purification, illumination and union with God. However, some versions of the meditation technique are known that may be placed with the general procedures to be customized by the hesychast practitioner. We shall especially use Dumitru Stăniloae’s studies to include this initiation endeavor.

The purification stage is an ascetic rise to the level at which body and soul are free from passions. „Being dispassionate is the preliminary condition necessary for contemplation” (Stăniloae 1993, 173). It opens one in the name and for the love of God. Illumination is the contemplation stage during which one contemplates God in nature, in the Scriptures, in life’s specific situations, and especially in the soul devoted to pure prayer. All these become possible due to God’s gifts placed like seeds in the soul open to contemplation, to any meditation state of prayer beyond words, which means, in fact, the opening

towards the work of the Holy Ghost and of the Logos. It is the stage at which heart and mind are one so that the person looking for illumination becomes „a pilgrim to the sky” and the heart’s prayer is achieved through permanent invocation of the words in the incessant prayer.

Calling on Kierkegaard, Dumitru Stăniloae shapes contemplation from the perspective of truth. The truth is built like an intersubjective reality of the encounter, occasioned by the very presence of the divine light through which the initiated is taken inside the light of God. At the third stage, of the sight of the Godly light or of the union with God, there is a lived experience of God due to the presence in the uncreated light of divinity. Most often, such experience is described as knowledge. It is the knowledge that goes beyond the kataphatic and apophatic stage, through what we call the second degree apophatism. Or we may speak about the same experience of love, one that makes a person partake in the divine love, the love as ecstasy. It is described as a „total victory” and it is experienced as „an infinity of the power to present with a gift” (Stăniloae 1993, 287). To understand a little about the ecstatic love, as it is described by the Hesychasm, I shall remind us the fact that „The great secret of love is the union attained by those who love each other, without keeping them apart as autonomous subjects. The love-based connection consists not only in the fact that those who love think with delight about each other, therefore not only in the intention focused on each other, but also in the fact that each receives a part of the other in oneself. Between those who love each other, there is no ontological separation” (Stăniloae 1993, 290). For this reason, the finality of the inner experience of love should have an outer focus on the others: „The beatitude of the love of God, experienced at the end of the pure prayer, should fill me with the urge to love all people, to prayer are welcome them all in my heart, which is in God’s heart” (Stăniloae 1993, 306).

This mystic eroticism supposes a series of meditation techniques that Stăniloae calls: „methods to facilitate pure prayer”. This mystic physiology elements and methods to support prayer are deemed by hesychasm to be only auxiliary and may be even absent. The one practicing the prayer may attain all benefits of divine contemplation without invoking them (Stăniloae 1993, 265).

Summing up several elements of the hesychast methods we may say that the hesychast technique supposes the one practicing it: 1) sits on a chair, back up, and hands on knees open upwards, or hands in one’s lap, one in the other, relaxed (for beginners, hands may use the rosarium to pray; 2) looks to his umbilicus (or simply to his chest looking for the heart); 3) connects breathing pace with the mind in a joint action; it is useful to pause between breathing in and breathing out; 4) being aware that the sky is breathed in and that it feeds the heart, will use as subject of meditation the words of the prayer: *Lord*

Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner; 5) in this contemplative state, the words of the Jesus prayer should be put into the mind and heart's circuit synchronized with the breathing – half of the formula on the breathe-in and the other half on the breathe-out; 6) a deeper contemplative state allows the synchronicity of the words with the heart beats and breathing pace; 7) the one reaching the highest stage of the mind's prayer gets to say with the heart and mind only the significance of the prayer's words.

In the context of a life shaped by Christian theology, mystic physiology elements supposed by such technique are not compulsory. The practitioner may attain the sight of the Godly light without summoning it. Also, in a context in which religion is integrated as a cultural phenomenon, it is possible for a lay formula of these techniques to be used with the purpose of personal and spiritual development, taken off from theologians' practices against the background of hesychasm. If we remember Eliade's dialectic of the sacred and the profane, we should accept that even when (subjected to a secularization process) the religious dimension of hesychasm is camouflaged in a spiritual experience consisting in hesychast meditation techniques providing an authentic experience. The unnatural energy behind some of these practices connected to the Jesus prayer should be functional (even if at a different level of power and intensity) in the life of those calling on such a method of Christian inspiration.

The study of the social dimension aims for the construction mode of the relational universe by which human being connects with other human beings. Among the modes in which the practitioner assumes the others' presence, Love plays a fundamental part. We should expect a meditation technique originating in love, that cannot take place outside love, should give its freedom and authenticity share – relatively independent from the religious attributes implied by such a meditation practice.

4. Meditation and initiation to regain one's personal dimension

If together with Mircea Eliade we accept that a fertile cultural paradigm may be brought from the Indian culture to the Western spirit, we notice the series of analogies that the thinker is using to make familiar to us an only partially accessible culture. In *Yoga. Immortality and Freedom* we are warned that „It is impossible not to take into account one of India's greatest discoveries: that of the witness-conscience, a conscience detached from its psycho-physiological structures and from their temporal conditionings, the conscience of the „liberated”, that is of the one who has succeeded to distance oneself from temporality, and consequently to know the true, inexpressible

freedom. To conquer this absolute freedom, this perfect spontaneity, constitutes the goal of all philosophies and all mystic techniques of India” (Eliade 1993, 12-13).

Such quest for freedom should be perceived first as an inner freedom. The witness-conscience has the necessary objectivity for introspection with a finality focused on all the inner forces towards a harmony of the inner universe with the relational universe of the person, with the structure of relations typical of the four dimensions of existence that we have listed here. Such a conscience may be perspectival and situational. So that it allows a process of reinterpreting life situations and problems we face, challenges that life sets for us. It falls under a hermeneutic of plurality that makes possible the situational approach and its overcome. It is thus possible to position oneself in the temporal as well as to exceed it for eternity. This enables our understanding of the human being as a conditioned being that is also actively engaged in the effort to eliminate any conditionings. Those who are familiar with the NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) will discover in Eliade’s studies sufficient similitudes with and differences from this personal growth method. It is not my intention to dwell on this process, although it is significant for our topic.

I would like to emphasize that, according to Eliade, the issue of human conditioning and its corollary represented by the human being’s *de-conditioning* is key in Indian thought, deeply concerned with human condition. Eliade identifies it to be shaped as an existentialist philosophy from which, we westerners, could learn the multiple conditionings to which the human being is a subject and to understand the need to surpass anguish and despair triggered by the awareness of temporality (Eliade 1993, 10). The response to the human need to escape from the pressure of conditioning is also the use of meditation techniques.

Here we should examine at least three aspects that Mircea Eliade emphasizes.

Firstly, the concern with the human condition, that appears as a constant in Indian philosophy since its origins and is fertile in European thinkers’ philosophies interested in temporality, historicity and man’s mode of being in the world. Even if the type of reflection and conceptual language are different, the two philosophy modes, oriental and occidental, meet on the ground of reflection on cosmic illusion, cosmic becoming, value of existence in time and history. These are central structures in meditation practices, with their cultural diversity nourished by a more or less implied transcendental unity (Eliade 1993).

Secondly, the initiation nature of the meditation practices is significant. For instance, it is important the view that „the yoga practices ensemble reproduces an initiation pattern. Like any initiation, yoga concludes with a radical change of the existential status of the one

accepting its rules. Due to it, the ascetic abolishes human condition (in Indian terms, nonilluminated life, existence destined to suffering) and gains an unconditioned mode of existence – which Indians name liberation, freedom, *mokṣa*, *mukti*, *nirvana*. But to annihilate profane human condition in order to gain absolute freedom means to die in this conditioned mode of existence and be reborn in another, a transcendent one, unconditioned” (Eliade 1995, 141).

To overcome existential anguish we have to consider, thirdly, the purification and transfiguration scope of meditation. For example, in Eliade’s reading of some of Buddha’s interpretations in certain texts to yoga meditation, the purpose of Buddhist meditation „is purification of the ascetic’s conscience which is prepared for higher experiences” (Eliade 1993, 150). It is about an initiation effort in which the ascetic’s conscience is rebuilt to be able to live through new experiences, aimed at the spiritual dimension as well as the immediate experience of its psychological and biological life. This take on the Buddhist meditation is important to understand that for Buddha, the link between knowledge and contemplation and meditation yoga type of practices is significant. These meditation techniques had to make possible knowledge as actual achievement in personal experience (Eliade 1993, 155).

Echoes of meditation Buddhist practices reached the Western world due to cultural models related to mindfulness. Starting from Buddhist principles, these meditation practices were integrated into the western cultural mentalities to solve a wider range of problems. Because they are implemented as spiritual not religious techniques, to practice them you do not need to be a Buddhist. This facilitates their relations with medical assistance and social support, with the therapeutical and clinical psychology practices, in education or in business (Silverton 2017, 14). To understand the meditation state at the base of problem solving we have to know that „when we are mindful, we choose to notice details of our experiences as they are at the present moment, without judging or changing them” (Silverton 2017, 13).

Clarifying for the way in which meditation techniques are used is the example provided by Sarah Silverstone under the name „Mountain meditation”. This meditation exercise includes: 1) lying down on the floor in a balanced position 2) noticing our own body, with our spine straight, raising lightly our head from the floor 3) noticing our breathing for a few minutes 4) thinking at the image of a mountain, one that we know or an imaginary one 5) let our mind explore this image for a few minutes; feel inside our own mountain as we stand „firm, straight and magnificent” 6) think that as seasons change, the mountain keeps firm, indifferent to the negative happenings around it 7) feel our own inner mountain and live stability as a personal experience 8)

return to our body's sensations, live in the present of our lives to which we have taken all the qualities of the mountain we have contemplated in our meditation experience. (Silverston 2017, 188).

It is easy to see that we can find here a version of the symbolism of the mountain as it appears in Eliade's studies. He posits us in the imaginary at the centre of the world, associated to significant experiences nurtured from the energy of the sacred that they carry and share everywhere. This symbolism of the centre should be kept to mind at least for two reasons. Firstly, the lay western cultural experience tends to place the individual at the centre of all significant creations and activities. Secondly, man may be associated with a religious symbolism, a centre of creation, or may partake in the symbolism of the centre, which enables him to assume it and make it fertile in his life.

5. Contemplation and finding oneself on the spiritual dimension

For a deeper understanding of the way in which the quest for spirituality and the secular mode of being in the world are combined, I believe it would be good to remember the dialectic of the sacred and the profane we spoke about earlier in our study. This interpretation grid, present in Eliade's work as a generalized instrument of interpreting the religious phenomenon (Codoban 1998; Preda 2021, 121), showcases the dynamics of the sacred in the metamorphoses it is subject to, especially in the modern world. What is sacred in traditional societies may be camouflaged in daily representations or activities and may abandon the camouflage in forms that are most easily integrated into daily life. Also, it is possible for human beings to invest special significance into ideas, things, occurrences in their life, that acquire the quality of hierophanies. From the perspective of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane, we may integrate religion as a cultural phenomenon and we may read it in the terms of a spirituality integrated into culture. In such a context, we should interpret Eliade's statement: „I believe that we – who are a product of the modern world, are ‚condemned‘ to receive revelation through culture. Only through the cultural forms and structures we can find our origins. We are ‚condemned‘ to learn and awaken to the spiritual life through books. In Europe there is no oral education, nor folklore creativity anymore. For this reason, the book, I think, has an overwhelming importance, not only culturally, but also religiously and spiritually” (Eliade 1990, 59).

He does not mean the book as a revelation receptacle, but, as in religions, the text of the Book is associated with the voice and the will of God. The Book religions or the Abrahamic Religions are relevant in this sense. However, beyond the grand monotheistic narratives or the ones recognizable in other traditional spiritualities, the book becomes a

spring of spiritual experiences in the context of the metamorphoses undergone by the religious imaginary in the postmodern man's life. This new situating of the book in our cultural experience does not exclude traditional experiences provided by the encounter with sacred texts. Moreover, in the hermeneutic discourse on the spiritual significance of the text, we may integrate the traditional idea of a cosmos that speaks to us through signs and symbols. We can make analogies between the three creative dimensions of hermeneutics as described by Eliade (Eliade 1990, 111-113) and the quest for meaning, for the deep significance of life by projecting the world as text and disclosing it in the immediate experience.

A remarkable mode of such a practice we find in Ran Lahav's views on philosophy as contemplative practice. Such a philosophical practice starts with the reflection on fragments in from the works of great philosophers that are used as base for meditation on the profound meanings in the daily life. The practician philosopher says: „I want to read a text in contemplation, to listen to it from my inner silence ... Contemplating on a philosophical text is called philosophical contemplation. It means listening to basic meaning of human reality” (Lahav 2021, 5). I would like to highlight here the quest for reality, which is also an aspiration for authenticity. It appears, in fact, as a permanent relation between interiority and freedom. Thus, Eliade's words come to mind, when he said: „Far from betraying an anti-metaphysical attitude, ‚authenticity’ expresses a powerful ontological thirst for knowing the real” (Eliade 1994, 177).

6. In lieu of conclusions to the quest for authenticity

At the end of a traumatic oneiric experience described in the *Journal*, we find Eliade concluding: „I told myself: if God does not exist, everything has ended, everything is absurd!” (Eliade 1993b, 294). Such escape from the experience of dream may be understood as an escape from illusion by overcoming the conditionings that human being is subject to. The idea of God's presence should be accompanied by the idea of the temporal interval of human existence in the conditioning register it should face and of the freedom it may gain through ascetic and mystic techniques. This growing awareness of freedom is achieved on all four dimensions of human condition, that we find in existential analyses and that are relevant also to the existentialist type of thinking that Eliade persuades us we can gain from the Indian thought considerations on human condition always.

It is true that an existential approach guides us not so much to a particular manifestation of God but to His perception as a hierophanic presence, as being significant, source of meaning, as making possible instituting or recognizing *the real*. This quest for the real coincides with

the description by postmodern man of the quest for *authenticity*. Such a journey is not without its initiation dimension, not even when it appears to us in experiences, we tend to associate to profane experiences. Considering that the sacred and the profane are to Eliade two modes of being in the world, two existential situations accompanying man in his becoming, we may more easily accept the consequences of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane at work in the world. Meditation techniques – aimed to provide unity and authenticity in the human being ready to build the digital era – can prove efficiency by practicing in various registers of existence. They may also be a unifying factor for the four dimensions of human existence: physical, social, personal and spiritual. Through them, human being may escape from the world, may abandon all personal conditionings and even escape from the self only to then find oneself and rediscover the ultimate fundamentals of the personal reality.

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