

Datta Yoga Center Germany – Datta Yoga Center Switzerland

Gnaa Naa Bha Yoga Conference – East meets West

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Speech by Pater Lutz Müller SJ on July 21, 2010 (translated from German by Saroja Johannan)

„With joy and in freedom I walk my path to the people with God”

The retreat (or spiritual exercises) of the saint Ignatius of Loyola open ones heart so one is lead to walk on Jesus of Nazareth’s path. The development of this individual Jesus-relationship empties into the devotion of his entire life. It finds its completion in service to the Lord and mankind.

Dear Sir, dear Madam, dear listeners,

Today’s arrangement of the conference is dedicated to surrender. I gladly rise to speak in order to show a way to devotion within Christianity. I hereby follow the so called spiritual exercises (in latin: exercitia spiritualia, span.: ejercicios espirituales, german: Exerzitionen), as they were passed on by the saint Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius, basque, army officer for the Spanish crown, later founder of the Jesuit order, lived from 1491 to 1556. These spiritual exercises are existent in book-form. It is practically unreadable, and that is also why I don’t recommend you to buy this book. The spiritual exercises booklet is not a book to read, but a book to practice, just as suggested by its name. The exercises book is a method book, not a reading book. If you go to a restaurant, you also order the food itself and not the cookbook. In other words the exercises book is a book, whose exercises one should do in practice. It is a code of practice for the one who bestows the spiritual exercises to others, the spiritual exercises tutor. It is less a book for the one who is receiving the spiritual exercises, the student.

What are spiritual exercises?

How does Ignatius of Loyola conceive spiritual exercises (SE)?

SE are any way the soul is being prepared

1. to break free from unsystematic adherence; and after it was removed,
2. to search for God’s will for ones own life
3. for salvation, therefore, for health of the spirit.

And that is what the SE are about:

1. Liberation of unsystematic adherence, therefore the dissociation of life blocking and life complicating attitudes ; so I can become free of anything that is inconsistent with my purpose and my being;
2. After removal or breaking free from attitudes that restrain or inhibit life follows the specific focusing on God as that which is in accordance with my purpose and my being, that is to say the search for God's will for my personal precise life;
3. So as to fully recover spiritually and psychologically and become whole.

So how do we do the SE? Ignatius of Loyola mentions here "any way to explore the conscience, to recollect oneself, to contemplate, to pray verbally or mentally". Today we call these different kinds of prayer soul searching, contemplation, meditation, consideration, examination of the holy scriptures. So it is about mental activities, whose central point is mostly the bible. Beside the ample stories of the experiences of the people of Israel with God the main focus is on the secrets of Jesus Christ's life. The contemplation of the events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth is supposed to enable the student to meet God and his healing plan.

The most common form of prayer in the SE is the examination of the Holy Scriptures. Examination here means meditating on a bible text. We get involved in the biblical scene with intense composure, our imagination, the memories of our world of experiences, our questions and our empathy. It is about meeting the personalities of the bible as lively as possible, just like on a theater stage and to be part of their experiences. It is not necessary to experience anything special, or that something unusual happens, instead it is important to reach depth. The following saying is passed on by the Holy Ignatius of Loyola: "Not a great deal of knowledge satiates the soul, but the tasting of things from the inside." So it is better to sound the depth of one encounter, than to take a quick look at ten scenes. This is about reading and asking, about searching and discovering, about lingering and reflecting. This can only succeed, if I do this exercise with a reverential and firm attitude.

Practically this means, that the student normally does these exercises for 5 hours a day, the first one in the hour after midnight, the second before breakfast, the third before lunch, the fourth in the afternoon and the fifth before or after dinner. Additionally there is one church service (an eucharist celebration) and a conversation with the Tutor. And of course one should move, to make sure you are not spending all day in the room, the chapel or the meditation room.

Duration of the SE

How long do these SE last? The full form lasts 30 days, those are the so called Big Exercises. The conformist form with some adjustments lasts 8 days. Of course, it is much easier for everyone to participate in the last, shorter form. The path of devotion that I am presenting today is oriented to the 30 day course. These 30 days are divided in so called weeks, but that doesn't necessarily mean they have to exactly cover 7 days. For the most part the introduction lasts 6 days, the first week 8 days, the second 8 and the third and fourth week together 8 days.

The SE are done in silence. The silence creates a space in which one can seek the Lord, where the individual can go its own path without disturbance from outside, without distraction from other people or everyday life duties. The silence is very strict, so that means no cellphone, newspaper, Internet, letters and so on.

The role of the Tutor

The tutor has several tasks: He is focused on the wellbeing of the student and is aligned with him and his experiences. He actively listens to him, keeps an eye on his gestures, eavesdrops for preliminary decisions. He accompanies him with empathy in a way that the real conversation between God and the student is not disturbed. I would like to illustrate this with the image of a scale: Ignatius of Loyola says: “While searching for God’s will it is better if the creator and Lord directly communicates with the devout Soul. The tutor is supposed to let the Creator work directly with his creation and the creation with its Creator and Lord“. (EB 15). That is to say the tutor should not stand in the way of the exchange between God and the individual, at the same time invite him to a spiritual path, promote and lead him, and even correct him if necessary. One could say he has a function of a hub, like the hub in a wheel. Of course he himself also has to be focused on God. Orientation means familiarity here. The tutor, being a disciple of the Lord, is animated with the desire to seek and to save the lost. As a human being with spiritual experience he lives from the closeness to God. He is united with Jesus Christ. He is contemplative and active at the same time, that is to say he prays, senses and follows his rhythm of life.

Principle and Foundation

The SE are divided in five phases. The introduction is called 'Principle and Foundation'. Here a vision is being formulated, which discusses the sense of life, the inner freedom of the person and its life decisions. Quote: “ Man was created to praise the Lord, to show him reverence and through this fulfill his life for the benefit and wellbeing of all”. These are not solely three religious actions, but a complete life attitude. In order to orientate and arrange your life towards God one needs freedom. That is to say he should not be bound to values that are contradictory to it. 'Unsystematic adherence' is the expression that Ignatius of Loyola uses for when a person lets itself get enticed by secondary objectives. In order to use everything to reach the sense and purpose of his life, one must become indifferent, well, serene in the choice of its relative methods, so he can orientate towards the primary goal. Ignatius of Loyola mentions four important fields: Vitality, in other words health and disease; Possession, in other words wealth and poverty; Prestige in other words fame and contempt; Existence: in other words long or short life. And of course, a life in health, wealth, fame and long duration seems more attractive and worth striving for than a life in illness, poverty, contempt and short duration. And so the student is supposed to ask himself what would serve the goal of his existence more. The question about the “more” is the Ignatian question, the question of the SE. It’s about God’s will for me. And the experience tells us, that a long life in good health, wealth and honor are not a guarantee for the successful outcome of life. The other way round

a short life in poverty, illness and contempt can give a deeper answer to God's calling, as well as better fulfill God's will in his healing plan.

The struggle for indifference is the main focus in the first phase of the SE. But this is not about a general lifestyle that could also be despising life, but rather its about the preparation for making a decision for Christ. The principle and foundation will motivate to solely align oneself on God, and nothing or anybody else. And it is a path to prepare oneself for a life with God.

The first week

When the student is ready to give God the priority and to offer oneself with complete trust into God's hands; if he is stable within himself and has been proven to be strong; when he trusts the tutor and wants to proceed on the path at his side; then it is time for the transition to the next phase. It is a turning back phase with the name 'first week'. In the first week the student looks at contradictions in his experience. On one side he feels God's compassion, the love of the creator for his creations, the affection of the Lord to his creation; on the other side he suspects the shadows in his inner core, the cracks that go through his life, the darkness that he is entangled in. Here sin means that the person refuses to fulfill the original purpose of his life. Instead of following God's guidance he pursues his own goals which take him away from God and love. He uses his freedom not in the sense of the creator and the creation. He doesn't allow God to be God, but he loses himself in the power of sins that destroy, lie, exploit, hate, abuse, kill and divide. The student is entangled in without action on his part. He finds himself in guilt, hurt feelings and disaster. He is both the victim and the doer. Shame and confusion about his life can grow when he feels that God in his compassion and loyalty has decided to stand by him. Although the person does not deserve that God is giving him grace and love, he is experiencing God's unconditional attention.

In biblical terms in the foreground are topics of creation of man, the condition in paradise, the fall from grace, the disastrous history of mankind, hell, relationship between man and God. This disastrous history should be applied to one's own life history. Which sins, attitudes, and deeds have separated him from God? The student should see within himself his wounds, his boils and his poison. He should become conscious of all of his sins. In the SE he experiences the interweaving with God's healing story. He gets shown that God wants his wellbeing, his recovery, and his life instead of his being lost, his infatuation with death and his guilt. In astonishment about the God who has sacrificed himself for him on the hill of Golgata (where Jesus was crucified), he then can realize that all of his sins together will not separate him from the love of God. But that God in his extensive compassion towards him bows down before him and pulls him out of the mud, the hate, ugliness and the disgustingness of his own sins. So while the student feels the possibility of conclusive denial, sees the destructive power of the sins, he becomes aware of his part in the guilt, at the place of his fear he can find his rescue: that God saves him! Being touched inside by God's affection, to become human through Jesus Christ, then the student can open himself up for the call of Christ to love him more and follow him. At the end of the first week there is a conversation with Christ as the

answer to God's compassion and mercy. It is often connected with a life confession. Usually this is the most strenuous phase of the retreat.

The second week

The main phase of the retreat follows, the second week. Here the focus is the realization of Jesus life's secret. The student somehow accompanies Jesus on his life path starting from his birth, the gathering of his disciples, the healings, his preaching, prophecies until his arrival in Jerusalem. The student should by experiment find the 'understanding of the true life' (EB 139), to be able to make a fundamental irrevocable life choice, or rather in case this has already happened, to make a significant and meaningful decision for his life. In the center stands a biblical Christology, the student is confronted with the reality of the New Testament, that God has accepted him within Jesus of Nazareth. The prayer exercises invite the student to convert the Christ message into his life. So the student experiences a systematic centering on the Christ of the gospels. The dynamic of the SE focuses on the poor and maligned Christ and asks the student whether he would like to let himself be taken into the movement of Jesus life. The student has a direct meeting with Jesus in the SE. This encounter is being framed by three big structural contemplations.

1st Structural contemplation: the consideration of the parable of the call to the kingdom

The call of an earthly king to his followers should help to contemplate the life of the eternal king (two accentuations). The Christian king of the middle ages is ideally seen as a provider, a protector, leader, model and friend for his followers.

Provider: the king takes care of the maintenance and military equipment.

Protector: the king gives protection and is the legal advisor.

Leader: the king calls for war.

Model: the king leads justly and serves peace.

Friend: the king is a trustworthy and reliable companion.

That is to say that already the call of an earthly king, who is wholeheartedly making an effort to serve God, should be obeyed, but how much more obedience is asked for if it comes from Lord Christ himself! What makes the earthly king so attractive is his selflessness and dedication to the task that God has entrusted him with. The conviction of the earthly king lets him be a role model. The student should then consider whether he should totally surrender himself to the divine king. But he doesn't need to decide that yet. He should come to realize that he can only walk on Jesus of Nazareth's path as path to life, having a deep personal Christ-relationship as a foundation. Because this path includes futility and failure, poverty and ingratitude, hardship and laboriousness – just as with following an earthly king! This consideration of Christ's call is so to speak the principle and foundation of the second week.

2nd Structural contemplation: meditation on the two standards

Again here an image of the piety of the middle ages is used. The student encounters two camps: Luzifer's camp, who assembles countless demons and sends them all over the world

to seduce mankind to desire wealth, honor and arrogance in order to put shackles on them. The second one is Christ's camp, who at Jerusalem sends out his disciples all over the world so they can spread his teachings, by motivating the people to strive for poverty, a low opinion about worldly fame and humility. So this is about expansion of the parable of the call to the kingdom. Now also the followers are standing next to their leader. With other words the scenario has the following two parts:

In the first sequence the leader of hostile forces against man sends out his followers to transform or pervert the powers of physical desires and emotional basic needs of man to greed, desire for honor and pride. In biblical typology Babylon is the inhuman world state, the place of godless self-assertion, the space of mental vanity and confusion. It produces fear, emptiness and bondage.

In the second sequence Christ wants to motivate his devotees to spread the happy message, to help everyone to regain their original freedom and dignity. In biblical typology Jerusalem is the place of ahimsa and truth, serving identity development and conveys trust, purpose and freedom.

The consideration of the two standards discusses the difference between good and evil, which influences our lives in a very dynamic way. The greed for possessions, fame and self-assertion can lead to self estrangement. The friendship with Christ is the best remedy against the deceptive tricks of the evil. At the end of the consideration of the two standards Ignatius of Loyola is hoping that the student is overwhelmed with joy due to having been taken in by Christ's mission, because he is invited to this personal relationship with its liberating dynamics.

3rd Structural contemplation: meditation on the three kinds of man

This story is easy. Three groups of human beings have each acquired 10'000 Euros, but out of selfish reasons, not out of love for God. So this is about a continuation of the consideration of the two standards. Namely because man has lost his inner freedom and has given in to greed. Ignatius presents three ways of dealing with this in meditation. The first group is too weak to detach. It doesn't have enough conviction, therefore everything stays the same. Passiveness is their mark. The second group demands of the Lord to sanction his attachment to possession. It only wants to serve God under certain conditions, not under all circumstances. The group is willing to let go of the money or keep it, depending on what God orders. Both options are equal to them and acceptable.

All structural considerations are embedded in and correlated with biblical narrations. The whole process makes it clear to the student, that he has a choice, that he has to make a decision, that he has to take a stand, as he is already doing it anyway. The second week has its peak in the choice. The choice gives answer to the question: 'Lord, what do you want me to do?' While the student is aligning himself to that, he is given the rules to discriminate between the spirits. I can only explain these rules very shortly here.

The discrimination between consolation and misery is essential to Ignatius of Loyola. Does the student feel consoled by the closeness with God, while he is doing his prayers? It is about encouragement and discouragement, confusion and clarity, sadness and joy, restlessness and peace. Which attitude, which life design brings us closer to Christ? The course of the retreat

wants to bring the student to experience God's intention for his life personally, to grow into the conviction of Christ (*familiaritas cum Christo* - Latin), to organize his life from him and dedicate it to him. Of course, one should discriminate between the direct level of experience and the mental conclusions, as well during and after the prayers. This should be discussed and reflected during the conversation with the tutor.

Choice becomes an option only if the student wants to become part of the third group of human beings. If he stands the tension to pray until the better path shows up: 'to serve God, who is our Lord'. In the sense of principle and foundation the student looks at what he was meant for in this lifetime (to live godly, to serve God and therefore save humanity), so he can choose the means to achieve his goal (that is the subject of the choice) and not change his goal to suit his means.

When it comes to choice Ignatius himself discriminates between three times of choice:

First time of choice: God-immediacy, conversion of Paul, notice of Blaise Pascal (Köster 173)

Second time of choice: Time of the inner opposites, discrimination of the spirits, second week.

Third time of choice: Time of the calm consideration, to consider arguments, pros and cons, rationality plus emotionality.

Subject of Choice (Köster 171): what serves the glorification of the Lord and to self-realization in accord with His image.

The rules of choice end with the sentence: 'Everyone should consider that in all of the spiritual matters one can only grow as much as one jumps out of *self-love*, ones *self-will* and ones *self-interest*.' (EB 189)

The third week

After the student has discovered his new freedom by prayerfully dealing with the secrets of Jesus' life, this now accepted freedom should further deepen with faith. This continuation is a probation. Now the student encounters Christ's suffering in Jerusalem. The contemplation on Jesus' holy path pulls him into compassion. The encounter with betrayal and suffering, disappointment and lies, torture and pain, persecution and crucifixion should confirm him not to evade the track of the cross, if the consequences of his choice require that. In this way, his compassion with the Lord can become part of his answer to Jesus' cross. This is illustrated by the opening verse of the Good Friday liturgy: "We pride ourselves in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him we found salvation and resurrection and life. Through Him we are redeemed and released." (Gal 6, 14)

In this way the student contemplates the complete path of suffering and crucifixion of Jesus, starting with the last supper, until the crucifixion and the burial. The awareness of the student is being directed to the way Christ is suffering as a human being or wants to suffer, to the Lord letting his son suffer as a man, to how he suffers this for all of the students' sins. The core of every exercise of the third week is always the same: Christ suffers also for the student and his sins. This is not achievable just by an act of will. All secrets of Christ's Passion come to life through the proximity that develops between the student and the suffering Christ.

The fourth week

In the fourth week the reports of Jesus Christ's resurrection are in the center of attention. The core of every exercise in the fourth week is always the same: The deep experience of consolation and the selfless joy that the risen Christ gives to his disciples; the gratitude for the salvation that the Lord has achieved for the sinner. The dynamic force is perceptible, so far as the student offers himself to God, to be part of the aspiration for salvation of all mankind. It is the time, in which the risen Christ enables a new the easterly faith in Him. Fear, horror and doubt are overcome in the encounter with the risen Christ himself. The new reality of Christ, his new presence in the Spirit puts the student into perspective. Christ consoles the student. This is how he gets to the final point of the SE,

the last structural contemplation: the contemplation to achieve love.

It is the sum of the exercises. It recapitulates the received boon of creation and salvation through God; what God has done for the student; God's endless giving of life to the elements, the plants, the animals and man; the price God has paid for the salvation of mankind; what every single person owes to God.

Because God has come into this world and is not returning from there, the student can now find "God in all that is". The student has personally experienced God's love and now he wants to pass it on to others. This love, so writes Ignatius in the concluding contemplation, "should be put more into actions than into words" (EB 239). Through this everything points to God and the service to God. The student, who "has also met with God by stepping down into the darkest, tightest and most impermeable of the world, experiences this at Jesus' cross. Only then the eye of the sinner becomes bright, is he enabled to the attitude of indifference, can he find God also in those things that hit him as a cross." (Karl Rahner)

And so the student is drawn back to the people, where there is life, celebration, suffering and death. True contemplation draws towards where Christ dies in the plight of mankind and rises. True contemplation draws into the succession of the "poor and abused Christ". And so the desire, grown out of grateful awareness, flows as hidden love into the concluding prayer of the SE:

„ Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.”