

**STUDY ON “THE PRAYER OF THE HEART”
A PROCEDURE FOR ACCESSING THE PROFOUND**

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Translator's note

The work of translating this Study was essentially a task in tracking down English versions of the quoted references and inserting those sections into the surrounding translated text.

Nearly all of the Philokalia could be found except for the parts written by St Nikodemus (the compiler of the work) himself which don't seem to ever have been translated to English.

The section on the Sufi practice of the Dhikr could likewise not be found online. This is our translation from the French with the use of the Spanish translation to facilitate understanding.

All translated quotations of the Qur'an in Appendix 1 come from www.quran.com using the Sahih International translation.

All translated quotations of Silo come from his books and speeches the official reference site for which is www.silo.net.

The comments by Silo in the section on the Practice of the Prayer of the Heart were originally translated by Silvia Swinden and reviewed by Nicole Myers and Danny Zuckerbrot.

The Bibliography lists the original references and the translations consulted together with their online locations, where available.

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Summary

Starting from the last chapters of “Psychology IV” in Silo’s book “Psychology Notes” in which situations and practices are described that refer to the displacement of the I, the suspension of the I and accessing profound levels, the “Prayer of the Heart” is studied as a possible procedure for entering these levels.

The historical background to this is reviewed, the same as other similar practices such as the Dhikr in Islam, the Nembutsu in Zen Buddhism and the Japa in yoga.

We go deeper into the “Prayer of the Heart” based on the texts that relate to the works and experiences of the Desert Fathers and the monks of Mount Athos (that are found in “the Philokalia, from the Jesus prayer”¹).

We also study Silo’s proposal for “the asking”—supported, like the above, by breathing—highlighting its presentation as a simple daily practice, but one which opens the door to more profound experiences.

Finally, in the last chapter, some points are synthesised and ordered which help to work on this practice.

As a synthesis of the study, it is concluded that the “Prayer of the Heart” is indeed a possible procedure for accessing the Profound and that just like with the other procedures, the rooting of the Purpose and the affection committed to the search, are conditions.

1 Lumen (Ed.), “La Filocalia, de la Oración de Jesús”, Argentina, 1996.

I. Framing

We take as the framing of this work the final chapters of “Psychology IV” from Silo’s “Psychology Notes”². We refer to the “Displacement of the I”, “The suspension of the I” and “Accessing of profound levels”.

In the first of these, different trance techniques are presented, starting with the experience of the Cumaen Sybil in which *“entrance into trance occurs through internalization of the ‘I’ and by an emotional exaltation in which the image of a god, of a force, or of a spirit is copresent which takes over and supplants the human personality”*³. Other trance techniques are also named, such as “the cult of Haitian voodoo,” the Indian “yantras” and “mantras,” present-day spiritual currents and hypnosis, explaining how in all of them a displacement of the I is produced and a substitution by other entities.

Later on, still in the same chapter, Silo describes how *“Advancing towards absorption we could end up at a point in which automatisms are left behind and where we are no longer dealing with a question of displacements or replacements of the ‘I’”*⁴. He puts as examples, certain advanced yoga practices citing the Patanjali⁵ and the “Prayer of the Heart”⁶ undertaken by the orthodox monks of Mount Athos.

Regarding the latter, he says, *“The recommendations given by Evagrius Ponticus⁷ turn out to be most adequate in order to avoid representations (at least those of the external senses): “Do not imagine the divinity in you when you pray, nor let your intelligence accept the impression of any form whatever; maintain immaterial and you will understand.” In broad strokes the prayer functions in this way: the practitioner in silent retreat concentrates on the heart, takes a short phrase and gently draws the phrase, along with the air, down to the heart, finishing the inhalation and “putting pressure” so they go deeper inward. Later, the air is exhaled very smoothly, without losing the attention in the heart. The monks repeated this practice many times a day until some indicators of progress such as “illumination” (of the space of representation) appeared. For the sake of precision we should acknowledge the passage through a state of trance in some moment of the repetitions of those prayers.”*⁸

Then in the following and final chapter of the book, about “Access to profound levels,” Silo explains how it is possible, starting from the suspension of the I, “to reach the mental situation of suppression of the I,” making some necessary conditions explicit:

“...Doubtless the substitution of the ‘I’ by a force, a spirit, a god, or the figure of a sorcerer or hypnotist, is something present in history. As we have seen the suspending of the ‘I’ while avoiding any substitution as in some types of yoga and some advanced mystical practices is also something known though not so present.

... So then, if someone could suspend and then cause the ‘I’ to disappear, they would lose structural control of the temporality and spatiality of their mental processes. They would be in a situation previous to that in which they learned to take their first baby steps.

2 Silo, Psychology Notes

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 The Aphorisms of Yoga or Yoga-Sutra, compiled by Patanjali in the 2nd century, is the first book of Yoga that remains integral in its 195 brief and magisterial sentences.

6 The tradition of the “prayer of the heart” starts in the XIV century in Greek Mount Athos. In 1782 it expanded outside of the monasteries with the publication of the *Philokalia*, by the Greek monk Nikodimus the Hagiorite, published in Russian shortly thereafter by Paisius Velichkovsky.

7 Evagrius Ponticus, of the “Desert Fathers”, wrote his Apothegms in the IV century. He is considered one of the precursors of the Mount Athos practices.

8 Silo, op. cit.

...It is possible to arrive at the mental situation of abolishing the "I", not in everyday life but in determined conditions that start off from the suspension of the "I".

...Entrance to profound states occurs from the suspension of the "I". From that suspension, significant registers of "lucid consciousness" and comprehension of one's own mental limitations are produced.

... Regarding this transit one should keep in mind some inescapable conditions: 1. that the practitioner has his or her Purpose clear—what they desire to achieve as the final objective of this work; 2. that they count on sufficient psychophysical energy to maintain their attention absorbed and concentrated on the suspension of the "I" and 3. that they can continue the continuous deepening of the state of suspension without interruption until temporal and spatial references disappear.

...With respect to the Purpose, it should be considered as the direction of the whole process, even though it does not occupy the attentional focus. We are saying that the Purpose must be "recorded" with sufficient emotional charge so that it is able to operate copresently while the attention is busy with the suspension of the 'I' and in the subsequent steps. This preparation conditions all of the subsequent work.⁹

II. Interest

In the first of the chapters referred to, Silo concludes that it is possible to go beyond displacements and substitutions of the I achieving "suspension of the I", giving certain advanced yoga practices and the prayer of the heart (which describes it synthetically) as examples of this. Furthermore, in the final chapter, he affirms that starting from this suspension "*...it is possible to arrive at the mental situation of abolishing the 'I'.*"

He subsequently explains that, in order to advance in this direction certain "unavoidable conditions" must be fulfilled regarding: the Purpose, to count on sufficient psychophysical energy and to be able to reach, unbroken, to the disappearance of space and time references.

From his explanations it turns out that a technique or procedure is required that allows the suspension of the I and from here our interest arises in studying the "Prayer of the Heart" as a type of prayer that could have led some monks to experience profound levels and could possibly be used as a procedure for "entry" into a work of asceticism.

III. Historical background

Prayer of the Heart

There exists, in the life of the Eastern Christian churches and the Russian Orthodox Church in particular, a spiritual practice of prayer which is very profound: the Jesus Prayer or the Prayer of the Heart. This was introduced into Russia towards the middle of the XIV century.

But, through the Eastern Churches, this practice goes back to the tradition of the Greek Fathers of the Byzantine Middle Ages: Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), Symeon the New Theologian (927-1022), Maximus the Confessor, Diadochos of Photiki (middle of the V century), Nikiphoros, Gregoras the solitary (second half of the XIII century), as well the Desert Fathers of the first centuries¹⁰: Makarios and Evagrius Ponticus.

This spiritual tradition had its principal foci of life in the Sinai monasteries from the XV century, and in Mount Athos, especially in the XIV century. From the end of the XVIII century it expanded outside the monasteries thanks to a book, "The Philokalia" published in 1782 by a Greek monk, Nikodimos the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Under the name of The Desert Fathers, the Wilderness Fathers or the Fathers of the Thebaid, they are known, within Christianity, as the monks, hermits and ascetics, who in the IV century after the Peace of the Church, abandoned the cities of the Roman Empire (and other neighbouring regions) in order to go and live in solitude in the deserts of Syria and Egypt (the Thebaid became famous for this phenomenon).

The first, among those known, of such ascetics was the Egyptian Anthony the Great. In Syria there were others such as Simeon Stylites

Hagiorite and edited in Russian shortly thereafter by Paisius Velichkovsky. Also, more recently, it has been popularised in the Stories of ‘The Way of a Pilgrim’ (late XIX century). This book circulated extensively in Russia, was translated to French in 1945 by Éditions du Seuil and several publications exist in Spanish (Relatos de un peregrino ruso, a su padre espiritual; Publisher Patria Grande, Buenos Aires 1978).

The prayer consists of an incessant invocation of Jesus’ name, hence the name: “the Jesus Prayer”. It consists of ceaselessly repeating the formula: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me”. (according to Luke 18:38).¹¹

“The Philokalia” appears thanks to the liberalness of a Romanian Prince, John Mavrocordatos (whose identity is unconfirmed) and was the fruit of the work together with Makarios, bishop of Corinth (1731-1805) and Nikodimus the Hagiorite (1749-1809), a monk of the Holy Mountain. The former looked after compiling the texts and the latter was responsible for writing the preface and the notes.

It is a folio¹² of two columns that starts: “Philokalia of the Neptic Saints¹³ collected between the Holy Theophorus¹⁴ Fathers where it can be seen how the intellect¹⁵ is purified, becomes illuminated and perfected through the philosophy of active life and contemplation...”

This true council of the “Neptic Fathers” convokes all traditions, from the era of the Desert with Anthony and Evagrius until Symeon of Thessaloniki (1410-1429). There are over thirty: Anthony the Great, Isaiah, Evagrius, Cassian, Mark, Hesychios, Nilus, Diadochos, John of Karpathos, Theodore of Edessa, Maximos the Confessor, Thalassios, John of Damascus, Philemon, Theognostos, Philotheos of Sinai, Ilias the Presbyter, Theophanis of the Ladder, Peter of Damascus, Makarios, Symeon the New Theologian, Nikitas Stithatos, Theoliptos, Nikiphoros the Solitary, Gregory of Sinai, Gregory Palamas, Kalistos Katafygiotis, Symeon of Salonica, Mark of Ephesus...¹⁶

The Philokalia was extraordinarily successful in Russia, thanks to a great starets¹⁷, Paisius Velichkovsky (1722-1794), the instigator of a veritable spiritual renaissance as much in Russia as in Moldova. He prepared a Slavic translation, Dobrotolyubiye, which appeared in St. Petersburg in 1793. It’s a pitiful example of this edition, which the Russian pilgrim bought for two roubles—his entire fortune—from a sacristan.¹⁸

In the next chapter we take extracts from the Philokalia texts of several of these monks, in which different aspects of the Jesus Prayer and Prayer of the Heart are developed.

Other practices

Descriptions of procedures very similar to the Prayer of the Heart are also to be found in the Dhikr of the Sufis, the Nembutsu of Zen Buddhism and the Japa in yoga, or the Japa-Yoga.

In their solitary retreats *fathers* (in Aramaic singular: *abba*) and *mothers* (*amma*) seek what in Greek had been called Hesychasm, i.e. an *inner peace* in order to make the re-union or “*mystical union*” with God.

On being the testimony of a sort of radical Christian faith, they had numerous disciples throughout the Middle Ages and their adages or apothegms (from the Greek *apophthegma*: a short and funny sentence in which an educational moral content was underlined) were compiled and translated into numerous languages thereby giving rise to a literary genre, the call of the Pateriká, with some of these writings the tradition of the Philokalia also starts.

11 Lumen (Ed.), op. cit., Page.. 9 ss.

12 Book in folio format.

13 From nepsis: a Greek word that means to be attentive, vigilant, alert....

14 A theophorous or theophoric name (from the ancient greek θεοφόρος, from θεο- "dios" and -φόρος "carrier") in onomatology is any name that contains elements alluding to God or to deities.

15 Translator’s note: In the Spanish version of the Philokalia used here the term “espiritu” (spirit) is used where the English translation uses the word “intellect”. Given that both the English and Spanish versions are translations of the Russian version, which was itself a translation from another Slavic language which itself came from a version in Ancient Greek, it might be difficult to track down the perfect translation.

16 Lumen (Ed.), op. cit.

17 A Starets, in the Russian Church, is a person who is recognised as a spiritual guide due to their holiness. They have no position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

18 Lumen (Ed.), op. cit.

In the case of the Dhikr¹⁹, we count on the reference that is included in the appendix of “*Petite Philocalie de la prière du cœur*”, translated and presented by Jean Gouillard (first edition in French in 1953, Éditions des Cahiers de Sud)²⁰. In it is written, “The following text is taken from the “Tanwîr alqulûb” (3rd edition, Cairo, P.548-558) by Sheikh Muhammad Amîn al-Kurdî al-Shâfi’i al-Naqshabandî, deceased 1332 after Hijra (1914).”

And later on in the text itself:

“Section about the inner dhikr or the one practised in the heart (adh-dhikru-l-qalbî), which is superior to the vocal dhikr (adh-dhikru-l-jahrî).

“Know that the dhikr is practised in two ways: with the heart and with the tongue. Each one of these forms has its legal basis in the Qur’an and in the Sunnah.

“The dhikr with the tongue, comprising a word composed of sounds and letters, cannot be practised at any moment. Commercial and similar activities necessarily thwart it, unlike the dhikr of the heart because this dhikr considers the meaning of the word without any pronunciation of letters and sounds, thus, there is no impediment to whoever invokes it internally.”²¹

The following description is suggestive:

“Sheikh Abu Said al-Kharraz said, “When Allah wishes to befriend one of His servants, He opens for him the door of His *dhikr* and when he delights in the *dhikr*, He opens for him the gate of Proximity. Then He raises him into the gatherings of Intimacy. Then He settles him upon the throne of Unity. Then He lifts the veil from him and leads him into the Abode of Unicity and reveals for him the divine Splendour and Majesty. When his regard falls upon the divine splendour and majesty, he remains “without his I” (*bi-lâ huwa*). Thereupon His servant is entirely extinguished for a time and enters into divine protection, free from any pretensions of his self.”²²

Several times reference is made to the need to inhale and hold one’s breath:

“The *dhâkir* places their tongue on the soft palate (*saqfu-l-halq*) and after inhaling, he holds his breath,” also, “the strength of the held breath will hit thus the “little black point of the heart” (*suwaîdû’u-l-qalb*) giving rise to the affect (*al-athar*) and the warmth (*al-harârah*) towards the rest of the body and so that this warmth will burn all the corrupted parts of the body, while the pure parts of the *dhâkir* will be illuminated by the light of the Name of Allah.”²³

Then it continues by explaining how to relax the breathing:

“...At the end of this formula, he will imagine a halt in an odd number (of time) and pronounce: *Muhammadun rasulullah* (Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah), from the heart below the left breast thereby understanding the agreement with the Prophet—Allah’s prayers and salutations be upon him!—and love for Him. Then, he releases his breath when he feels the need to do so and he “halts” for an odd number (of time): three or five or seven, etc, up to twenty-one. It is what is called by our Masters “the complete halt” (*al-muqûfu-l-’adadî*). When he exhales the *dhâkir* will say with his tongue only silently “My God, I address myself to You and Your satisfaction is what I ask for” (*Ilâhî Anta maqsûdî wa ridâ-ka matlûbî*).²⁴

In the same text, the following is also said:

“If in the course of the invocation the *dhâkir* (the practitioner of the dhikr) is disturbed by some “despondency” (*qabd*) or by ideas that trouble the concentration of the heart, then he should open his

19 Generally speaking, all worship is dhikr and assimilated to invocation. It literally means “remembrance” and alludes to the phrases used as litanies for the remembrance of God.

20 Appendix 1, at the end of this work: Jean Gouillard, *Petite Philocalie de la prière du cœur*, Paris: Editions des Cahiers de Sud. 1953: Appendix 23

21 Ibid, p. 21

22 Ibid, p. 21

23 Ibid, p. 26

24 Ibid, p. 27

eyes, because the trouble will cease. If it doesn't, the invoker will speak with his tongue, "Allah sees me, Allah is present with me," (*Allâhu nâzhirî, Allâhu hadhirî*) three times."²⁵

Regarding "Nembutsu" in Zen Buddhism, "...The Nembutsu literally means, 'to think of the Buddha', and consists particularly in the recitation of the name of Amitâbha Buddha (o-mi-to-fo in Chinese).

Historically, we can trace the origin of the Nembutsu teaching in the very early days of Buddhism in India²⁶. In China the first known group of Nembutsu devotees was the White Lotus Society led by Hui-yüan (died 416). The gradual democratization of the Buddhist faith down through the successive dynasties favoured the spread of the Nembutsu all over China and alongside of the more aristocratic Zen. Superficially considered, the Nembutsu is the very opposite of Zen, for when Zen depends on nobody outside one's self, the Nembutsu puts its reliance exclusively on the Buddha. But when the psychology of the Nembutsu is analysed there is something in the recitation of the Buddha's name as practised by the Pure Land followers, which corresponds to the holding of a koan in Zen."²⁷

"...In the Nembutsu you can distinguish between that which is effective and that which is not. Why? If the devotee's invocation does not go farther than his lips while his mind is not at all thinking of the Buddha, this kind of invocation is not effective. If on the other hand his lips and his mind are conjointly working towards the Buddha as his name is recited, so that his mind always works in union with the Buddha, his Nembutsu will surely bring its result. Suppose here is a man carrying a rosary in his hand and reciting the Buddha's name with his lips; but if in the meantime his thoughts are all in confusion, running wild in every direction, he is the one whose invocation is on his lips only and not in his mind. He is uselessly fatiguing himself, his labour comes to naught. It is far better to be thinking of the Buddha in the mind even though the lips are not moving, for such is the real follower of the Nembutsu."²⁸

"...The mechanical repetition of the Nembutsu, that is, the rhythmic though monotonous utterance of the Buddha name, 'na-mu-a-mi-da-bu', 'na-mu-a-mi-da-bu'... over again and again, tens of thousands of times, creates a state of consciousness which tends to keep down all the ordinary functions of the mind. This state is very much akin perhaps to that of hypnotic trance, but fundamentally different from the latter in that what grows out of the Nembutsu consciousness is a most significant insight into the nature of Reality and has a most enduring and beneficial effect on the spiritual life of the devotee."²⁹

Even though there is a relationship between the 'Nembutsu' and the 'Prayer of the Heart' regarding the use of a short invocation which is repeatedly carried out and its location in the heart, in none of the consulted texts have we found any reference to the work with breathing.

Regarding the Japa in yoga or Japa-yoga, we don't find very precise information, but in general all the descriptions coincide in regards to the "mystical recitation" and that consists of the repetition (*abhyâsa*) of *mantras* according to certain rules. Many repeat the idea that in the case of the Japa, the mantra is the name of god, whatever it may be.

It seems to be an extremely ancient³⁰ practice that belongs to the first developments of yoga and that probably originated through the recitation of the Vedic texts, which required the maximum concentration, given that each sacred word had to be pronounced to perfection (*yajna*).

Some classical commentators interpret *svâdhyâya*³¹ in the *Yoga Sûtras of Patanjali*³², like the meditative recitation (*Japa*) of the sacred texts (*yoga sūtra II.32*) especially *Raja Bhoja* that exclusively identifies study with recitation.

25 Ibid, p. 25

26 Buddha, Siddhârtha Gautama (in [Pali](#), Siddattha Gotama), lived between the years 566 and 478 b.c.e. approximately

27 D.T. Suzuki, *Essays on Zen Buddhism* (second series), Editorial Kier, Argentina, 2007,

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid

30 Possibly dating back to the III or IV century BCE and may be the most ancient of these practices

31 Sva means "oneself" and adhyâya, "study", so the literal translation of *svâdhyâya* is "the study of oneself"

32 Patanjali; *Yoga Sûtras*; Indigo; Spain 2003

There is also coincidence between the different sources in that the Japa can be practised verbally or mentally. In the first case, the *mantra* can be whispered (*upâmshu*) or spoken out loud (*ucca, vâcika*). It is said that the whispered recitation is much better than the one spoken out loud, while the mental one (*manasah*) is in turn much better than the whispered one and is considered to be the most powerful.³³

In the *Goraksha Paddhati*³⁴ natural and spontaneous recitation caused by inhaling and exhaling known as *ajapa-gâyatri* is contemplated: *The vital breath exits the body with the sound ha and re-enters it with the sound sa. The vital breath continually recites the mantra "hamsa hamsa." When the practitioner commits themselves consciously to this recitation, "hamsa hamsa hamsa", it becomes "so'ham so'ham so'ham", in other words, "That is me, that is me, that is me."*

For his part, Mircea Eliade in "Yoga: immortality and freedom" points out:

"...Respiratory technique is also employed by Islamic mysticism (cf. I. Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam*, page. 164; M. M. Moreno, *Mística musulmana e mística indiana*, Annali Lateranensi, X (1946), pp. 102-212, especially pp. 140 ff; and particularly L. Gardet, *La mention du nom divine (Dhikr) dans la mystique musulmane*, Revue Thomiste, LII (1952), pp. 642-79; LIII (1953), pp. 197-216, a study that we use below, pp. 217 ff). Whatever the case may be in regard to the *origin* of this respiratory technique within the Islamic tradition, there is no doubt that certain Moslem mystics of India borrowed and practiced yogic exercises. (One of them, Prince Muhammad Dārā Shikoh, even attempted a synthesis of Indian and Islamic mysticism); c.f. M. Mahfuz-ul-Haq, ed. *Majma 'ul-Bahrain; or The Mingling of the Two Oceans*. The technique of dhikr sometimes bears striking formal resemblances to the Indian discipline of respiration."³⁵

It also says: "... Some of the ascetic preliminaries and methods of prayer employed by the Hesychastic monks offer points of resemblance with yogic techniques, especially with *prānāyāma*."³⁶

IV. Some extracts from "The Philokalia"³⁷

Regarding the Jesus Prayer³⁸

- According to Meyendorff, "In its primitive form the 'Jesus Prayer' seems in fact to be the "Kyrie eleison"³⁹ whose constant repetition in the eastern liturgies goes back to the Desert Fathers.⁴⁰
- The words of the formula may vary, but it is recommended to apply a brief and fixed formula. This goes by the name of "monological prayer".
- Adjusting the prayer to the rhythm of breathing, the intellect calms down, in finding "repose" (hesychia in Greek; from here derives the name "Hesychasm" given to this spiritual current of prayer.) The intellect is liberated from agitation of the external world, abandons multiplicity and dispersion, it is purified of disordered movement of thoughts, of images, of representations and of ideas. It turns inward and is unified while praying with the body and is embodied. In the depths of the heart, the intellect and the body re-find their original unity, human beings recover their "simplicity".
- Retaining breath, where possible, in order to not breathe too often... invoke the Lord Jesus with a fervent desire and, in patient expectation, abandon all thought.

33 Very similar comment to what we found both in the Dhikr and the Nembutsu

34 Manual of *hatha yoga* from the XII or XIII century

35 Mircea Eliade; *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*, translated by Willard Ropes Trask, Princeton University Press, 2009; page. 62-63.
<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=V07I6gThaV0C&pg=PP1&dq=yoga%3A%20immortality%20and%20freedom&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>

36 Ibid.

37 Lumen (Ed.), op. Cit.

38 Ibid.

39 Lord, have mercy.

40 St. Gregory Palamas and orthodox spirituality' by John Meyendorff, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1974.

Evagrius Pontikos (+ 399)^{41 42}

- Try to make your intellect deaf and dumb during prayer; you will then be able to pray.
- When you are praying, do not shape within yourself any image of the Deity, and do not let your intellect be stamped with the impress of any form; but approach the Immaterial in an immaterial manner, and then you will understand.
- Detach yourself from concern for the body when you pray: do not let the sting of a flea or a fly, the bite of a louse or a mosquito, deprive you of the fruits of your prayer.
- The monk becomes equal to the angels through prayer, because of his longing to ‘behold the face of the Father who is in heaven’. Never try to see a form or shape during prayer.
- Blessed is the intellect that during prayer is free from materiality and stripped of all possessions.
- So long as you give attention to the beauty of the body, and your intellect delights in the outside of the tabernacle, you have not yet perceived the realm of prayer and are still far from treading its blessed path.
- If when praying no other joy can attract you, then truly you have found prayer.

Nikiphoros, the Hesychast (second half of the 13th century)^{43 44 45}

- Seat yourself, then, concentrate your intellect, and lead it into the respiratory passage through which your breath passes into your heart. Put pressure on your intellect and compel it to descend with your inhaled breath into your heart. Once it has entered there, what follows will be neither dismal nor glum. Just as a man, after being far away from home, on his return is overjoyed at being with his wife and children again, so the intellect, once it is united with the soul, is filled with indescribable delight.

Therefore, brother, train your intellect not to leave your heart quickly, for at first it is strongly disinclined to remain constrained and circumscribed in this way. But once it becomes accustomed to remaining there, it can no longer bear to be outside the heart.

- If, then, after your first attempts you enter through your intellect into the abode of the heart in the way that I have explained, give thanks and glory to God, and exult in Him.
- Moreover, when your intellect is firmly established in your heart, it must not remain there silent and idle; it should constantly repeat and meditate on the prayer, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me’, and should never stop doing this. For this prayer protects the intellect from distraction, renders it impregnable to diabolic attacks, and every day increases its love and desire for God.

If, however, in spite of all your efforts you are not able to enter the realms of the heart in the way I have enjoined, do what I now tell you and with God’s help you will find what you seek. You know that everyone’s discursive faculty is centred in his breast; for when our lips are silent we speak and deliberate and formulate prayers, psalms and other things in our breast. Banish, then, all thoughts from this faculty – and you can do this if you want to – and in their place put

41 Evagrius Pontikos, died in 399 and originally came from Cappadocia. He was a disciple of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, living the last sixteen years of his life as a hermit. He headed one of the largest currents of Byzantine spirituality. John Climacus, Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian and the Hesychasts built on his work.

42 Lumen (Ed.), op. cit.

43 Nikiphoros the Solitary, also known as the Hagiorite, constitutes the first testimony accurately dated of the Jesus Prayer combined with a breathing technique. “Italian” in origin he passes to orthodoxy and embraces the hermetic lifestyle on Mount Athos. An opponent of the religious politician Michael VIII Palaiologos (1261-1282), he went into exile.

44 Lumen (Ed.), op. cit.,

45 At the end of this work, we include in appendix 2, the complete text of Nikiphoros extracted from “School Notebooks, editorial transmutación, Santiago de Chile, 1973

the prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me', and compel it to repeat this prayer ceaselessly. If you continue to do this for some time, it will assuredly open for you the entrance to your heart in the way we have explained, and as we ourselves know from experience.

Then, along with the attentiveness you have so wished for, the whole choir of the virtues – love, joy, peace and the others – will come to you. Through the virtues all your petitions will be answered in Christ Jesus our Lord...

St Symeon the New Theologian^{46 47}

- Now if you would like to learn also about the method of prayer, with God's help I will tell you about this too, in so far as I can. Above all else you should strive to acquire three things, and so begin to attain what you seek. The first is freedom from anxiety with respect to everything, whether reasonable or senseless – in other words, you should be dead to everything. Secondly, you should strive to preserve a pure conscience, so that it has nothing to reproach you with. Thirdly, you should be completely detached, so that your thoughts incline towards nothing worldly, not even your own body.

Then sit down in a quiet cell, in a corner by yourself, and do what I tell you. Close the door, and withdraw your intellect from everything worthless and transient. Rest your beard on your chest, and focus your physical gaze, together with the whole of your intellect, upon the centre of your belly or your navel.⁴⁸ Restrain the drawing-in of breath through your nostrils, so as not to breathe easily, and search inside yourself with your intellect so as to find the place of the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside. To start with you will find there darkness and an impenetrable density. Later, when you persist and practise this task day and night, you will find, as though miraculously, an unceasing joy. For as soon as the intellect attains the place of the heart, at once it sees things of which it previously knew nothing. It sees the open space within the heart and it beholds itself entirely luminous and full of discrimination. From then on, from whatever side a distractive thought may appear, before it has come to completion and assumed a form, the intellect immediately drives it away and destroys it with the invocation of Jesus Christ.

St Gregory of Sinai (1255–1346)^{49 50}

- Thus if we want to realize and know the truth and not to be led astray, let us seek to possess only the heart-engrafted energy in a way that is totally without shape or form, not trying to contemplate in our imagination what we take to be the figure or similitude of things holy or to see any colours or lights. For in the nature of things the spirit of delusion deceives the intellect through such spurious fantasies, especially at the early stages, in those who are still inexperienced. On the contrary, let our aim be to make the energy of prayer alone active in our hearts, for it brings warmth and joy to the intellect, and sets the heart alight with an ineffable love for God and man. It is on account of this that humility and contrition flow richly from prayer. For prayer in beginners is the unceasing noetic activity of the Holy Spirit. To start with it rises like a fire of joy from the heart; in the end it is like light made fragrant by divine energy⁵¹.
- Sitting from dawn on a seat about nine inches high, compel your intellect to descend from your head into your heart, and retain it there. Keeping your head forcibly bent downwards, and

46 The essay could be of a contemporary of Nikiphoros or even Nikiphoros himself.

47 Lumen (Ed.), op. cit.

48 Translator's note: The previous two sentences are somehow much shorter in the Spanish original of this work. I've kept the expanded version here.

49 Originally from Asia Minor, for much of his life he did no more than a series of pilgrimages that led him from Klazomenai to Laodicea, to Cyprus, to Sinai, from whence his name and to Crete where the Hesychast, Arsenios, would discover the prayer of the spirit

50 Lumen (Ed.), op. cit.,

51 This metaphor was previously used by John Climacus and then by Nikiphoros, the solitary.

suffering acute pain in your chest, shoulders and neck, persevere in repeating noetically or in your soul 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy'.

- Restrain your breathing, so as not to breathe unimpeded.
- Isaiah the Solitary is one of many who affirm that when praying you have to restrain your breath.
- Another writer says that in a monk mindfulness of God ought to take the place of breathing, while another declares that the love of God acts as a brake on his outbreathing. St Symeon the New Theologian tells us, 'Restrain the drawing-in of breath through your nostrils, so as not to breathe easily';

Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos (end of the 14th Century)^{52 53}

- After sunset, having asked the help of the all-merciful and all-powerful Lord Jesus Christ, sit you down on a low stool in your quiet and dimly lit cell, collect your mind from its customary circling and wandering outside, and quietly lead it into the heart by way of breathing, keeping this prayer: 'Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!' connected with the breath. In this way, in conjunction with breathing, you introduce into the heart the words of the prayer, as Hesychius says: 'Connect with your breathing sobriety, the name of Jesus, an unfailling memory of death and humility; for all these bring great profit'
- Know, brother, that every means or method, every rule and, if you like, all these various practices are established and legalised because we cannot as yet pray purely and without distraction.
- In prayer, that is, in constant remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ, quietly led into the heart by way of breathing and again led out, with closed lips, without any extraneous thought or imagining.
- Incessant prayer within the heart and all that follows beyond this is not reached by simple happening or by short and easy work.

St. Nikodimus of the Holy Mountain (1749–1809)^{54 55}

- Why the spirit enters the heart

...The intellect, once in the heart, does not remain solely in contemplation alone. Here it will find reason, the inner voice thanks to which we reason and compose works, we judge, we examine and read entire books in silence, without our mouths proffering even a single word. Let your intellect then, having found the inner verb, only allow it to pronounce the short monological prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!"

But this is not enough. You must also set in motion the strength of volition of your soul, in other words, say this prayer with your entire will, with all your might, with all your love. More clearly, let your inner verb apply its attention, as much on its mental view as on its mental sound, to these unique words and better still, on the meaning of the words. Thus, remaining without images, or figures, without imagining or thinking about anything else, of the senses or the intellect, external or internal, something good will be produced. Because God is beyond all senses and intellect. Therefore, the intellect that wants to be united with God through prayer must leave behind senses and intellect and transcend them to obtain divine union. Here are the words of the Divine Nilus (Evagrius): "In Prayer, do not imagine the divinity, don't let your

52 Monks from the Monastery of Xanthopolous. Callistus was the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1397 for one month under the name Callistus II. They are the authors of "Directions to Hesychasts, in a hundred chapters" which is reproduced in the Philokalia.

53 Lumen (Ed.), op. cit.,

54 Theologian, compiler and translator was, at the end of the 18th century together with St Makarios of Corinth, a driver of the spiritual renaissance in the heart of orthodoxy. He wrote the preface and notes of the Philokalia.

55 Lumen (Ed.), op. cit.

intellect suffer the imprint of any form whatsoever, remain instead, immaterial in front of the immaterial and you will understand.”

- Reasons why one should hold ones breath during prayer.

Given that your intellect – the act of your spirit – has the habit of expanding and dispersing over objects of the senses and external in the world, it’s necessary that on speaking this holy prayer, you don’t continually breath as one is naturally accustomed to do. Retain your breath, until your inner voice has said the prayer. Then breathe the way the Fathers teach.

... such is, in summary... the celebrated prayer to which the Holy Fathers gave the name of mental and heartfelt prayer. If you wish to know more, read the book of the Holy Philokalia, the treatise of Saint Nicephoros, the speech of Gregory of Salonica about the Holy Hesychasts and the One Hundred chapters of Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos.

... If it is impossible due to concerns and troubles of this world, dedicate yourself to it permanently, fix at least one or two hours, preferably in the evening and in a peaceful and dark place, to consecrate yourself to this holy and spiritual occupation

V. Silo: The asking

In a speech on the 7th of May 2005, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Park of Study and Reflection La Reja, Silo outlined this brief recommendation, known as “the asking”, which is supported by breathing⁵⁶.

“...Since today we are holding this celebration - and in some celebrations people exchange gifts - I would like to give you a present. Then certainly, it will be up to you to decide whether it merits your acceptance. It consists, in fact, of the easiest and most practical recommendation I am able to offer. It is almost like a recipe from a cook book, but I trust you will be able to go beyond simply what is indicated by the words...

In some moment of the day or night, inhale a breath of air and imagine that you direct this air to your heart. Then, ask with strength for yourself and for your loved ones. Ask with strength to move away from all that brings you contradiction; ask for your life to have unity. Don't take a lot of time in this brief prayer, this brief asking, because it is enough that you interrupt for one brief moment what is happening in your life for this contact with your interior to give clarity to your feelings and your ideas.

To move away from contradiction is the same as to overcome hate, resentment, the desire for vengeance. To move away from contradiction is to cultivate the desire to reconcile with others and with one self. To move away from contradiction is to forgive and to make amends twice-over for every wrong that you have inflicted on others.

This is the appropriate attitude to cultivate. So that in the measure that time passes you will understand that what is most important is achieving a life of internal unity. This will bear fruit when what you think, feel and do goes in the same direction. Life grows thanks to its internal unity and it disintegrates because of contradiction. It happens then, that what you do does not remain inside of you, but also reaches others. Therefore, when you help others to overcome pain and suffering you make your life grow and you contribute to the world. Inversely, when you increase the suffering in others, you cause your own life to disintegrate and you poison the world. And who should you help? Firstly, those that are closest to you, but your action will not end with them.

Learning does not stop with this “recipe” rather it begins. This “recipe” says that you have to ask; but who do you ask? Depending on what you believe it may be your internal god, or your guide or an inspiring and comforting image. Finally, if you don't have someone to ask you also won't have someone to give to, and so my gift will not merit your acceptance.

⁵⁶ Silo, Text can be found at www.silo.net

Later on you may reflect on what is explained in the Message; in its Book, in its Path and in its Experience. Also you will then be able to count on true companions with whom you can begin a new life.

In this simple asking is also a meditation that gives direction to one's own life. And this asking and this meditation go on gaining force so as to be able to transform the situations of daily life.

Advancing in this way perhaps one day you will grasp a signal; a signal that sometimes presents itself with errors and sometimes with accuracy. A signal that is like a gentle hint but, which, in rare moments of one's life erupts as a sacred fire giving rise to the rapture of lovers, to the inspiration of artists and to the ecstasies of mystics. It is useful to note that religions as much as works of art and life's great inspirations all arise from there. They are all different translations of this same signal but there is no reason to believe that these translations faithfully represent the world which they translate. This signal in your consciousness is the translation into images of that which has no images. It is the contact with the Profound in the human mind, an unfathomable depth where space is infinite and time is eternal.

At some moments in history an outcry arises; a heart-breaking asking coming from individuals and from nations. Then, from the Profound a signal arrives. May this signal be translated with kindness in these times, may it be translated to surpass pain and suffering - because behind this signal are blowing the winds of great change."

We can see that "the asking" is proposed as a simple, daily procedure that leaves the possibility open that in working with it and deepening we are set on the road towards the profound and the transcendental experience, explained by Silo as, "...perhaps one day you will grasp a signal, ... A signal that is like a gentle hint but, which, in rare moments of one's life erupts as a sacred fire", adding "...This signal in your consciousness is the translation into images of that which has no images. It is the contact with the Profound in the human mind, an unfathomable depth where space is infinite and time is eternal."

Other interesting aspects in this proposal are:

In relation to the time that is required to carry it out, it is simplified, approaching the possibility of its practice, when it is explained that it is sufficient to interrupt your activities for an instant, of the day or the night, without dedicating much time to this brief prayer...

As we said previously, the procedure is a process: "...Learning does not stop with this "recipe" rather it begins," and it is said that the asking can gradually gain strength in the transformation of daily life.

An image of who to ask is not imposed and it is left open so that, according to the belief or facility of each one, it may be to "your internal god, or your guide or an inspiring and comforting image." It is also important what Silo indicates regarding, "if you don't have someone to ask you also won't have someone to give to, and so my gift will not merit your acceptance," thereby marking an important condition with respect to the attitude required in these works.

Together with the personal direction towards internal unity—that will be achieved in agreement between thought, feeling and action—one is driven in a direction towards others and to help them in their overcoming of pain and suffering.

Finally, there is another element that, even if it isn't in the text, is observed as a constant in the opportunities in which as a group (many times with Silo present) askings have been made and it is that, simultaneously on inhaling a breath of air and imagining that it is brought to the heart, a hand is placed on the heart, with a soft pressure on it, a register that significantly helps the practice.

VI. Regarding the practice of the Prayer of the Heart

In this chapter, in five points (the condition, the Purpose; the emotional charge; the practice and the registers), we order some elements that we consider useful in order to advance in the work with the Prayer of the Heart. On one hand we take texts quoted from the Philokalia; on the other, comments

from Silo about this practice⁵⁷ and also personal comments and comments by others who have practised with this procedure.

1. The condition

The Philokalia:

- Detach yourself from concern for the body when you pray: do not let the sting of a flea or a fly, the bite of a louse or a mosquito, deprive you of the fruits of your prayer.
- Then sit down in a quiet cell, in a corner by yourself, and do what I tell you. Close the door, and withdraw your intellect...
- Sitting from dawn on a seat about nine inches high, compel your intellect to descend from your head into your heart, and retain it there.
- After sunset, having asked the help of the all-merciful and all-powerful Lord Jesus Christ, sit you down on a low stool in your quiet and dimly lit cell, collect your mind from its customary circling and wandering outside,

Silo:

- If you are paying attention to the body you cannot "fly" ...
- The body's translations are bothersome, so we have to find the best conditions that will allow us to "slip" inside.
- The other point is that of the position of the body. You will have to see if it is the body that expels you, due to physical, not psychological, restlessness.
- You must pass through trance to enter, this is the rule. The trance is the doorway, with different procedures ... it's a good idea to know how to manage it. At the basis of the trance is the displacement of the I. We are interested in the procedures; one procedure is not the same as another.

Other comments:

- The time and place of your practice is immaterial, but it is important not to be interrupted by external stimuli or signals from the body.
- The attitude is one of "internal humility" and of valuing each advance, however small it may be.
- A good condition in these practices is to prepare oneself every time "as if it were the last time."
- Clearly it is the body that brings you back, so we'll have to see how to stop the body from producing signals.

2. The Purpose

The Philokalia:

- The monk becomes equal to the angels through prayer, because of his longing to 'behold the face of the Father who is in heaven'. Never try to see a form or shape during prayer.
- If you ardently long to attain the wondrous divine illumination of our Saviour Jesus Christ; to experience in your heart the supra-celestial fire and to be consciously reconciled with God; to dispossess yourself of worldly things in order to find and possess the treasure hidden in the

⁵⁷ These comments of Silo have been extracted from minutes and notes of meetings in which he referred to this subject. The vast majority of them are useful for all Ascesis work.

field of your heart; to enkindle here and now your soul's flame and to renounce all that is only here and now; and spiritually to know and experience the kingdom of heaven within you.⁵⁸

Silo:

- The first question is about the search: what is your objective? You can put into the Purpose many small Purposes, interests. It is a process of profound transformation, it is internal work.
- If you want to elevate yourself, to ascend, you must ascertain your Purpose. Without this Purpose you will not even enter, nothing [will happen]. Instead, if the Purpose is clear in all its power, it invades the different levels of consciousness, it works copresently. For this to happen it is necessary for this Purpose to have a certain charge. If the charge is there and it has taken root, the Purpose is operating, even when you're not paying attention. For us, certain phenomena of attention keep working, keep moving. An example: you have to get to your friend Antonio's place, you know where he lives, and after going there once or twice you don't pay attention any more, you're on auto pilot. You've set a direction in motion, the autopilot is very extraordinary.
- As the Buddhists would say, if your practice goes in one direction the Purpose is being charged. Let it be on automatic! When you've developed the Purpose it will operate on automatic thanks to the practice in a given direction and the charge that direction has.
- The Purpose is the key to this question. You have to charge the copresence so that it works by itself, just like a wheel that "prays by itself."
- The Purpose will be the same for everyone, to enter Nirvana, the profound spaces: "nirvana" without time or space. Whichever way you enter, we are all going to the same entry point.

Other comments:

- Without the Purpose the techniques are empty practices.
- The Purpose is the autopilot that guides me in the Profound, without the Purpose there is no way to guide and orientate oneself.
- The Purpose is perfectible and can continue to be improved in the process.

3. The Charge of Affection

The Philokalia:

- Invoke the Lord Jesus with a fervent desire and, in patient expectation, abandon all thought.
- But this is not enough. You must also set in motion the strength of volition of your soul, in other words, say this prayer with your entire will, with all your might, with all your love. More clearly, let your inner voice apply its attention, as much on its mental view as on its mental sound, to these unique words and better still, on the meaning of the words.

Silo:

- This thing you're trying to do: when do you do it? In your spare time or, are you someone who has been poisoned with persistence? We are talking about power of affection, affection set in motion. Before we attempt to fix the attention we need to see whether our intent has a charge of affection. But it is not only the technique that will carry me, it is my affection. Nobody can get into this work without something, or a power of affection, otherwise after two hours you get bored. Strength, brightness and permanence in an image have to do with the charge of affection. See the affectionate intensity of this Purpose. Can your Purpose be replaced, or is it

something irreplaceable, almost obsessive? Do you experience it as necessary or is it just a wish or something interesting?

- So, if I have a Purpose and a set of techniques, I should review and comprehend how much force or intensity of affection there is in all of this. That's the measure. This isn't about how much I practice, rather, if I'm adequately mobilising it, how I place myself.
- When we talk about rooting the Purpose, how do you do it? With an affectionate charge. A sexual charge is not enough. It must be with an affectionate charge. In the mystics we see the need to fuse with the Divinity. Their affectionate charge is very strong and obsessive. It's kind of related to when you've fallen strongly in love and you feel the need to see her or him.
- If we are talking about that affectionate pathway, we need a strength that affection gives you. In order to produce the spark and break through the barrier connecting to another level of consciousness, you will have to put to work a strong affectionate force of the heart.
- The "affection" gives you the "power", for the "spark." The asceticism to enter another world is carried out with this "power"...
- In the Prayer of the Heart one finds the energetic thing and a devotional work that puts us in contact with the phenomenon of the charge of affection. This interesting phenomenon of fixing the attention so that it produces effects, when you have enough energy, will allow you to enter. It has an energetic component.

Other comments:

- It is not a routine and it is appropriate to look for moments of inspiration and necessity. It is not a routine practice, but one of inspiration and not done against the grain.
- The devotional attitude is a condition that certainly makes the practice easier and well loved.
- The Purpose has to be a strong image with greatly charged affection, it is not for show.
- The states of "necessity" or "failure" are the most appropriate ones for achieving the charge.

4. The Technique

The Philokalia:

- The words of the formula may vary, but it is recommended to apply a brief and fixed formula. This goes by the name of "monological prayer".
- Adjusting the prayer to the rhythm of breathing, the intellect calms down, in finding "repose"
- Retaining breath, where possible, in order to not breathe too often
- Seat yourself, then, concentrate your intellect, and lead it into the respiratory passage through which your breath passes into your heart. Put pressure on your intellect and compel it to descend with your inhaled breath into your heart.
- Therefore, brother, train your intellect not to leave your heart quickly, for at first it is strongly disinclined to remain constrained and circumscribed in this way. But once it becomes accustomed to remaining there, it can no longer bear to be outside the heart.
- In prayer, that is, in constant remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ, quietly led into the heart by way of breathing and again led out, with closed lips, without any extraneous thought or imagining.
- ...The intellect, once in the heart, does not remain solely in contemplation alone. Here it will find reason, the inner voice thanks to which we reason and compose works, we judge, we examine and read entire books in silence, without our mouths proffering even a single word.

Let your intellect then, having found the inner verb, only allow it to pronounce the short monological prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!"

Silo:

- Verbalizations reinforced by the air pressing into the heart is a very comprehensive pill for striking where you need to strike.
- It is particularly important to force the breath to go to the heart. It is not simply to inhale and exhale, but to force the air movement towards the heart, trying to keep it there... The intention is to bring the air in and keep it there.
- In addition, experiencing great solitude is a strange phenomenon in this work. By forcing the air to remain, you end up having the register of solitude, of the black moon.
- So attention is the key and there is a whole method for maintaining this impassive attention: a method which is very precise in its language. So the first point is not to breathe fully. If you breathe serenely you cannot do what you want. And nobody worries about the exhalation. If you exhale fast you get tetany, you start to see lights. But we say that it's through inhalation, that this is what interests us, it should not be comfortable. And no one dies, because if you overdo it, you faint.
- Breathing is very important. You get pulled out because your breathing has not been educated. I inflate my lungs and let the air out slowly, or so many inhalations and so many exhalations. It is an automatic process to inhale, hold it a bit and let it out gently. For this to become fairly automatic it should be practiced quite a lot.
- The entrance is through the coenesthetic register. If, for example, I use the (charged) word "Lord" (complex copresence, with meaning): I bring it towards the inside, so that it connects to the coenaesthesia of the "heart", towards the interior of my space of representation. It is affected by the emotions: the heart, the breathing—which correspond to the emotions; concomitances, breathing and the heart. It becomes central: "Lord" (eliminating all distractions, no external elements should get in, and at a certain point you pass into another internal space-time). Catch the rhythm to be in it. We are in the technology of entering and repetition helps us be able to pass through that door into another space-time. We have to find the rhythm of a metronome, in some cases it may be the breathing. The thing is that nothing else from this world should get in...

Other comments:

- The technique is interesting insofar as recording a mechanism, but nothing is done with just the technique. The Purpose and the strength of affection are fundamental.
- One has to "gather" everything and carry it to the heart together with the breathing. At one point I locate myself "from within" (in my space of representation at the level of the heart).

5. The Registers

The Philokalia:

- Blessed is the intellect that during prayer is free from materiality and stripped of all possessions.
- When you are praying, do not shape within yourself any image of the Deity, and do not let your intellect be stamped with the impress of any form; but approach the Immaterial in an immaterial manner, and then you will understand.
- Thus if we want to realize and know the truth and not to be led astray, let us seek to possess only the heart-engrafted energy in a way that is totally without shape or form, not trying to

contemplate in our imagination what we take to be the figure or similitude of things holy or to see any colours or lights. For in the nature of things the spirit of delusion deceives the intellect through such spurious fantasies, especially at the early stages, in those who are still inexperienced.

- The intellect is liberated from agitation of the external world, abandons multiplicity and dispersion, it is purified of disordered movement of thoughts, of images, of representations and of ideas. It turns inward and is unified while praying with the body and is embodied. In the depths. Of the heart, the intellect and the body re-find their original unity, human beings recover their "simplicity".
- Thus, remaining without images, or figures, without imagining or thinking about anything else, of the senses or the intellect, external or internal, something good will be produced. Because God is beyond all senses and intellect. Therefore, the intellect that wants to be united with God through prayer must leave behind senses and intellect and transcend them to obtain divine union.

Silo:

- But by cleansing yourself of all data from memory, avoiding images, you may also get to the "other world". Worlds of Meanings, not of images.
- The register is that there is nothing and yet, "something is breathing by its own nature." You can't confuse the register with the interpretation. This must be differentiated, it is a subtlety. It is an act that remains suspended. Time and space are given in the "I", so the images tend to disappear and go somewhere "else"; you remain in the "void" with its own dynamics. Coenesthetic registers without translation (dynamic void).
- Phenomenological epoché⁵⁹, remaining in suspension is the point, not so much the interpretation. The "I", staying suspended, having a register. *Ataraxia*⁶⁰ or impassivity in front of the landscape, neutral affection, you don't pay any attention to translations, to the illusory. One aims towards a Purpose, in a direction. The Purpose guides us!
- The mental placement is to not pay attention to the phenomena thing (mara⁶¹), you continue, otherwise you will stay in the memory or in the representation, in the intermediate level. But you cannot avoid the mechanisms of the "I", that is the main point. Landscapes are translations, the first rule is to not put the attention there, and the second rule is to not try to recognise what's happening. You cannot reflect like that. Keep entering into the Nothing-is-happening! It is interesting to enter this silence, this nothingness. You won't do it through mechanisms, but instead it will happen for moments.
- There comes a time when you feel something like an impact and enter into the "nothing." You do not know whether It happened or not. The feeling is of having brushed against something or having reached a special inspiration. And the translations that have appeared in some cases, don't go through there, by way of translations.
- There is very little memory for recovering what happened, so it is a very good idea to write down whatever representations arose immediately after finishing the experience.

Other comments:

- The "I" has no way of structuring what is experienced. If we refer to it as "the unnameable" it is because when I try to name it I get out of the state.

⁵⁹ Translator's note: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epoch%C3%A9>

⁶⁰ Ataraxia (from the Greek Ἀταραξία "tranquillity"): serenity and imperturbability and in common language it also means indifference.

⁶¹ "Mara" refers to the dark presence that tried to stop Siddharta Gautama from reaching illumination.

VII. Final synthesis and conclusions

We take from Silo, the last chapters of “Psychology IV” in his book “Psychology Notes” regarding the displacement of the “I”, suspension of the I and access to profound levels.

Here are described the trance states that occur from the internalisation of the I and its subsequent displacement and substitution by other entities, indicating that this may be verified in various cults such as voodoo; the macumba; Indian techniques such as the yantras and mantras; spirit currents and hypnotic trance.

It goes on to explain that it is possible to overcome the displacements and substitutions of the I in order to end up producing a suspension of the activity of the I.

Subsequently, referring now to the accessing of profound levels, he says, “it is possible to arrive at the mental situation of suppressing the ‘I’, not in everyday life but in specific conditions that start from the suspension of the ‘I,’” clarifying later about this state of suppression of the I, “continuing in the deepening of the suspension until achieving the register of “emptiness” signifies that nothing should appear as a representation, or as a register of internal sensations. There should not, and cannot be a register of this mental situation.”⁶²

Silo highlights the theme of the Purpose as a prior condition for the experience as without an appropriate preparation thereof it will not be possible to count on either the necessary energy or permanence. He considers the Purpose as the direction of the entire process, with it operating copresently.

Furthermore he also explains how historically we find procedures in order to seek the suspension of the I and access to profound levels and he refers to certain advanced practices of yoga and the Prayer of the Heart.

It is in this context that we have studied the background to the latter in the texts that recount the works and experiences of the Desert Fathers and the monks of Mount Athos, just as we sought similarities in other practices such as the Dhikr in Islam, the Nembutsu in Zen Buddhism and the Japa in Yoga.

In reviewing “The Philokalia, of the Jesus Prayer” we find that several monks are aware of important experiences that reveal their access to what Silo calls “profound levels”, describing in detail the conditions, mechanisms and registers.

For his part, Silo in his explanations about “the asking” gives clear indications of a work in the same direction, making possible a simple daily practice that can progressively gain in depth.

In the final part we gather the different sources (The Philokalia, Comments by Silo and personal experiences), points that may help to work and go deeper in this practice.

So, from what we have seen, it seems that the “Prayer of the Heart” is indeed a possible procedure to enter into the search for contact with the Profound, above all for those who recognise a “devotional” component in their way of approaching these spaces of the mind, attending in turn to the recommendation that Silo gives in “The Asking”: “...*but who do you ask? Depending on what you believe: it may be your internal god, or your guide or an inspiring and comforting image.*”

Finally, it is important to underline that it is definitely the rooting of the Purpose and the affection committed to the search which are the conditions that, beyond procedures and practices, lead us to this “*contact with the Profound in the human mind, an unfathomable depth where space is infinite and time is eternal.*”

62 Silo, Psychology Notes,

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Translation: Not found, translated especially for this English translation from the French.

Lumen (Ed.). (1996); *La Filocalia, de la Oración de Jesús*; Argentina.

Translation: The Philokalia extends to five volumes, only four of which have been published in English. This text is available online and has been translated by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware.

Some of the text of the fifth volume can be found in "Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart, translated by E Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer.

Remaining quotes from St Nikodimus have been translated from the Spanish Lumen Edition.

Patanjali (2003); Yoga Sutras; España; Indigo, clásicos esotéricos.

The translation and the original Spanish comes from this online source <http://www.consciouslivingfoundation.org/ebooks/new8/Patanjali%20-%20Yoga%20Sutra%20-%20InSpanish.pdf>

Patria Grande (Ed.). (2005); *Relatos de un peregrino ruso*; Buenos Aires.

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Translation: Psychology Notes, www.silo.net.

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Translation: The speech by Silo on the 7th of May 2005 can be found on www.silo.net.

Suzuki, D.T. (2007); *Ensayos sobre Budismo Zen (segunda serie)*; Argentina: Editorial Kier.

Translation: Essays in Zen Buddhism: (second series). Version online found at: <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:zJAVz9i1zsAJ:www.scribd.com/doc/172991191/Suzuki-The-Zen-Koan+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk>

APPENDICES

Appendix 1:**23.- Appendix⁶³****A SUFI TECHNIQUE FOR THE PRAYER OF THE HEART**

The following text is taken from the "Tanwîr alqulûb" (3rd edition, Cairo, P.548-558) by Sheikh Muhammad Amîn al-Kurdî al-Shâfi'i al-Naqshabandî, deceased 1332 after Hijra (1914)⁶⁴.

Its presence here is not that of an hors d'oeuvre. None of the Christian texts that we possess can rival it in regards to its didactic nature, its extension and the precision of its details. Its symbolic topography of the centres will be able to clarify the notion—vague in pseudo-Symeon—of the exploration of the heart; its breathing technique is more thorough. On the other hand, it offers numerous impressive parallels with the Christian tradition, especially regarding the idea of death and the absolute need for a Master.

These findings do not claim to conceal the Hermeticism of some aspects or to minimise the differences. But it is difficult not to consider that either there is a distant common origin regarding methods, or more simply that the multiple verification of an identical psychological law naturally exercised in a few given circumstances.

When we procured this text, we were as yet unaware of the text by M. L. Gardet "On the divine name in Islamic mysticism", Revue Thomiste, 1952, 642s which constitutes a particularly informed guide to this subject that is so little studied.

Section about the inner dhikr or the one practised in the heart (adh-dhikru-l-qalbî), which is superior to the vocal dhikr (adh-dhikru-l-jahrî).

Know that the dhikr is practised in two ways: with the heart and with the tongue. Each one of these forms has its legal basis in the Qur'an and in the Sunnah.

The *dhikr* with the tongue, comprising a word composed of sounds and letters, cannot be practised at any moment. Commercial and similar activities necessarily thwart it, unlike the *dhikr* of the heart because this *dhikr* considers the meaning of the word without any pronunciation of letters and sounds, thus, there is no impediment to whoever invokes it internally.

Verse

Invoke Allah in the heart, in a secret
that creatures do not know, illiterate and without voice!
This *dhikr* is the best of all incantations.
It is from whence comes the glory of spiritual men.

This is why our Naqshbandi Masters preferred the *dhikr* practised with the heart, because the heart is "the place where Allah looks", the Master of forgiveness; it is the "seat of Faith" as well as the "mine of secrets" and the "source of lights"; when it is healthy, the whole body is healthy and when it is corrupted it corrupts the whole body, as the chosen Prophet has explained to us. The servant is only a believer through the engagement of the heart which demands faith, and an act of worship only qualifies as such through appropriate intention. Religious leaders agree that the actions of limbs are only accepted through the action of the heart but, on the other hand, the action of the heart can be

63 Appendix from "Petite Philocalie de la prière du coeur", translated and presented by Jean Guillard (first edition in French in 1953, Editions des Cahiers de Sud). Translated from the French by Tony Robinson.

64 We are profoundly grateful to the two benevolent collaborators for their courtesy and disinterest: we are referring to the transcriber and the French translator (an Islamic theologian) for the text we are talking about.

accepted without actions of the limbs; also teaching that if actions of the heart are not accepted, the faith will not be accepted.

Faith (*Iman*) is the sincere adhesion of the heart, Allah said, “He has written faith in their hearts” (Qur’an 58, 22)⁶⁵. He said, “Those are the ones whose hearts has Allah tested for piety” (Qur’an 49, 3) and also, “Bring thy Lord to remembrance in thy soul,” (Qur’an 7, 205) in other words “in your heart,” an interpretation that is supported by another verse, “They say in their souls: If Allah does not punish us because of what we say.” (Qur’an 58, 9)⁶⁶.

The poet Akhtal said:

“In truth, the word is in the heart
and the tongue has only been put as evidence against the heart”

Allah said, “Call upon your Lord in humility and privately” (Qur’an 7, 55).

Aisha—may it please Allah!—reports that the Prophet—Allah’s prayers and salutations be upon him!—said, “The *dhikr* is 70 times more powerful than the *dhikr* (in other words, the secret *dhikr* is superior to the spoken *dhikr*). On the day of Resurrection, Allah will call the creatures to account and the guardian angels will come with what they have observed and written. Allah will say, “Look, does there remain something in favour of my servant?” The angels will respond, “We have forgotten nothing of what we have learned and retained, because we have accounted for everything and written it down.” Allah will say to the servant, “There remains one more thing with Me, and I shall reward thee: it is the secret *dhikr* (*adh-dhikru-l-khafī*).”

Likewise it is reported in the authentic hadith that Allah—praise be unto him!—said, ‘I am near to the thought of Me, My servant, and I am with him as he remembers Me (*dhakaranī*). And if he remembers Me in his heart, I also remember him in My heart, and if he remembers Me in assembly I remember him in assembly, better than his.’ Another hadith of the Little Collection (*Al-Jaami’ al-Saghīr*) of al-Suyuti says, “The best *dhikr* is the secret *dhikr*, and the greatest wealth is that which suffices.” Another hadith says, “The *dhikr* that the guardian angels do not hear is 70 times superior to the one they hear.” This hadith that dates back to Aisha is reported by Al-Bayhaqi who said, “This hadith is considered good” (in respect to its authenticity). Ultimately the hadiths related to the merits of the secret *dhikr* are many.

One commentator has said regarding the verse (Qur’an 35, 29), “There are servants who are unjust to their souls,” they are the invokers by tongue alone! “And there are those well directed,” those who invoke from the heart! “And there are those servants who do well in advance,” they are those who forget not their Lord (so that they don’t have to recollect Him through the *dhikr*)!

One of the Knowledgeable (al-Arifun) declared, “The *dhikr* with the heart is the sword of aspirants, (*saifu al-murīdin*), this is what they fight their enemies with and what they use to repel the calamities that these enemies want to inflict on them. Truly, when misfortune attacks the servant and he flees with his heart towards Allah, Allah soon eliminates everything that afflicts the servant.”

The Prophet—Allah’s prayers and salutations be upon him—said, “When Allah wants good for someone, he opens the lock of the heart to him and places certainty there.”

Sheikh Abu Said al-Kharraz said, “When Allah wishes to befriend one of His servants, He opens for him the door of His *dhikr* and when he delights in the *dhikr*, He opens for him the gate of Proximity. Then He raises him into the gatherings of Intimacy. Then He settles him upon the throne of Unity. Then He lifts the veil from him and leads him into the Abode of Unicity and reveals for him the divine Splendour and Majesty. When his regard falls upon the divine splendour and majesty, he remains “without himself” (*bi-lā huwa*). Thereupon His servant is entirely extinguished for a time and enters into divine protection, free from any pretensions of his self.”

⁶⁵ All quotes from the Qur’an come from www.quran.com and the Sahih International translation.

⁶⁶ Translation note: Here the French original refers to section 58,9 but this might be a typing error in the original text. It could be that the quote is from the Quran 9:85 but neither sections seem to reflect what this text is saying.

Khalid ibn Ma'dân said, "Every man has two eyes in his head, with which he may see the things of this world, and two eyes in his heart with which he may see the other world. If Allah wishes good for a servant, he opens the eyes of his heart so that His servant may see all that He promised him and which is not here; and if Allah wishes otherwise, He leaves him in the state he found him."

Ahmed ben Khidrawâih said, "Hearts are vessels, if they are filled with truth, the surplus of their light pours over the limbs and if they are filled with error, over their limbs pours the surplus of their darkness."

Dhul-Nun al-Misri said, "Reconciliation from the heart during one hour is better than the religious works of two species endowed with seriousness (jinn and men). If the angel doesn't enter into a house where an image is found (as a hadith said), how will the Witness of God enter into the heart that contains the traits of someone other than him?"

One of the spiritual men said, "An atom of work from hearts is more worthy than mountains of work of limbs."

SECTION ON THE DHIKR METHOD OF THE NAQSHABANDI MASTERS

Know that the *dhikr* of the heart (*adh-dhikru-l-qalbî*) is practised in two ways:

1. With the Name of the Supreme Essence (*Ismu-dh-Dhât*), or
2. With the formula of denial and affirmation (*an-naf yu wa-l-ithhât*).

The Name of Essence is Allah. (In this respect of pure designation of Self), Allah said, "Indeed, I am Allah," (Qur'an 20, 14). Also (regarding the direct and precise use of this name as a means of *dhikr*) he has said, "Say, 'Allah!' Then leave them in their empty discourse," (Qur'an 6, 91).

Verse:

Say, "Allah" and leave the universe and what it contains,
 If you desire to attain universality!
 Because everything besides Allah, if you do things well,
 Is pure nothingness, be it taken analytically or synthetically.
 Know that you and all the worlds,
 Without Him, are lost without a trace!
 He who is not aware of himself
 Without Him it is pure impossibility.
 The Knowledgeable who are extinguished in Him,
 Know nothing other than the All-Powerful,
 He who transcends the transcendence,
 And he who is "other-than-him", they see him unconscious
 As much in the present as in the past and the future."

The *dhikr* of the heart has eleven rules:

- 1st The state of ritual purity (*at-tahârah*) obtained through ablution, by the word of the Prophet—Allah's prayers and salutations be upon him—"ablution (*al-wud'û*) erases the sins."
- 2nd The accomplishment of a prayer worth two *rak'ah*.
- 3rd Orientation with the face turned towards *qibla* (ritual direction towards Mecca, place of the House of Allah, the *Ka'abah*) while standing in a solitary place, in accordance with the prophetic words, "The

best position is that where one stands oriented towards *qiblah*” and also to the teaching given by the Prophet to Ali: “You must continually practise the *dhikr* in solitude (*al-khalwah*).”

4th The position supported on the other side from that on which one supports oneself in the rite of prayer (sitting on the heel of the right foot turned towards the inside while the left foot remains to the side supported on the tips of the toes and with the heel straightened). Such is the position observed by the companions of the Prophet—Allah's prayers and salutations be upon him! This position is more conducive to the state of humility and more favourable to the concentration of the senses.

5th The request for forgiveness (*al-istighfar*) for all one's sins, making a synthetic review within oneself, with the awareness that Allah sees the being and doesn't cease to observe; as well as representing the immensity and majesty of Allah, as well as the severity of His grasp and of His reducing power and at the same time one banishes all one's mundane thoughts. One feels the fear in front of the Lord, and asks for forgiveness, knowing well that He is generous and forgiving. It is in this state that one says with the tongue: *Astaghfirullah*, “I seek forgiveness from Allah,” and at the same time one considers the meaning of these words with the heart. This is done five times, or fifteen times, or twenty-five times, which is more worthy. The practise of *istighfâr* (the request for forgiveness) is according to the following hadith (among others), “to whoever is attached to the practice of *istighfâr*, Allah gives a way out and alleviation from all affliction, as well as the good that comes to him in an unpredictable manner.”

6th Recitation of the *Al-Fatiha* sura (first sura of the Qur'an) once and the *Al-Ikhlâs* sura (112th) three times, offering them to the spirit of our Lord Muhammad—and to the spirits of all the Masters of the *Tarîqah Naqshbandiyyah*.

7th One closes one's eyes, tightens one's lips, and places the tongue against the palate towards the throat with a perfect calm. It is thus that one expels foreign thoughts (*al-khawâtir*) which distract the look. This rule is according to the order that the Prophet—Allah's prayers and salutations be upon him—gave to Ali when he taught how the *dhikr* must be practised, “O Ali, close your eyes!”

8th The spiritual act called “attachment to the tomb” (*râbitatu-l-qabr*) which means the consideration of death: you see yourself dead, washed, wrapped in a shroud; the funeral prayer performed for you; you see yourself carried to the tomb and buried therein; your family and your friends have left, leaving you alone, and you know then that nothing can benefit you unless it's your good actions. This rule is according to the words of the Prophet, “Be in this world like a foreigner or a traveller and count yourself among the tomb-dwellers.”

9th The initiation act called “attachment to the spiritual director,” (*râbitatu-l-murhid*). For this act the disciple has his heart facing the heart of his Master, and keeps his image in his consciousness, even when he may be absent. It represents that the heart of the Master (Sheikh) is like a pipe and that the spiritual flow (*al-faîd*) comes from his “Enveloping Sea” towards his own heart and that he thus receives the *barakah*, because the Master is the link that assures the divine conjunction (*at-Tawassul*) as is said in several verses of the Qur'an and the hadith. Allah—praise be unto him!—said, “O you who have believed, fear Allah and seek the means [of nearness] to Him,” (Qur'an 5, 35) and, “O you who have believed, fear Allah and be with those who are true,” (Qur'an 9, 119). Also the Prophet—Allah's prayers and salutations be upon him—said, “Man is with the one he loves,” and also, “Be with Allah. If you can't be there, be with those who are with Him.”

It has been said, “Extinction (*al-fanâ*) in the Sheikh is the premise for extinction in Allah.”

Caution: He who finds in the representation of the form (of his Sheikh) an intoxication (*sukr*) or an ecstatic swoon (*ghaîbah*) must renounce the image and orientate himself towards the state itself that results through it.

10th Concentration of all the bodily senses by subtracting any other concern and any suggestion coming from the intimacy itself of being, orientating towards Allah—praise be unto him!— with all the faculties of perception. Then it was said, “You are my purpose and Your satisfaction is what I ask.”

After that the Name of Essence (*Ismu-dh-Dhât*) is said in the heart, making the word Allah pass over him, while considering the meaning, to know that it is to do with the Essence without Similarity (*adh-Dhâtu bi-lâ mithl*). Though one is aware that Allah observes being and envelops every part of it, in accordance with the words of the Prophet (said in the definition of *Ihsân*, the Virtue of the worshipful perfection), “Worship Allah as if you see him, because although you may not see him, He sees you.”

11th The expectation of the effect (if any) of the invocation (*wâridu-dh-dhikr*) when it is over, remaining thus slightly before opening one’s eyes. If an “ecstatic swoon” (*ghaibah*) or a “spiritual rapture” (*jadhbah*) presents itself, avoid interrupting it.

Note. If in the course of the invocation the *dhâkir* (the practitioner of the dhikr) is disturbed by some “despondency” (*qabd*) or by ideas that trouble the concentration of the heart, then he should open his eyes, because the trouble will cease. If it doesn’t, the invoker will speak with his tongue, “Allah sees me, Allah is present with me,” (*Allâhu nâzhirî, Allâhu hadhirî*) three times.

If the dispersion persists, the invoker will cease the *dhikr* and resume “attachment to the director” (*râbitatu-l-murchid*). If this is not enough, the invoker will do a small ablution (*wudu*) or even a full one (*ghusl*), and then will pray for two *raka’ah* followed by the “prayer for forgiveness” and complete it with this request, “O He who lifts all pain, O He who answers all requests, O He who repairs what is broken, O He who makes easy everything that is difficult, O Companion to all strangers, O Close friend to the lonely, O Unifier of all division, O He who returns all heart, O He who converts all states! No God besides You! Glory to You, truly I am among the unjust! I ask You to grant me relief and a way out, to infuse Your love in my heart so that I may have no more desire or troubles in my heart and so that you may protect me and grant me Mercy! For Your Mercy, O the most Merciful of Merciful!” With this request all troubling thoughts will be banished, if it pleases Allah, the Sublime.

Know that the Masters of this elevated path envisage in a technical way certain subtle centres (subtleties) of the human being (*al-lataifu-l-insâniyya*), with the aim of facilitating the route of the path for the practitioners.

As a means of *dhikr* related with these subtle centres, they employ the Divine Name Allah (commonly referred to as the “Name of the Divine Majesty”) in order to reach the state called the “proper essential rapture” (*al-jadhbah-l-mu’aiyanatu-dh-dhâtiyyah*).

1. The first of these subtleties (*lataif*) is the “heart” (*qalb*) which is considered to be situated two finger widths under the left breast, inclined towards the side and having the form of a “pine-cone”. The “heart” thus considered counts as being under the “foot” (*qadam*) of Adam—his salutations to Him! The corresponding Light is “yellow”. When the light of this subtlety (*latifa*) leaves the side of his shoulder and rises, and a tremor (*ikhtilâj*) or any powerful agitation (*harakah*) is produced, the invoker will transfer to the point that corresponds to the subtlety called the “spirit” (*ruh*).
2. The “spirit” (*ruh*) is symbolically situated two finger lengths below the right breast, towards the chest. This subtlety is under the “foot” of Noah and of Abraham—his salutations to them both! Its “light” is “red”. Thus, the *dhikr* will be in the “spirit” and the “halt” (*wuquf*) is in the “heart”. If any agitation (*harakah*) is produced that troubles the *dhâkir*, he will transfer to the point that corresponds to the subtlety “secret” (*sirr*).
3. The “secret” (*sirr*) is situated in the same way, two fingers lengths below the left breast. This subtlety is considered as being under the “foot” of Moses—his salutations to Him! His “light” is “white”. It is in this centre that the *dhikr* will be performed once the “halt” is in the “heart”. If any trouble occurs, the *dhâkir* will do transfer to the point that corresponds to the subtlety called “mysterious” (*khafi*).

4. The “mysterious” (*khafī*) is symbolically situated two fingers above the right breast towards the centre of the chest. This point is under the “foot” of Jesus—his salutations to Him! His “light” is “black”. If the *dhakir* experiences any trouble, he will transfer to the point that corresponds to the subtlety called “the deeply mysterious” (*akhfa*).
5. The “deeply mysterious” (*akhfa*) is situated symbolically in the centre of the forehead. This centre is considered to be under the “foot” of our Prophet Muhammad—Allah's prayers and salutations be upon him! Its “light” is “green”. It is worked as was said before (in other words, as with all the subtleties indicated, the *dhakir* will perform his *dhikr* while the “halt” is still in the first subtlety called “heart”).

It is understood by the expression “foot” (*qadam*), the *Sunnah* (the way) and the *Tariqa* (the Path).

He who obtains ascension (*at-taraqqī*) towards one of these subtleties (*lataif*) and notices the particularity and the related state will draw his “beverage” (*machrab*) with the Prophet under the “foot” wherein is found the subtlety in question.

Then the *dhakir* passes to “denial and affirmation” (*annaīyu wa-l-ithbāt*) represented by the formula *Lā ‘ilaha ‘illā-llah* = “There is no god but God (Absolute and Universal).”

The method to employ this formula is as follows:

- The *dhâkir* places their tongue to the soft palate (*saqfu-l-halq*) and after inhaling, he holds his breath. Then, he starts the pronunciation with the sound *Lā* (“no”) imagining it (*bi-t-takhaiyul*) placed under the navel; from there he draws the sound towards the middle of the subtleties where the centre called “the deeply mysterious” (*akhfa*) is found and it is extended until it reaches the point that corresponds to the subtlety of the “logical” or “rational soul” (*nafs-l-natiqa*); the latter is symbolically situated in the first chamber (*al-bâtinu-lawalu*) of the brain (*ad-dimâgh*) called the “chief” (*ar-ra’îs*).
- Then the *dhâkir* proceeds to articulate the word *‘ilaha* (“God”) starting imaginatively with the phonetic element called *hamza* (appearing in the transcription as the apostrophe) from the brain making it descend to the right shoulder in order to make it flow towards the corresponding point of the subtlety called “spirit” (*ruh*).
- Finally the *dhâkir* proceeds to pronounce the *‘illā-llah* (“but God”) imagining the *hamza* of *‘illā* starting from the (right) shoulder extending towards the “heart” (*qalb*) where the *dhâkir* hits with the final word Allah (represented in the above transcription without the “A” due to the elision brought about by the union of these elements of the formula); the strength of the held breath will hit thus the “little black point of the heart” (*suwaîdû‘u-l-qalb*) giving rise to the affect (*al-athar*) and the warmth (*al-harârah*) towards the rest of the body and so that this warmth will burn all the corrupted parts of the body, while the pure parts of the *dhâkir* will be illuminated by the light of the Name of Allah.

The *dhâkir* will consider the formula *Lā ‘ilaha ‘illā-llah* in the sense that there is no “worship” (*ma’bûd*) nor “purpose” (*maqsud*), nor “existence” (*mawijûd*) without Allah. Of these three acceptances the first (there is no worship) is useful at the start (*al-mubtadî*), the second (there is no purpose) for “he who is in the middle of the path” (*al-mutawassit*) and the third (there is no existence) for the one “at the end” (*al-muntahî*).

When the *dhâkir* pronounces the negative part of this formula, he denies the existence of all the contingent things (*al-muhdathât*) that present themselves in his sight and to his thought, and he considers therefore these things with the look of extinction (*bi-nazhari-l-fanâ*); when he pronounces the affirmative part, he affirms in his heart and in his sight the reality of the True Being—praise be unto Him!— and he considers therefore the True Being from the “look of permanence” (*bi-nazhari-l-baqâ*).

At the end of this formula, he will imagine a halt in an odd number (of time) and pronounce: *Muhammadun rasulullah* (Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah), from the heart below the left breast thereby understanding the agreement with the Prophet—Allah's prayers and salutations be upon him!—and love for Him. Then, he releases his breath when he feels the need to do so and he “halts” for

an odd number (of time): three or five or seven, etc, up to twenty-one. It is what is called by our Masters “the complete halt” (*al-muqûfu-l-‘adadî*). When he exhales the *dhâkir* will say with his tongue only silently “My God, I address myself to You and Your satisfaction is what I ask for” (*Ilâhî Anta maqsûdî wa ridâ-ka matlûbî*).

Once the breath is expelled, he will take another breath to be used in the same way as the first but between one exhalation and an inhalation, he will observe this imaginative attitude (for calculating time).

When the *dhâkir* reaches the 21st time, the results of the *dhikr* of the heart will appear to him. This result will come from the abolition of his humanity and his animal thoughts, hence the loss of being, in an “essential divine rapture” (*al-jadhbatu-l-ilâhiyyatu-dh-dhâtiyyah*). Then in his heart will appear the active virtue of his “divine rapture” and that consists of the orientation (*tawajjub*) of the heart towards the Holy World (*al-âlamu-l-aqdas*) which is the origin of essential love conferred on being as well as the arising effect. The being will draw on its profit according to his “predisposition” (*isti’dâd*). This “predisposition” is itself the divine gift made for the spirits just before they detach from the body, a gift that comes from the essential proximity and lasting for all eternity.

There are invocers who at the start survive an “ecstatic swoon” (*ghaibah*) in other words an abandonment of everything that is other than Allah.

There are those who survive “ecstatic intoxication” (*as-sukr*), in other words amazement (*al haîrah*), and “ecstatic swoon” (*al-ghaibah*) at the same time.

Others reach the state of annihilation (*al-dam*) in other words extinction (*al-ifnâ*) of their humanity after which they are illuminated by extinction that is the disappearance in the “divine rapture”.

If the *dhâkir* doesn’t obtain any results, it can be attributed to the lack of fulfilment of the required rules. These rules are: sincerity of the will (*çidqu-l-irâdah*), “attachment to the Sheikh”, conformity to the orders of the Sheikh, detachment from all his interests, renunciation of all personal preference in favour of the preference of the Sheikh and the search for his satisfaction in everything.

Appendix 2:

From Holy Father Nicephoros^{67 68}

Brief biographical note:

"Our holy father Nicephoros lived a life of intense spiritual work in Mount Athos, dying shortly after the year 1340. He was master and guide to Gregory of Salonica (Balamas), in the study and method of training to obtain the highest wisdom according to the testimony of his own disciple.

"In silent seclusion undisturbed by mundane problems and keeping his attention exclusively within himself, he attained the indescribable internal union with the Eternal God, receiving in his heart the blessed enlightenment of the Divine Grace. Exalted by this divine gift, he is like a father guiding us with his writings on the same path. He selected from the books and lives of the Holy Fathers passages related to sobriety, attention, and prayer finally adding advice derived from his own experience and inviting us all to elevate ourselves towards the most perfect communion with the Lord through the prayer of the mind and of the heart."

Thus begins the translation of the first theme or chapter from the book "Philokalia", translated directly from the Russian text. From Nicephoros himself.

QUESTION (to Nicephoros): We have learnt from previous evidences that the work as practised by the holy fathers pleased God; and that there is a certain work that rapidly liberates the soul from passions and that by love unites it to God. Practice that is indispensable to anyone who is moved by these things. All of our doubts are now clarified and we feel firmly convinced of this. But, we beg of you to teach us what is attention of the mind and how to capacitate oneself to acquire it, for that work is absolutely unknown to us.

REPLY (by Nicephoros): In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ Who said: "Without me you can do nothing" (John, XV, 5). Having invoked Him to help me, I shall try my best to show you what attention is and how, if God allows it, one can succeed in acquiring it.

Some of the Saints have called attention to the preservation of the mind; others, to the protection of the heart, and yet others have called it "to awaken" and many other similar names.

However, all these names mean the same thing. Exactly as of bread, one can say: a slice, a piece, or a morsel, in the same way you must understand all these expressions. Regarding attention itself and its characteristic features, we shall study it right now.

Attention is a signal of sincere repentance.

Attention is the image or appearance the soul can have of itself, rejecting the world and ascending towards God.

Attention is renouncing sin and the acquisition of virtue.

Attention is the absolute certainty of the forgiveness of sins.

Attention is the beginning of contemplation, or rather its necessary condition, for through it God approaches and reveals Himself to the mind.

Attention is the serenity of the mind, or in other words, is to remain undisturbed, without reveries in the gift of divine mercy.

67 "School Notebooks", editorial trasmutación, Santiago, Chile, 1973.

68 Note that this extract from the School Notebooks of Holy Father Nicephoros is the same text as that used in section IV regarding Nikiphoros but a different translation, even the name is translated differently. We have kept the different translation sources.

Attention means stopping thoughts; it is the abode of the memory of God and the house of the treasure where lies the power to resist everything that may come.

Consequently, attention is also the origin of faith, of hope and of love; for he who is lacking in faith cannot resist all the afflictions coming from the world and he who does not voluntarily suffer them, cannot say: "He is my refuge and my strength" (Psalms, X, VI, 2); and he who has not the All Powerful as his refuge, cannot be truly sincere in his love for Him.

This work, the greatest of all the great works, can be accomplished by many and even by all if they are duly trained. Few men receive this gift directly from God without need for teachings and they work by inner compulsion and at the warmth of their faith. Nonetheless, that which is the exception is not the rule.

Therefore, it is necessary to search for a Master who is not himself in error, to follow his instructions and thus learn to distinguish, in matters of attention, defects and excesses of the right and of the left, which emerge through diabolic suggestions.

From his own experience about temptations, he will explain what is necessary to do and show us correctly the mental path that we then must follow with fewer impediments.

If such a Master is out of your reach, you must search for him relentlessly. However, if in spite of such search, he is not found, then, with contrite spirit, invoking God and praying to him assiduously and in humbleness, work according to my explanations.

You know that your breathing consists of inhalation and of exhalation of air. The organ that serves this purpose is the lungs that surround the heart in such a way that the air that circulates through them involves, in passing, the heart.

Consequently, breathing is the natural path to the heart. Thus, having united your mind within yourselves (which is also attention), direct it towards the respiratory channel through which air reaches the heart and, together with the inhaled air, oblige the mind to descend into the heart and keep it there.

Get used to it brethren, do not come out from the heart too soon although at the beginning you will experience great solitude in such isolation and seclusion. When you become accustomed to it, on the contrary, you will begin to feel disgusted by the non-meaning of the external world and it will not be unpleasant or tedious to remain within the heart.

Exactly as a man that has been far away is invaded on returning home by a great happiness on meeting his spouse and his children; he embraces them all and everything that he may say to them will never be enough; in the same way to unite oneself to one's own heart is experienced by an inexpressible happiness and delight.

Then one sees that the Kingdom of Heaven is really within ourselves; and seeing it now in oneself, one struggles and makes efforts with pure prayer to keep it and strengthen it there, understanding that everything that is external is of no importance and completely unattractive.

When you enter thus to the place of the heart as I have prescribed, praise God and, asking for his mercy, preserve this work and He will teach you things that you could not possibly learn by any other means. Moreover, you should know that whilst the mind establishes itself in the heart, it should not be left there in silence and idleness but rather to repeat constantly the prayer: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me," without stopping. For this practice moves away reveries from the mind, makes it evasive and impenetrable to the suggestions of the enemy and guides it more and more each day and to fervently love and desire God.

If, however, and in spite of all your efforts you do not succeed in entering into the kingdom of the heart according to what I have said, do what I shall now tell you, and with the help of God you will find what you are seeking.

You know that in every human being, talking internally to yourself depends on the chest. Thus, in spite of our lips being silent, it is in the chest where we converse and talk to ourselves, pray, sing psalms, and do many other unsuitable things.

Then, having driven away all thoughts of this inner chattering (which can be done if one wishes), give the chest the following short prayer: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me" - and oblige it in spite of any other thought so that you have only this sound within.

If you work in this manner with permanence, with complete attention, then, and in time, this will open the path to the heart, as it has been already described. It is not possible to doubt this for we have verified it by ourselves through experience.

If you work in this way with a strong wish and with great attention, full of sweetness, a complete range of virtues will come: love, joy, peace, and others, through which every petition you make will be answered in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be in honour and glory, power and adoration now and always and for ever and ever.

Amen.