

St. Teresa of Ávila & Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett: A Comparative Study

Received January 6, 2021

Revised January 23, 2021

Accepted January 25, 2021

Key words

Christianity, Zen Buddhism,
spirituality, subtle energies,

St. Teresa of Ávila,

Jiyu-Kennett

In the study, the author compares two prominent spiritual leaders – St. Teresa of Ávila and Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett. St. Teresa of Ávila represents Roman Catholic tradition, more precisely Carmelite spirituality; Jiyu-Kennett represents Zen Buddhism. The comparison utilizes two approaches: The first one is a hermeneutical approach (language, semiotics), where the author compares various spiritual contexts. The second approach is based on comparing developed *subtle energies*. The author states that the second methodological approach is more objective, as it uses a more verifiable existence of energies. In the conclusion, the author states that in both of these representatives the subtle energies were exceptionally strong – and thus served as a means for a higher spiritual (mystical) experience. Thanks to developing subtle energies, they were able to experience spiritual states that are known in Christian tradition as purification of sins (Lat. *purificatio*), illumination (Lat. *illuminatio*), and unification with God (Lat. *unio*) in Christian tradition and purification of negative *karma*, intensification of inner light, and awakening in Buddhism. Both St. Teresa of Ávila and Jiyu-Kennett experienced freeing the mind from the body, which in many traditions is known as *mystical death*, or *death and rebirth*. The author sees subtle energies as an important methodological frame for comparative studies in the case of various forms of spirituality and spiritual abilities in human.

1 Introduction

We are currently witnessing intensive efforts for globalization. Several decades ago, Paul Ricoeur spoke of shaping a planetary civilization. In his view, planetary civilization was the result of advance in the field of science, engineering, economics and politics, spreading all across the globe without any major flaws. According to him, all of these fields share a common denominator – “abstract rationality” – cognitive apprehension, clarity, predictability and efficiency, which constitutes the basis for not only science and technology, but also politics and economics. This form of knowledge typically utilizes the progress principle, which means accumulation of knowledge, accumulation of positive results and linear progress. This definition of abstract rationality and practical applications of such rationality is more or less recognized worldwide. Inventions and innovations in, for example, the automotive industry, or digital industry, merge and accumulate and constitute visible progress. The same applies to economics – it must respect rational rules in order to succeed. This is least true in politics; however, politics faces the test of time simply because excessive influence of emotions and irrational approach is generally harmful in the long run.

Unification of the world through science, technology or rational politics and economics faces resistance among various cultures and religions. Cultures and religions are the results of hundreds, even thousands of years of progress, which gives them a considerable amount of complexity and a vast sum of symbols that cannot be processed entirely by abstract reality. Apart from this, they feature spirituality, or mystical core, which also goes beyond the capabilities of abstract rationality. Contact between various cultures and religions may also generate negative consequences – fear of the other, reluctance or even hate that stems from the lack of awareness of other cultures and religions. We assume that understanding other cultures and religions may bring us an opportunity to accept some of their features into our world and, if we do so, these cultures and religions should not trigger negative emotions anymore. Learning about various cultures and religions and accepting dialogue between religions is therefore



About the author

Prof. PhDr. Slavomír Gálik, PhD., is a philosopher who specializes in philosophy of mysticism, philosophy of media, and history of philosophy. He publishes extensively in these fields. Among his most important publications are books *Philosophy and Mysticism* and *The Spiritual Dimension of Crisis of Contemporary Man*. As a head researcher he led a research project on phenomenon of *mystical death* in European and non-European spiritual traditions. He currently serves as Vice Dean for science, research, quality and foreign relations at the Faculty of Mass Media Communications, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. His email contact is s_galik@yahoo.com.

extremely important in our globalizing world. A new form of dialogue of spiritual experience appears to be of particular importance in this regard according to Martin Dojčár (2019, 36–37).

The ambition of this study is to contribute to the inter-religious dialogue, especially between Christian, in particular Carmelite spirituality and Zen Buddhist spirituality. Our objective is to compare St. Teresa of Ávila, representing Carmelite spirituality, and Rōshi Ji-yu-Kennett, representing Zen Buddhist spirituality. We also want to identify relevant methods to find what these two spiritual traditions share and what is different between them.

2 Methods

When we study spirituality, mysticism [1], or mystical texts, we assume that what we can rely on them; in other words that the authors of such texts intended to describe everything truthfully and were only limited in terms of their own knowledge and language (Dojčár 2013, 2). Truthfulness, effort to describe mystical experience truthfully, is the fundamental condition (*prima conditio sine qua non*) for studying mysticism. When Carl Gustav Jung mentions Chinese texts, he does not think that their authors could be liars: “We assume that a Chinese author is, firstly, not a liar, secondly has a common sense and thirdly – is a person of a great intellect.” (Jung 2004, 130).

Veracity in great spiritual traditions is verified by the existence of similar phenomena in a given spiritual tradition. If Christian religion mentions in various contexts a sequence *purification* (Lat. *purificatio*), *illumination* (Lat. *illuminatio*), and *unification* (Lat. *unio*), then we believe the truthfulness of this mystical tradition grows. This is even stronger in Buddhism, as it implicitly involves also verification of the spiritual method. This is also acknowledged by Buddha’s words, as John Snelling reminds: “It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain. But Kalamas, do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning ... The monk is our teacher, Kalamas, when you yourselves know.” (Snelling 2000, 18). The words “you yourself know” mean knowledge gained from personal experience; experimental verification of a given spiritual tradition. In fact, it means that we should not trust even Buddha’s words, but verify them, which is a condition that applies even in the present science.

If we assume that great spiritual and mystical traditions, including Carmelite spirituality and Zen Buddhism, are truthful, then we should take a second step and determine a method to study these traditions. In the case of Carmelite spirituality, namely in mystical visions of St. Teresa of Ávila, we can use her own texts, but also written testimonies provided by people who were close to her, as well as many secondary sources of information that tell us about her life and work. In the case of Zen Buddhist tradition, more precisely spirituality of Rōshi Ji-yu-Kennett, we can use her texts, drawings, secondary sources of information about her life and work, but also testimonies provided by Japanese monks who are still alive.

In both cases, the prevailing source of information can be found in texts, so we choose the hermeneutical method as

the main method – more specifically linguistic and semiotic approach. However, mysticism, or spirituality, is not solely a matter of linguistics, simply because mysticism that constructs the core of spirituality (*mystical spirituality*) goes beyond any cognitive and linguistic limits. This is the reason why it is necessary that the person who analyses mysticism has had some previous experience with mysticism [2]. Mystical texts often mention certain “light”, “milk-like beams”, “death”, “nothingness”, “unification with God”, “awakening”, and similar phenomena, each of these means a concrete mystical experience. If the person that studies mysticism had no previous experience, then he or she could only use analogical ideas linked to common life experience, this would result in permanent uncertainty. Initial experience with mysticism thus constitutes the second primary condition (*secunda conditio sine qua non*) for studying mysticism.

2.1 Hermeneutical Approach to Comparison

Comparison is one of the basic tools of the process of learning in humans. Without comparison, Dalibor Antalík (2005, 101) argues, there is no knowledge: “Comparison is not purely classification; it is especially a tool for understanding.” In this comparison, we utilize semiotic rules that also apply in our language, thinking and consequently also in learning. Umberto Eco (2009, 93) writes, “[a] cultural unit exists and is distinguished since there is another unit in opposition. This is a relationship between members of individual cultural units, in which everything that is transferred to other members are deduced.” In other words, human thinking and learning is contextual, i.e., based on comparison.

This form of learning works quite well in *small language-games* [3] (these are common in one-language everyday situations), because participants more or less understand the meaning of individual words. However, the situation gets more complicated when the meanings of the words are not so straightforward, for example in religious experience [4]. In this case not everybody may have such experience even when we regard just one language and one religion. Even worse is to come when we speak about comprehension with *great language-games*, which happens when we compare and try to understand various languages and religious and spiritual traditions. In this case individual languages describe religious and spiritual traditions differently. In the Spanish

language, for example, we will find St. Teresa of Ávila and her writings on Christian, chiefly Carmelite spirituality, while in the Pāli language we will be able to find material concerning Buddhist spirituality. Words will be completely different in these cases, therefore similarities between what these language elements describe will have to be looked for in similar spiritual experience. Yet how are we to determine whether these spiritual experiences are similar? A Christian does not know Buddhist spirituality and, *vice-versa*, a Buddhist does not know Christian spirituality. Though it is possible that they both may study the other's spirituality, there still will be some uncertainty as to whether we understand it correctly. Ideally, one would have to embrace both religions, then the person would be able to come with a more adequate comparison. History proves that something like this can really happen, for instance, Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine monk who spent many years in various Hinduist ashrams, or Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle, a German Jesuit priest, who dedicated his life to the practice of Zen in Japan. Now, also thanks to globalization, there are more people who practice the same. Despite being firmly attached to their original religion, they claim that deep inside the Self, the spiritual and mystical cores of religions meet each other. Based on his experience with Buddhism, Bede Griffiths (1997, 92–94) expressed the following: “*The greatest reality is experienced deep in the soul, in the core, or in the center of consciousness and at the same time in the person's very Essence ... Experiencing God is described in the word of Sat-Chid-Ananda. God, the greatest existence, is experienced as the absolute existence (Sat), full consciousness comprehension (Chit), and pure bliss (Ananda).*”

Although this approach and comparison offer great potential for inter-spiritual dialogue, we should still be cautious as language and historical context shape spiritual experiences considerably. We are now witnessing the so-called new comparativeness. On the one hand, it rejects premature generalizing and essentialism, on the other hand, it emphasizes the fact that we must not ignore the language and historical context of the period when a given religious and spiritual concepts were developed (Millet Gil 2019, 16–24). The question still remains, what do the words that describe given spirituality, or a certain stage of spiritual development mean and to what extent this may be approachable for a person of a different spiritual tradition?

2.2 Subtle Energies as a Comparison Tool

We learn about the existence of the so-called *subtle energies* (energies hidden in *chakras*, and active up along the spine) from spiritual iconography and mystical and spiritual texts that exist in all of the major religions, including Christian religion and Buddhism. In the Christian iconography, we see the traditional *golden aura* around a saint's head. In Buddhist iconography, specifically in the case of statues or paintings of Buddha, the depiction of energy forms and flows is rather complex.

We see the most complex concept of *subtle energies* (*chakras*, *Kundalinī*, *nāḍīs*) in yoga, so we will mostly be using this terminology and concept when comparing the spirituality of St. Teresa of Ávila and Rōshi Ji-yu-Kennett. The etymology of the word *chakra* comes from Sanskrit and means “circle” or “wheel”. Kumar and Larsen Kumar (2006, 239–240) claim that “*chakras are energy whirls that correspond with certain nervous plexus. Before kundalini is awakened, chakras only have limited energy resources, similar to batteries. Chakras develop in concrete phases of development and represent milestones on the road of evolution.*” These authors talk about seven specific *chakras*:

1. *Mūlādhāra chakra* at the root of the spine;
2. *Svādhīstāna chakra* placed at the spine above genitals;
3. *Manipūra chakra* placed around the solar plexus;
4. *Anāhata chakra* placed close to the spine in the heart area;
5. *Vishuddhi chakra* placed near the throat in the spinal column;
6. *Āgyā chakra* placed in the middle of the brain;
7. *Sahasrāra chakra* placed above the crown of the head.

Fig. 1.
Localization of Chakras
in Human Body

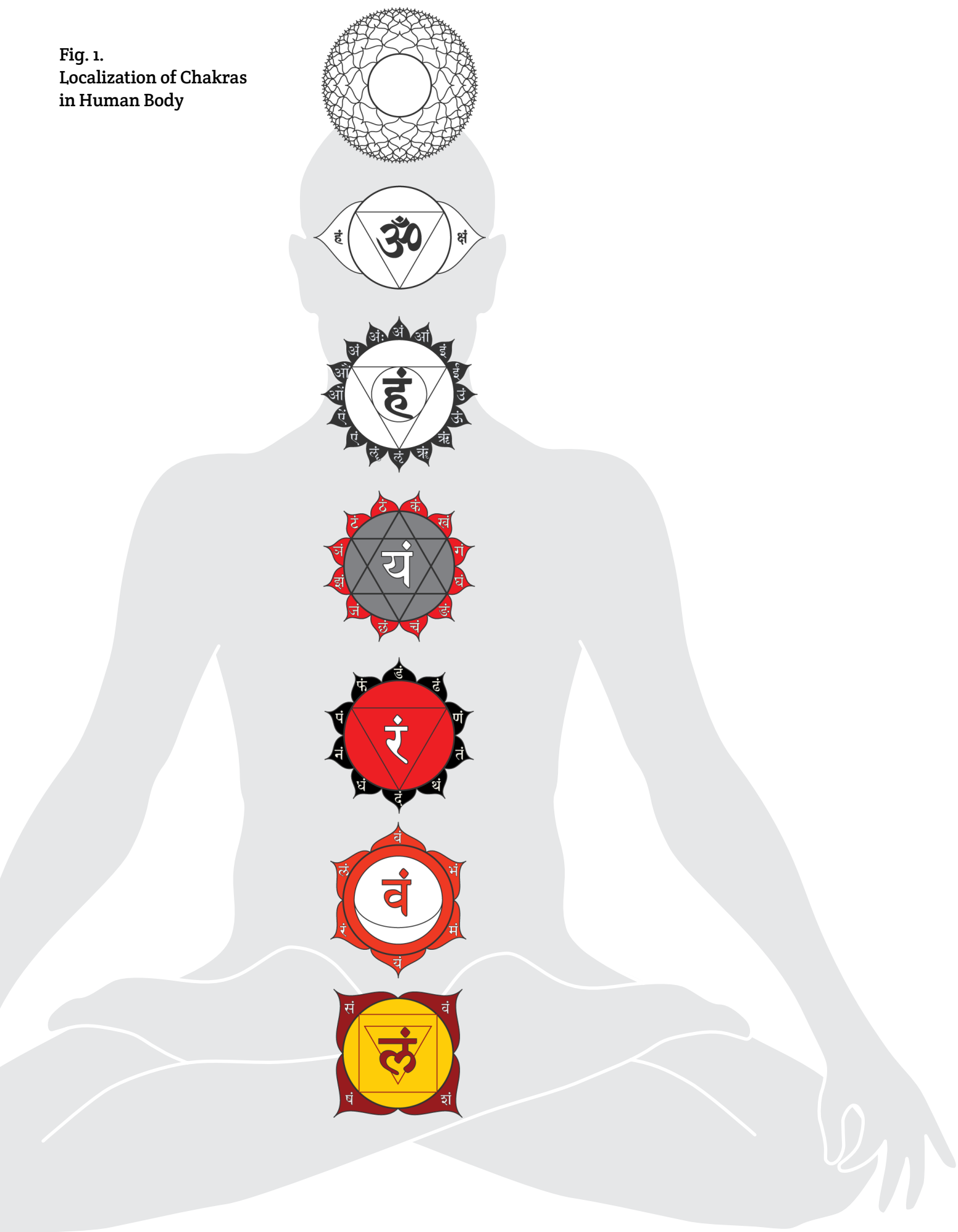


Fig. 2
The Golden Flower Above
the Top of the Head: Fully
Developed Subtle Ener-
gies



Subtle energies or the *subtle body* constitute a much better tool for comparison than language because individual chakras can be localized in the human body and, when developed, it is possible to see their dynamical structure literally with just the naked eye [5]. Subtle energies, especially in their developed state, testify to higher spiritual and mystical experience. Individual energy (*chakra*) centers also distinguish degrees of spiritual and mystical experience, which means that we can anticipate certain spiritual experience behind each of the developed *chakra center*. Comparison between developed energy centers (*chakra*) and spiritual experience can then be used also for comparison between individual spiritual traditions.

We also need to note here that if energy centers are not developed and therefore invisible, many people either do not believe they exist, or they misinterpret this concept considerably. For example, C. G. Jung, a famous psychologist, whose great knowledge of various spiritual traditions is well recognized, would interpret the *Golden Flower* purely as a symbol,

a consciousness *mandala*: “The Golden Flower is a mandala symbol” (Jung 2004, 108). Or next comment: “This body [note: The Golden Flower] is, like everything else, a symbol describing extraordinary psychological experience which, being objective, is projected in forms distinguished by biological life – as an embryo, foetus, child, body and so on.” (Jung 2004, 138).

On the other hand, C. G. Jung was correct in his idea that without spiritual experience, or subtle energies in our case, one cannot learn about them adequately. He, for example, believed that “instructions are valuable for those who know what a camera or a combustion engine is, but they are useless for those who have no idea about such devices” (Jung 2004, 143).

In this case, the second requirement applies when studying mysticism (*secunda conditio sine qua non*) because it is not quite possible to understand the deepest experience without the initial phase – embracing spiritual and mystical life.

3 Results

3.1 Hermeneutical Approach

Using the hermeneutical, or semiotic and linguistic approach to compare spirituality in St. Teresa of Ávila and Rōshi Ji-yu-Kennett, we expect that the greatest difference will be seen in religious and spiritual traditions themselves, i.e., Christianity (St. Teresa of Ávila) and Buddhism (Rōshi Ji-yu-Kennett). Secondary differences would then be based on individual experiencing spirituality and language used in these two representatives. In the case of St. Teresa of Ávila, it is important to interpret her approach starting with the most general Christian fundamentals and finishing with her concrete and unique spiritual experience in this sequence: Christianity – Carmelite spirituality – St. Teresa of Ávila. In the case of Rōshi Ji-yu-Kennett, we would use this sequence: Buddhism – Zen Buddhism – Rōshi Ji-yu-Kennett. We will speak of content conformity or similarity carefully and only in the case of their final spiritual and mystical experience. Regarding methodology, in the case of both representatives, we will first explain the primary spiritual principles that apply in their approach, then we will explain their personal approach and outline the comparison in a chart.

3.1.1 Christianity – Carmelite Spirituality – St. Teresa of Ávila

All of the important religions across the globe utilize a given life goal (*salvation, nirvāna*, etc.) and the way that ensures fulfilment of this goal (*prayer, self-denial, meditation*, etc.). In the case of Christianity, or Christian religion, the goal is in salvation – described metaphorically as *God's kingdom* (or *kingdom of heaven*) that comes first and that represents an interpersonal unification with God. Here we can use a couple of quotes found in the New Testament: “*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*” (Matthew 6:33); “*Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit*” (John 3:5); “*For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face*” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

God's kingdom, communion with God is the *finis ultimus* of a Christian's life. We also need to emphasize that the idea of *salvation* in Christian religion is based on personal salvation. This idea comes from an older Jewish tradition in which interpersonality originated from the relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel. Yahweh called patriarchs and prophets by their first names, which assured a personal rela-

tionship between human and God, a kind of relationship that came also in the Christian religion. The road to salvation the way Christian religion sees it is composed of several sacraments, the first of which is *Christening*. Through Christening, which is the first and prerequisite step for Christian life, the adept is approved to be a member of the Christian community, but also freed from the original sin. “*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.*” (Mark 16:16). Further, it is leading a Christian life that follows the Christian ethics that declares the principle of universal love: “*If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love*” (John 15:10); “*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*” (John 15:12). However, it is not just leading a Christian life, since the Christian religion emphasizes that also mercy is needed in order to ensure salvation: “*We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.*” (Acts 15:11).

Carmelite spirituality was started by monks in the 12th century around the Mount Carmel in the Holy Land, hence the name Carmelites. Their spiritual tradition follows the teaching of a Hebrew prophet Elijah, who lived on the mount of Carmel by a spring and who testified that God lived: “*The Lord I serve lives*” (1 Kings 17:1). As we learn from Elijah, along with brotherhood and service to people, Carmelite spirituality put a lot of emphasis on contemplation, which created favorable conditions for mystical spirituality. We have proof for this claim – the existence of two great saints and mystics who, shaped by Carmelite spirituality, devoted their lives to spirituality – St. John of the Cross (1540–1591) and St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582).

Spain of the 16th century saw the forming spirituality of St. Teresa of Ávila, which was influenced by various changes triggered by conflicts in politics and religion of that time. Spain was then discovering and conquering the New World and also fighting enemies from both abroad Spain (Muslims) and inside Spain – the Inquisition was looking for heretics. St. Teresa of Ávila was very sensitive to these changes. Let us for example mention that when she was just a child, she wanted to fight Muslims and was praying for protestants. She feared she would be identified as a heretic by the inquisition. Her brother, who was fighting in the New World, was also helping her with financing of monasteries. These social, cultural and religious factors greatly influenced her. However, when she was growing up, she also discovered that she had a talent for

spirituality. Though it was very difficult for her to be separated from her father, she decided to enroll in a convent. This internal fight caused a serious psycho-spiritual crisis that had a negative impact on her health. The most severe crisis came in 1537 when she lost consciousness, and everybody thought she would die [6]. She regained her consciousness again after four days but fought with the consequent health problems for long months.

Spirituality of St. Teresa of Ávila is based on friendship with Jesus. This relationship culminates in mystical unification, also called spiritual marriage. She describes it in the seventh chamber of her *Interior Castle* (1921, 121): “*But spiritual marriage is like rain falling from heaven into a river or stream, becoming one and the same liquid, so that the river and rain-water cannot be divided; or it resembles a streamlet flowing into the ocean, which cannot afterwards be disunited from it. This marriage may also be likened to a room into which a bright light enters through two windows – though divided when it enters, the light becomes one and the same.*” In other words, we can say that her case describes a total unification of the soul with God, which traditional Christian mysticism calls *unio*. The second, equally important component of St. Teresa’s spirituality is in the road that led her to spiritual fulfilment. St. Teresa of Ávila had a great talent regarding spiritual life and could develop it even further in a convent – through prayer, contemplation, silence and isolation from the outside world. Yet, it is also probable that her spirituality was greatly influenced by her spiritual crisis in the beginning of her life in the convent, her experience in 1537 with almost dying and conversion when contemplating the Agony of Christ painting in 1554. This all enhanced her spiritual desire (Sudbrack 1995, 47). The most important description of St. Teresa’s steps that lead to the completion of her mission can be seen in the *seven stages of prayer*, these correspond to the *seven mansions* of her *Interior Castle*. The first three stages describe purification of the soul (Lat. *purification*). The fourth stage is the place in which deeper spiritual experiences begins, these correspond to the illumination phase (Lat. *illuminatio*). Teresa says (Teresa 1921, 39): “*Henceforth they begin to be supernatural and it will be most difficult to speak clearly about them.*” The fifth stage of prayer is transformation, described also as *mystical death* [7]. On this transformation Teresa says (Teresa 1921, 58): “*Now let us see what becomes of the ‘silkworm,’ for all I have been saying leads to this. As soon*

as, by means of this prayer, the soul becomes entirely dead to the world, it comes forth like a lovely little white butterfly!” The sixth stage of prayer means preparation for spiritual marriage, with visions, inner voices and other mystical experiences. However, spiritual marriage takes place in the Seventh mansion – the seventh stage of prayer.

3.1.2 Buddhism – Zen Buddhism – Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett

The ultimate goal of Buddhism is *enlightenment*, which we can also see when we look at the etymology of the word: *Buddha* means “awakened”, “enlightened” both in Sanskrit and Pāli. In Sanskrit, this ultimate goal is also articulated as *nirvāna* (*nibbāna* in Pāli), which indicates this condition exceeds everything that is temporary and conditioned. Thus, *nirvāna* is unconditioned and goes beyond I–world dualism. Mircea Eliade explains that Buddha did not define *nirvāna* but would constantly turn towards its features: “*He says that arhats [note: enlightened saints] have achieved unshakeable happiness, that nirvana is a bliss, that he, blessed, is immortal and monks can be immortal too: You will live. Arhats are freed in their lives; they enjoy nirvana and bliss and spend their time with Brahma.*” (Eliade 1997, 85).

In Buddhism, the path to awakening (freeing, enlightenment) is equally important. Buddha explains that we first need to know the correct path to walk along. In this respect, Buddha’s teaching mentions *Four noble truths* and, most importantly, an *Eightfold path* that leads to awakening. We can see a detailed explanation of this *Eightfold path* that leads to *nirvāna* in *Abhidharma* (ancient Buddhist texts). In order to succeed, we need to master meditation, which, according to *Abhidharma*, is composed of three parts: *mindful breathing* (Pi. *ānāpānasati*), *mindful walking* (Pi. *chankamanasati*), and *loving kindness* (Pi. *mettā bhāvanā*). All of these three concepts describe focusing of attention, its continuity and even realization of being disturbed and similar concepts. In Buddhism, knowledge, or wisdom, is a very important complementary condition in meditation. This means that the person who mediates and experiences various stages of consciousness is also able to describe these stages.

Buddhism is primarily a practical guide to achieve awakening, the fact that it deals with metaphysical aspects that are related to humans and the world is of secondary importance.

Buddha explains the importance of this order using an example – a man shot by a poisoned arrow. First, the arrow needs to be removed, only then we can ask who shot it and why. It is similar to a human and his awakening. We first need to be awoken, only then we can handle metaphysical connections (Eliade 1997, 79–80). It is similar in the case of Japanese Zen Buddhism [8]. Scott and Doubleday (2001, 13) make a following comment in this regard: “*Zen is a practical method of realizing Buddha-like approach. It is a mental, but also physical training that requires endeavor, persistence and belief that awakening can be achieved.*”

Zen Buddhism also aspires to achieve awakening, but the path to reach this is equally important. Zen meditation has two pillars – counting every exhalation and walking that is synchronized with breathing. We find that these two methods of meditation are quite similar to meditation methods in the early Buddhism, mindful breathing and mindful walking. When practiced correctly and long enough, one can succeed in achieving awakening, called also *satori* or *kenshō*, which means “seeing one’s true nature”. Genpo Merzel (Scott and Doubleday 2001, 102–103) describes *kenshō* as follows: “*Once the Wisdom-Eye Prajna is fully opened, it cannot be closed. However, before this happens, it tends to close, just like a camera shutter. When it opens a bit, we are thrilled – we speak of kensho, a little insight into our nature, the essence of our mind. We then see all dharmas as one, all things as one body; we realize that everything is interconnected.*”

Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett (1924–1996), was, without doubt, one of the greatest representatives of modern Zen Buddhism. She successfully reached the state of awakening several times, once even the so-called *great awakening* (Ja. *kenshō*) in Shasta Abbey, a Zen Buddhist monastery in California in 1977. Born in England, Jiyu-Kennett, was first interested in Theravāda Buddhism and later in Zen Buddhism that she practiced for the rest of her life. It was quite unusual for an English woman to become a Rōshi, a Zen Buddhist master. She wrote several books dealing with Zen spirituality, with *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom or How a Zen Buddhist Prepares for Death* (1993) being one of the most important of her works. In this book, which depicts her spiritual experiences during her 1976–1977 meditation practice and later experiences from the year 1992, Jiyu-Kennett described her own path that led to awakening and that also meant preparation for death. Her health was so weak in the 1970s that she found herself literally hovering between life and death. Her experience with meditation and *kenshō* helped her overcome the threat and finally, her health improved greatly.

On her path to awakening, Jiyu-Kennett (Jiyu-Kennett 1997, 223) uses the Zen method. She explains: “*You should meditate in a quiet room, eat and drink moderately and cut all ties ... Control your mind, consciousness, your will ... Lean to the left and then to the right and then just sit steadily neither trying to think nor not trying to think; just sitting, with no deliberate thought is the important aspect of serene meditation.*” Jiyu-Kennett had a number of visions and other physical and mental experiences, including developing subtle energies that gradually freed her mind of the body. There was a moment when she (Jiyu-Kennett 1997, 75) had a sensation of “*a strong hit*” in her forehead, which was the moment when she died for a short time. Further development of subtle energies brought yet more transcendent experiences. The great finale came with her awakening. She claims (Jiyu-Kennett 1997, 144) that, “*the mind is illuminated by infinite space, I cannot say neither that in the middle is emptiness nor that there is not emptiness. It is pristine, I am not IT, IT is in me, so form is emptiness and emptiness is form.*”

3.1.3 Summary

Using hermeneutical approach, we concentrated on comparison of the goal, methods and accompanying occurrences that we can find in books written by St. Teresa of Ávila and Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett. Concerning content (language, semiotics), we found differences rather than similarities or even conformity. St. Teresa of Ávila seeks for *unification* with God, while Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett seeks for *awakening* and *emptiness*. Concerning methods, we found traditional mystical terms, such as *purification*, *illumination*, and *mystical death* in St. Teresa of Ávila, while Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett mentions phenomena that are related to the human mind and body – subtle energies. However, when we try to go deeper, we can also find certain similarities. For example, St. Teresa describes *spiritual marriage* in the Seventh chamber of her *Interior Castle* as “*light in light*”, a “*drop of water in the sea*”, which indicates overcoming the subject–object dualism; this corresponds to Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett description of *awakening*. On the other hand, we can see a glimpse of interpersonality also in the case of Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett, who speaks of emptiness, or the essence of mind, as of YOU. In her case, we can also notice that despite the fact she emphasizes one’s own effort, she also speaks of waiting for manifestation of the nature of the mind. We can find perhaps the most similarities in the accompanying occurrences that are bound to subtle energies, which we will try to clarify further. Even though we can find similarities between spiritual traditions, it is extremely difficult to say whether they are significant or simply coincidental, using and analyzing just texts.

Tab 1.
Comparative Chart of St. Teresa of Ávila and Rōshi
Jiyu-Kennett Based on Hermeneutical Approach

| | Teresa of Ávila | Jiyu-Kennett |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Religion | Christianity | Buddhism |
| Spiritual Tradition | Carmelite spirituality | Zen Buddhist spirituality |
| Goal (general) I. | salvation of the soul | awakening |
| Goal (concrete) II. | spiritual marriage (Lat. <i>unio</i>) | insight into one's nature |
| Method I. | prayer | meditation |
| Method II. | interpersonal relationship human–God | intrapersonality |
| Method III. | emphasis on God's mercy | emphasis on one's own effort |
| Accompanying Actions I. | soul purification (Lat. <i>purificatio</i>) | emptying, purification of the mind |
| Accompanying Actions II. | illumination (Lat. <i>illuminatio</i>) | development of subtle energies |
| Accompanying Actions III. | <i>mystical death</i> – metaphor silkworm turning into butterfly | death moment in the course of developing subtle energies – <i>Āgyā chakra</i> |

3.2 Comparison Based on Subtle Energies

3.2.1 St. Teresa of Ávila

We anticipate existence of subtle energies (*Kundalinī* and *chakras*) in the spirituality of Teresa of Ávila thanks to her description of accompanying mystical occurrence in her prime writing, the *Interior Castle*. Here she writes about seven stages of prayer that developed throughout her spiritual life. The first three mansions serve for cleansing of the soul, one cannot really notice any subtle energies. However, St Teresa of Ávila explicitly mentions “*celestial waters*” flowing from the very center of her being. Teresa says (Teresa 1921, 39, 44): “Henceforth they begin to be supernatural and it will be most difficult to speak clearly about them ... the dilation begun by the celestial waters in the depths of our being. They appear to dilate and enlarge us internally.”

We agree with Tsoukatos (2011, 153), who claims that the symbol of water in St. Teresa's spiritual learning means a ve-

hicle for prayer and, we could add, also higher mystical degrees. Further, St. Teresa (1921, 44) speaks of fire, warmth and pleasant smell that is filling her body: “*Although the spirit neither sees the flame nor knows where it is, yet it is penetrated by the warmth and scented fumes which are sometimes perceived even by the body.*” This is quite similar to the description of *Kundalinī* energies, mentioned in Eastern traditions, especially in yoga. Margaret South (South 2001, 178), too, thinks that this metaphor description corresponds to *Kundalinī* energies and *chakras* in yoga: “*In her writings, often using the metaphor ‘fire,’ St. Teresa of Ávila describes the arousal of an energy from below that rises upwards in a way analogous to the descriptions found in Eastern texts on Kundalini arousal.*”

The Fifth mansion is where we see a change in St. Teresa's spirituality, she metaphorically speaks about a silkworm turning into a butterfly, this is also called *mystical death*. St. Teresa interprets this transformation in these words (Teresa

1921, 58): “Now let us see what becomes of the ‘silkworm,’ for all I have been saying leads to this. As soon as, by means of this prayer, the soul has become entirely dead to the world, it comes forth like a lovely little white butterfly!”

The preparation for spiritual marriage starts in the Sixth mansion, which is also a place where states of ecstasy often come with visions, inner voices, and similar occurrences. Spiritual completion (*spiritual marriage*) is realized in the Seventh mansion of her *Interior Castle*, where the spirit is unified with God. St. Teresa (Teresa 1921, 121) explains in these words: “But spiritual marriage is like rain falling from heaven into a river or stream, becoming one and the same liquid, so that the river and rainwater cannot be divided; or it resembles a streamlet flowing into the ocean, which cannot afterwards be disunited from it. This marriage may also be likened to a room into which

a bright light enters through two windows – though divided when it enters, the light becomes one and the same.”

We can say that energies that St. Teresa metaphorically describes as light, fire or milk-like rays of light, served for freeing consciousness from the body and its unification with God. In the Seventh mansion, St. Teresa (Teresa 1921, 121) offers a lively description of “spouting water”, “milk-like rays” that flood the body and even swallow it up: “For from the bosom of the Divinity, where God seems ever to hold this soul fast clasped, issue streams of milk, which solace the servants of the castle.”

We can finally conclude that there definitely are descriptions of subtle energies in St. Teresa of Ávila and that these constitute an important component of her spiritual development.

Fig. 3
St. Teresa of Ávila with Golden Aura Around the Head Resembling the Sahasrāra Chakra



Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett

We can trace the existence of subtle energies in the case of Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett in her descriptions, but especially in her drawings, these can really help us understand her spiritual development. Jiyu-Kennett started with meditation intensely in Zen Buddhist convent in Shasta Abbey, CA, in 1976. Her meditations would start with negative experiences (Jiyu-Kennett 1997, 31), which we could see as the phase of cleansing negative *karma*. After this phase came development of subtle energies, which were first concentrated behind the navel (*Manipūra chakra* in yoga) and then they rose up around the spine and towards the head (Jiyu-Kennett 1997, 70–75). In certain phase, meditation and development of these energies reached the forehead, with a great impact (*Āgyā chakra*). Jiyu-Kennett stated that she had died for a moment.

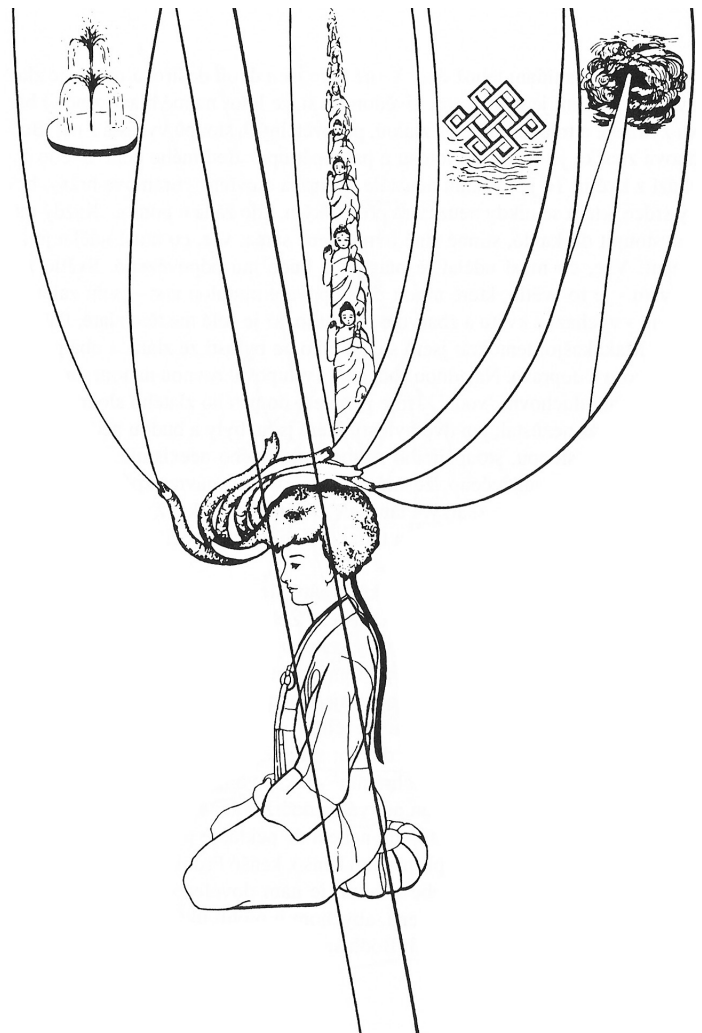
Fig. 4
Mystical Death of Jiyu-Kennett



Jiyu-Kennett (1997, 75) says more on this dramatic moment: *“Something hit my forehead with the word ‘awakening’ ... The blow was so intense that I couldn’t grasp my breath ... I cannot say what happened, but one of the monks said I had died for a moment ... After the blow something opened in the middle of my forehead, right in the place I have the spot and yellow light started to get inside.”*

In the following days, subtle energies developed even further and started to take a certain form. Jiyu-Kennett (1997, 100) gives the following comments on that: *“Five rays of light are rising from my body. They are going up and now they are coming from a lotus blossom on my head.”*

Fig. 5
Fully Developed Chakra Energies



On January 26, 1977, Jiyu-Kennett (1997, 144) experienced the *great awakening*, which she described in this way: “*The mind is illuminated by infinite space, I cannot say neither that in the middle is emptiness nor that there is not emptiness. It is pristine, I am not IT, IT is in me, so form is emptiness and emptiness is form.*” In the second part of her book, written in 1992, Jiyu-Kennett (1997, 162) completes her teaching that she started in the first part of the book. She returns

to the fountain of water that starts in her chest and goes upwards her body: “*This morning I can see a silver pump in my body, powered by my will. It is running a fountain of water that springs in my chest, through my body.*” Jiyu-Kennett sees this vision, which correlates to developing energies, as a very important source and a condition for development of higher spiritual experience, including awakening.

Tab 2.

Comparative Chart of St. Teresa of Ávila and Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett Based on Comparison of Subtle Energies

| | Teresa of Ávila | Jiyu-Kennett |
|---|--|--|
| Description of Subtle Energies | heavenly water, fire, light, warmth, nice smell | yellow light, golden light, water, fountain |
| Subtle Energies and Body | heavenly water streaming upwards, through the body, from the depth of the soul | stream of light (or fountain of water) from the chest upwards through the body |
| Effects Accompanying Development of Subtle Energies I. | purification of the soul from sins (Lat. <i>purificatio</i>) – First three mansions | purification of the mind from bad <i>karma</i> |
| Effects Accompanying Development of Subtle Energies II. | illumination (Lat. <i>illuminatio</i>) – Fourth mansion | vision of internal light – <i>Manipūra chakra</i> |
| Effects Accompanying Development of Subtle Energies III. | <i>mystical death</i> (silkworm turning into a butterfly metaphor) – Fifth mansion | death moment occurring in the course of developing subtle energies – <i>Āgyā chakra</i> |
| Effects Accompanying Development of Subtle Energies IV. | “ <i>flight of the spirit</i> ” – Sixth mansion | transcendent states – development of <i>Five golden pillars</i> over the head |
| Effects Accompanying Development of Subtle Energies V. | <i>spiritual marriage</i> (Lat. <i>unio</i>) – Seventh mansion | <i>awakening</i> (Ja. <i>kenshō</i>) – fully developed central <i>Golden pillar</i> over the head |

3.2.2 Summary

In our comparison study, we investigated the spirituality of St. Teresa of Ávila and Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett, concentrating on subtle energies. We found interesting similarities in three aspects: (1) description of subtle energies; (2) link between subtle energies and body; (3) accompanying effects of subtle energies. We found obvious similarities in the description of energies flowing upward the body and over the head in a form of celestial water, fountain of water, light and similar. This is a highly objective epiphenomenon of spirituality or

mysticism, as it is perceptible not just by mystics themselves, but also by other people. However, a subjective description might differ – meaning description of the influence and experiences brought by these energies. This is where descriptions are heavily influenced by personal experience, historical context, culture and religion.

Similar are also phenomena that accompany subtle energies. Firstly, these energies gradually reveal hidden negative

memories, bringing them up to consciousness. After being mentally processed, they lose their negative influence. This stage is known as the purification phase in Christian religion and purification of mind in Buddhism, but it generally means the same. Next follows the phase of revealing subtle energies, which become visible also for other people in the case St. Teresa of Ávila and Jiyu-Kennett as well. We found differences only in terms of location. While St. Teresa of Ávila spoke of spiritual energies coming from the chest, Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett believed it was around the navel. However, we need to mention that in her case, the source of energy was deeper than just *Manipūra chakra* because subtle energies appeared after the last obstacle had been removed in the depth of the memory (non-biographical memory of white jaguar). Further accompanying sign of development and releasing of subtle energies can be seen in the dramatic experience of internal transformation, called also *mystical death*. St. Teresa of Ávila describes this experience in the Fifth man-

sion and compares it to a silkworm transformed into a butterfly. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett speaks of a temporary death and localizes it in the *Sixth chakra* – *Āgyā*. Another accompanying phenomenon are to do with the development of subtle energies, they come with various transcendent experiences. St. Teresa of Ávila speaks of the “*flight of the spirit*” in the Sixth mansion. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett mentions various visions that come with the development of golden pillars over her head. The last accompanying effect of the development of subtle energies is *spiritual marriage* (Lat. *unio*) in the case of St. Teresa of Ávila and *awakening* (Ja. *kenshō*) in Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett. St. Teresa describes unity without any difference (“*drop of water in the sea*”, “*light in the light*”), which suggests overcoming the subject–object dualism. In the case of Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett, it is explicitly about overcoming duality, in the form of emptiness of the mind that is behind everything, including the “I” of an individual person.

4 Conclusion

In this work, we studied and compared two great spiritual leaders – St Teresa of Ávila, a Carmelite nun, and Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett, a Zen Buddhist. We came to a conclusion: If comparison relies on linguistic tools, it can easily fail because we compare not only two different spiritual traditions but also different personal experiences. Furthermore, we speak about something that exceeds the capabilities of language. Nevertheless, when we scrutinized the so-called subtle energies, we found striking similarities. These helped us better understand texts describing spiritual experiences in both cases of St. Teresa of Ávila and Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett. Margaret South (2001, 246) also believes that it is possible to compare subtle energies, when she speaks of a great comparative potential of subtle energies (in her words *Kundalinī*): “*The Kundalini model offers a wider understanding of mystical experiences ... within a cross-cultural framework.*” She also mentions that there is a possibility for scientific observation: “*Since Kundalini is defined as a psychophysiological mechanism, it is amenable to scientific observation.*” We believe that comparison through

subtle energies has great potential not only for interreligious dialogue but also for studying the nature of human.

We currently often speak of posthumanism and improving of human through technology, genetic manipulation, or nanorobots, yet we still have not succeeded in finding all possibilities that human nature offers, specifically in terms of one’s capacity for self-transcendence in the sense of transcendence of the ordinary state of human consciousness as proposed by Martin Dojčár (2017, 165–170). Carmelite and Zen Buddhism spiritualities show us that there are some more details. Using and developing them may bring some reward – self-knowledge, or salvation and liberation. Since there are accompanying effects of mysticism, there is also a possibility for systematic scientific research. Though a small step has already been made in this, we believe this is just the beginning of the journey for studying higher forms of spirituality.

Notes

- [1] We understand spirituality as an internal core of religion. Every religion contains, apart from visible signs such as myths, rituals and other similar manifestations also internal spiritual aspects and feelings. In this respect, the very term of spirituality corresponds to the term of mysticism, which (in our concept) utilizes a vital transformation known as “*death of an old man and birth of a new one – a pneumatic*”. Here, Mircea Eliade speaks of a universal matrix *life – death – resurrection* (Eliade 1997, 216), which corresponds also to the St. Paul’s notion of the *pneuma*. Our concept of spirituality thus represents the most radical type of spirituality that we can describe as mystical spirituality.
- [2] Almost a hundred years ago, Henri Bergson wrote that when mysticism is mentioned, many people feel its impact (Bergson 1970, 348–349). This suggests that both a mystical experience and understanding of such an experience is not completely strange to people. We could even say that every person is a potential mystic. However, it is questionable whether people can develop this potential in their lives.
- [3] We are borrowing the term of *language-game* from Ludwig Wittgenstein, who “*sees language as a complicated mixture of similarities that meet at certain points and merge. Thus, he finds a term that is better than ‘family resemblance’*. In this pragmatic approach to language, the meaning of a given word is determined by its usage in the language and its function in the system. Language should be seen as a tool for communication and activity in given contexts, in given language-games.” (Sačková 2007, 4).
- [4] Multiple authors, for example Gaston Bachelard, Carl Gustav Jung, René Alleau, Paul Ricoeur and others imply that we should be using *symbols*, not *signs* to speak about deeper spiritual experience. Signs represent ordinary semiotic labels, but symbols express multi-level semantic structures that cannot be understood totally (Borecký 2003, 23).
- [5] We believe that *subtle energies* constitute a bridge between the spirit (*consciousness*) and matter (*body*) and, when fully developed, transcends human body. Subtle energies serve as a “lift” that can transport consciousness beyond the boundaries of human body, so that the consciousness finally expands into the Absolute dimension. On the way to this, we find a very dramatic stage in which consciousness leaves the body. This stage, which is almost impossible to distinguish from physical death or real dying, is called *mystical death*. The advantage of these energies is in the fact that they are visible to the naked eye (in certain lighting conditions also in a mirror), therefore we can use a scientific approach. This could push scientific research in this field considerably. Despite the fact that subtle energies are very dynamic, they come in a strictly given form that can be compared with subtle energies drawn by Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett.
- [6] See also Teresa of Ávila 1904, 50.
- [7] See also Gálik, Gáliková Tolnaiová, and Modrzejewski 2020, 607.
- [8] Buddhism came to Japan from China. In China, it was called *Chan*, with Bodhidharma being its greatest representative. He sailed to China in 520 AD. In the 12th and 13th century in Japan, there were two most famous schools *Rinzai* and *Sōtō*. *Rinzai* was founded by Eisai, who found many followers among *samurais*. *Rinzai* emphasizes *sudden enlightenment*, the followers tried to gain it through long *kōan* exercises. *Sōtō* was founded by Dōgen, it is more meditative and open to people than *Rinzai*. Less emphasis is put on *kōan* exercises and preferred is objectless mediation (Ja. *Shikantaza*). Zen is very popular in the West now, it is promoted by D. T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, Philip Kapleau, or Jiyu-Kennett.
- [9] For example, in 1995 Konstantin Korotkov proposed a *GDV technique* – “Gas Discharge Visualization”, which is based on computerized analyses of bio-photon emissions of human fingers in high-energy magnetic field captured using a specially configured optical CCD camera system (see Gálik 2020, 17).

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