

## A COMPARISON OF SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UNIVERSALITY OF MYSTICISM

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, the authors study similarities in mysticism of Western Christian tradition and selected Eastern spiritual traditions based on comparative analysis of prayer degrees (“mansions” in *The Interior Castle*) in Teresa of Avila and Yogic psychical centres (the so-called “chakras”) that are known also in other Eastern spiritual traditions (Taoism and Buddhism). The authors note that especially higher degrees – from the fourth to the seventh – show formal similarities, while the seventh degree also reveals similarities in contents. They speak of importance of revealing these similarities in the perspective of understanding of human being, his further spiritual development, and also interreligious dialogue.

### Key words

Mysticism, symbol, mansions in Teresa’s *Interior Castle*, kundalini, chakra

spiritual traditions can be taken as subjects of comparative analysis through which we can study universality of the phenomenon of mysticism.

### 1 Introduction

Religion is primarily a spiritual, not institutional phenomenon. Each and every religion is based on certain spiritual and mystical tradition that is the source of its spiritual vitality. If we then want to understand a given religion, we have to know especially its spiritual tradition, the very core of this religion. These

In this paper we would like to compare Western Christian tradition, represented by saint Teresa of Avila, with the selected Eastern traditions. We would like to pay special attention to morphological similarities in mystical journey in Teresa’s work *The Interior Castle* with spiritual traditions such as Yoga, Buddhism and Taoism. Speaking more concretely, we want to investigate and see if Teresa’s

seven "mansions" of *The Interior Castle* show structural similarity with the so-called energy centres that are in Indian (Yoga) spiritual traditions known as "chakras".

If we could prove the existence of similarities between mystical journeys in various mystical traditions or formal conformity in contents, then we could say that mysticism is a universal phenomenon. We believe that declaration of universality of mysticism in the sense of formal and structural level or content level, has a consequence for example in understanding of human being and potential spiritual evolution. It can also be a foundation for reasoning for the possibility and validity of interreligious dialogue that occurs also through participation in spiritual experience in individual traditions.

## 2 Several methodological ideas on comparing mysticism

Comparison is one of the basic tools of process of learning in humans. When we learn something new, we compare it with our older knowledge and experience. If the object of our study starts to intersect with the old knowledge just a little, we start to understand. We usually do not fully understand everything, but it is the beginning of the journey that leads us to further understanding. If there is no footing, then we at least realise that we do not know the given object and start to be aware of those barriers and differences. Through comparison we are presented with a field of meanings, some of them identical to the contents that we already know,

some of them different. Experts on linguistics and semiotics agree that this learning process is also the basic characteristics of language. Hypothetically speaking, if there were just one term to describe the whole colour spectrum, for example "blue" then we would not even know that blue is in fact blue. The term "blue" must be in correlation with terms describing violet, green or red, for example. Meaning of the words is formed in a grid of position and opposition of symbols. These relations define meaning that is further refined by incorporating more symbols into relations between them. As Umberto Eco (2009, 91) says, understanding thus becomes a never ending process, unlimited *semiosis*. This is the principle that is similar to the *hermeneutic circle* in which knowledge is constantly corrected by permanent approaching to the subject of study. Understanding in the sense of complete comprehension is not reached in just one round. For example, the meaning of a historical written document can constantly be amended by new information about the content of the text, but also information about its author and time period in which he or she lived. We can therefore constantly improve our knowledge of an event or important writing.

When we compare simple symbols that we use every day, we soon find some differences and agreements. However, we encounter a problem with symbols that originate in diverse cultural and religious areas. A symbol, unlike a sign, has a number of meanings and is based deeper in culture and religion. This base also relates to deeper levels of human psyche, otherwise the sym-

bol could not exist. Carl Gustav Jung (1997) spoke of “*collective unconscious*” that symbols penetrate when they are used over a long period of time, these then appear in our dreams, visions and so on. We approach a symbol as a sign, yet this symbol also exceeds the sign. Let’s take for example the Christian symbol of a cross. We can identify a cross as two arms set across each other, but we do not necessarily have to understand it as a symbol, because in Christianity, cross represents Passion, salvation and something sacred. It is though much more difficult to understand the symbols found in other cultures, for example Buddhist dharma wheel.

When dealing with symbols, we need to open our mind to a deeper experience that is off the abstract rationality and that we have no control of. Paul Ricoeur (1993) claims that unlike in the case of sign, we need to face a symbol with open mind and wait until we are approached by it. Ricoeur (1993, 161) uses the word *symbol* for “whatever meaning structure whose primary, literal meaning leads to a different meaning, indirect, secondary, transferred meaning that can only be reached through the first meaning”. The primary meaning is expressed by the sign, but this sign leads to other, secondary signs that we cannot understand directly, although we can open ourselves to them.

René Alleau speaks similarly. According to him, the world of signs belongs to the world of society, while the world of symbols belongs to the world of sanctity. Alleau (2008, 23) says: “We cannot describe a symbol, we can only approach it and start walking to experience the meaning of this walk. A sign,

on contrary, is something we can describe logically, something available for our intellect and logical analysis.” Alleau (2008, 21) continues that we need to be reborn into a symbol. To be reborn for a symbol, we need to die to this world. Such a rebirth changes the profane structure into a sacred structure. Profane changes into sacred when something exceptional, some kind of *metanoia* happens. In the Old Testament, for example, we can read about a dream patriarch Jacob had when we fell asleep on his way to Laban. He dreamt of a ladder that angles used. In the end God spoke to Jacob and promises his blessings (Genesis 28: 10–22). This dream had a tremendous effect on Jacob, so he marked this “horrible” place. A common place became sacred and the stone he was sleeping on was made into a sacred pillar. We can say that with this dream patriarch Jacob entered the field of sanctity and symbols.

Religious symbols carrying sacred character show structural similarity in mysticism. For example, mysticism is defined also as consciousness of being (spirit) that can only be reached by personal transformation, which includes understanding of symbols and sanctity. Marie-Madeleine Davy (2000, 8) also links mysticism to personal transformation when says: “a mystic is a person who has reached the spirit. Spirit is a revolutionist; every advanced spirit mightily outgrows the old bounds (...) in which the majority of people find shelter and safety.”

The language that mystics use is full of symbols too. It is, for example, very frequent when in various spiritual and mystical traditions fire, light or air is meant to represent

the spirit. As the opposite, water is used as a symbol for something lower, physical, bodily. By coincidence of water and fire in consecration, baptising, a new being is initiated. Fire can also represent the masculine principle, while water can represent the feminine principle, and their integration in *unio mystica*. If we can understand the symbolic language of mysticism, then we also can understand mysticism. Consequently, comparison of various symbols would mean comparison of various sorts of mystical traditions.

It is however questionable whether we can compare varying symbols in different religious and mystical traditions. Without comparison, as Dalibor Antalik (2005, 101) says, there is no knowledge. "Comparison is not purely classification, it is especially a tool for understanding (...) The process of comparison does not end when the formula that expresses similarity and differences is constructed. The aim of comparative frame is to understand better whatever religious practice, when we understand the formula that is behind." A man simply wants to learn, since learning is one of the natural desires of man as an intelligent being. He also wants to know things outside his culture and religion. Max Müller expressed that "the one who knows only one religion, does not know any" (Antalik 2005, 15). Yet comparison needs to be done with great care, because we know what troubles rise even when we translate languages, which express profane things. The more so, if they express also religious symbols. We need to imagine meaning of the written text, and we only can imagine something we know, something we have already experienced. It is more complicated to imagine, for example,

what fire or water symbolise in various religions. Our imagination and knowledge can be helped significantly with descriptions of images. Such images have a translinguistic nature and are easier to understand among languages.

There are plenty image expressions of symbols, but many of them would be very difficult to understand without a thorough study. Despite this, there are also many symbols that are quite clear, because they are directly linked to human body. In our case, it is the system of energy centres, the so-called *chakras*. Although we find descriptions of the *chakra system* mainly in Hinduism, especially in Yoga, it can be recognized in other religious and spiritual traditions as well. All of the image-based representations of chakras are linked to a certain location in the body along with descriptions of spiritual experience. We presuppose that the so-called chakra system is an important starting point for a study, in particular a comparison of various mystical or spiritual traditions.

### 3 Comparison of the chakra system

Etymology of the word *chakra* comes from Sanskrit and means a *circle* or a *wheel*. In the full sense of the word, chakra represents an energy centre that connects body with the *astral world*. The classic Yoga recognizes the seven main chakras or six that link to the body and the seventh, which is above the crown of the head (Eliade 1999, 185–187):

1. *The Muladhara chakra* is situated at the base of the coccyx between the anus

and genitals. Around lingam (penis) there is *kundalini energy*, which is coiled up eight times.

2. *The Svadhithana chakra* is placed at the root of the penis.
3. *The Manipura chakra* is located in the middle of the body, above the navel.
4. *The Anahata chakra* is situated in the region of the heart.
5. *The Vishuddhi chakra* is located in throat area.
6. *The Ajna chakra* is between the eyebrows.
7. *The Sahasrara chakra* is above the crown of the head.

According to Yoga teaching, if the kundalini energy is arisen, then this energy activates all the chakra centres gradually, one by one, up to the Sahasrara. However, it is the Manipura chakra that is activated as the first. Each of the energy centres represents individual type of experience. Higher degrees of spiritual experiences start in the fourth hearth chakra, mystical death in the sixth chakra, and liberation in the seventh chakra. *Kundalini* is symbolically expressed in the form of a snake, dragon, aura of the saints and so on.

The most detailed teaching about the chakras and kundalini can be found in Yoga, specifically in Hatha Yoga. It can, however, be found also in other religions, for example in Tibetan Buddhism and Taoism, but we can also recognize depiction of something very close to the chakras in Kabala, Sufism, and Christian mysticism. For example, the Taoist text *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (Jung and Wilhelm 2004, 57, 65) mentions two

centres of energy: one of them corresponds to the Manipura chakra, the other one correlates to the Sahasrara chakra in Yoga. The first representation is explained in the Taoist text by the comment that it is a “rebirth in the space of energy”. The second representation is explained as “awakening of the spiritual body to start independent existence”. There is also a different name of this representation – *Golden Flower*. Looking at depicting of the Golden Flower, we can certainly assume that it is beyond the body – transcendent form of existence.

In Christian art we find Sahasrara or Taoist Golden Flower depicted in pictures of aura of the saints. When expressed in words, we speak about a cloud, which is a symbol that dates back between the time of Moses and the work *The Cloud of Unknowing* written in the Middle Ages. In its Czech translation a picture of a Luttrell psalm is applied showing the cloud along with “flowers”, similar to the chakras (lotus flowers) in Hinduism.

Zen Buddhist roshi Houn Jiyu-Kennett (1997) also uses very impressive pictures of the chakras along with their descriptions. The first opened chakra is, again, Manipura (Jiyu-Kennett 1997, 70), and then there are other chakras that are activated up the spine. For a moment, Jiyu-Kennett experiences “death” when the sixth Ajna chakra is opened (1997, 74–75) and the seventh chakra, similar to the picture of “Golden Flower” from the Taoist book, gets gradually opened as well.

In the Jewish mysticism of Kabbalah, the seven-candle holder Menorah symbolises something similar to the chakras in Yoga.

Seven lights of the candles represent contact with higher spiritual degrees or Jacob's mystical ladder to heaven. However, according to Brian Lancaster (2000, 64–65) the connection between Menorah and the human body, specifically the lungs, is important: "The analogy of the lungs might seem a little weird now. Yet for Malbim lungs had a very important role in our intellectual life. People believed that by purifying the air and forcing this spiritual steam up for the brain (...) the relation to lungs is about mystical identification of breathing and intellectual soul of the man." In Yoga, breathing is very important, as it is through breathing that the kundalini and the chakras are stimulated, so that liberation – *samadhi* – can be reached.

Also the Islam mysticism of Sufism, especially its great spiritual leader Inayat Khan, speaks about the importance of breathing. Breathing is a physiological process, but as the text explains, it also has an effect on the more subtle levels of the body (chakras) and intellect. Khan (Witteveen 1998, 116) claims: "Those, who have some intuition or whatever miraculous power, got possession of it through breath. The first and basic condition though is the clear channel for breath, this channel is meant to be human body itself. If this channel is blocked, then air cannot pass freely." The text indicates that they are *nadi channels* that prevent "breathing" in a subtle level. Kundalini energy is released with the help of breathing, and then it flows through the energy channels, which need to be cleared from all obstacles, so that the chakras may be activated.

We can see illustrations of the chakras even in

the New World, which also supports the thesis of universality of this phenomenon. Ravindra Kumar (2006, 70–71), citing R. Sheer, says: "[i]n Peru, we find in the ancient stone-built temples engravings that depict a puma, condor and snake – symbols of the three empires: our Earth, a world above it and a world below it. Between the engravings, there are seven holes, placed one on the top of each other. (...) According to the early Kichwa mythology, each of these seven hollows was filled up with gold and diamonds (...) energy that the Incas called Kori Machakway is the same transformation that the Indian people describe as kundalini. Activation or awakening of the chakras is bound to the kundalini energy, which is showed even more frequently than the chakras themselves." Again, Ravindra Kumar (2006, 70) – with the help of J. White – offers examples of such symbolic expressions: "It (kundalini) was described in historical writings from the ancient Egypt, Tibet, Sumer, China, Greek, and other cultures and religious traditions, including the early Judaism and Christianity. Crown of the pharaoh, Mexican feathered dragon, dragon in Oriental mythology or the snake in the Garden of Eden – these all are hints of kundalini. Also Aesculapian staff, two snakes twisted around the staff – the modern symbol of medical practice. It is said that this staff came from god Hermes, the founder of Hermetic tradition of higher knowledge."

Symbolic illustrations of the chakras are more or less seen in various spiritual traditions. The precision of positioning of the chakras on the body is remarkable, as well as depiction of kundalini and experiences in individual chakras. Kundalini represents



energy that activates chakras, one by one, along the spine and therefore is an important instrument of reaching liberation. The Manipura chakra is usually the first to be awakened and means the beginning of transcendent experience. The fifth and sixth chakra then bring the so-called “*mystical death*”, intense feeling of the death of myself. In the seventh chakra we see the end of duality and liberation.

#### **4 Theresa’s mansions as a system of chakras?**

A German theologian and religious scholar Hans Küng notices connections between the mysticism of Teresa of Avila and Hinduism, especially Yoga. So does a Czech mystic Eduard Tomáš. Küng (1997, 68) claims, for example, that there are surprising similarities between “degrees of mystical submerging in *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali and grades of prayer of Teresa of Avila”. Küng though does not define where exactly these similarities are. Tomáš (2000, 119), on the other hand, identifies precisely mansions of Teresa of Avila and the Yoga system of the chakras when says: “There are seven grades of a mystical ladder, seven large mansions or Teresa’s sacred castle, seven great centres of our subtle psychic.” Similarly to Küng, he does not go any further in this – for us an important – remark. Are then mansions (prayer grades) in the Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle* something similar to the Yoga chakras or is this similarity purely incidental?

Ordered by the Inquisition, Teresa of Avila wrote her mystical work *The Interior Castle* in 1577, five years before her death, when

she was already a great mystic. When contemplating the concept of the book, Teresa of Avila (1921, 17) got an inspiration about how to methodologically process the grades of prayer: “While I was begging our Lord today to speak for me, since I knew not what to say nor how to commence this work which obedience has laid upon me, an idea occurred to me which I will explain, and which will serve as a foundation for that I am about to write. I thought of the soul as resembling a castle, formed of a single diamond or a very transparent crystal, and containing many rooms, just as in heaven there are many mansions.”

This Teresa’s vision seems to be an indirect and concentrated digest of her mystical journey, rather than its direct copy. The symbolic crystal, castle with many mansions, is really interesting. In the centre of the diamond, or castle, there is a light that does not reach to the mansions at the side of the diamond. We can cite Teresa’s various speeches (1921, 18, 22, 23–24) on this topic: “Let us imagine, as I said, that there are many rooms in this castle, of which some are above, some below, others at the side; in the centre, in the very midst of them all, is the principal chamber in which God and the soul hold their most secret intercourse. (...) Now let us turn at last to our castle with its many mansions. You must not think of a suite of rooms placed in succession, but fix your eyes on the keep, the court inhabited by the King. Like the kernel of the palmito, from which several rinds must be removed before coming to the eatable part, this principal chamber is surrounded by many others. However large, magnificent, and spacious

you imagine this castle to be, you cannot exaggerate it; the capacity of the soul is beyond all our understanding, and the Sun within this palace enlightens every part of it. (...) You must notice that the light which comes from the King's palace hardly shines at all in these first mansions; although not as gloomy and black as the soul in mortal sin, yet they are in semi-darkness, and their inhabitants see scarcely anything."

It is however important to realise that the symbol of a diamond or a castle depicts human soul and borders of the castle, the "outer walls" represent human body. It means that this symbolism describes a human, his body and soul. Teresa (1921, 18) for example says: "All our care is concentrated on our bodies, which are but the coarse setting of the diamond or the outer walls of the castle."

Teresa's structure of the text is progressive; it describes the mystical rise of the soul to God from the first chamber to the seventh chamber. This mystical ascent was known in Christian mysticism from the Middle Ages and its roots are found in the *mystical ladder of patriarch Jacob*. Many mystical authors spoke about a journey or ascend to God among them Bonaventure in his work *Journey of the Soul into God*. Ascend, or gradation can also be found in the classic three-phase or triadic understanding of mystical journey by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite – *purification, illumination, unification* (*purificatio, illuminatio, unio* in Latin).

The first three mansions of the castle, as Teresa writes, are a kind of pre-stage of deeper mystical experiences. According to her, these

are easily penetrated by the human's negative characters, symbolised by frogs, lizards and venomous snakes. Basing on Teresa's explanations, these first three mansions cannot be reliably identified with the first three grades of the Yoga chakra system (Muladhara, Svadhisthana and Manipura). The first three mansions are more likely to be part of the first stage of mysticism, which is purification (*purificatio* in Latin). However, if we consider also Patanjali's first stages of ethical preparation in Yoga, then we would find something similar also here.

The fourth mansion represents mystical stage of illumination and this is the place where spiritual turnover starts. Teresa (1921, 39) says: "Henceforth they begin to be supernatural and it will be most difficult to speak clearly about them". And really, the fourth degree is in all religions supposed to be the centre, heart of spiritual existence. Teresa of Avila (1921, 44) surprisingly adds this: "This joy does not appear to me to originate in the heart, but in some more interior part and, as it were, in the depths of our being. I think this must be the centre of the soul, as I have since learnt and will explain later on." In this centre of the soul, Teresa says, it is very difficult to distinguish where the soul ends and God starts. She speaks (1921, 44) of this poetically: „[t]he dilation begun by the celestial waters in the depths of our being. They appear to dilate and enlarge us internally". Teresa speaks here about expanding the heart, which resembles spiritual techniques to expand consciousness. It is not important if we speak about expanding the heart or expanding consciousness, it is the expanding itself that is required for open-



ing of the self for the spiritual and transcendent. Remarkable with Teresa is also her frequently mentioned element of water (inner light in consciousness in Teresa's approach can be seen as *celestial waters*), which symbolises the life-giving flow of subtle forms of energy coming from the very depth, beyond borders of the body. In the seventh mansion she approves this in her words (1921, 121): "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".

Can we then take Teresa's fourth mansion as development of the fourth Anahata chakra? Taoist and Zen literature understand the beginning of awakening of spiritual potential to lay in the Manipura chakra (see above). Despite this difference, Teresa places the fourth mansion in the area of the heart, when she speaks about expanding the heart, but she believes its very source has even deeper spiritual origin. This interpretation resembles the symbol of Jewish candleholder (Menorah), whose primary line reaches the fourth light (Sephira) or Ramana Maharshi's "*spiritual Heart*".

Ramana Maharshi, who continues with the Vedanta tradition, speaks of the Heart or the true Self (*Atman*) as the universal life-principle of human. This principle is at the same time god being and is different from the idea of the self or ego. Maharshi (Mudaliar 1996, 54, 61) characterises the true Self in this way: "[t]here is the one and only Reality, the greatest truth, and it is not only your Self, but the Self of the whole world you see now, as well as of all other beings. This

Self, *Paraatman* is immortal and unalterable as opposed to ego, *jiva*, which is temporary. You must not mistake ego for *Atman*." He further explains: "Heart is the greatest centre of the Self. You do not need to doubt it. The real Self shines constantly in the Heart, behind the *jiva* or ego." Maharshi (Mudaliar 1996, 61) even places this *spiritual Heart* to the right side of heart, but, of course, under the physical and also the fine layer, referring to the old Vedantic texts.

Based on comparison between Teresa of Avila and Ramana Maharshi, we could find an agreement in the placement of the spiritual centre and in the case of the fourth mansion in Teresa of Avila we could also speak about awakening of the fourth chakra. This is supported by Teresa's experiences (1921, 42), which describes in the first chapter of the fourth mansions: "Whilst writing this I am thinking of the loud noise in my head which I mentioned in the Introduction, and which has made it almost impossible to obey the command given me to write this. It sounds as if there were a number of rushing waterfalls within my brain, while in other parts, drowned by the sound of the waters, are the voices of birds singing and whistling. This tumult is not in my ears, but in the upper part of my head, where, they say, is placed the superior part of the soul. I have long thought that this must be so because the flight of the spirit seems to take place from this part with great velocity." She further continues (1921, 125): "However large a fire may be, the flame never burns downwards, but upwards, and so this movement is seen to come from the centre of the soul whose powers it excites."

Having this description, it is quite apparent that ascending soul in Teresa will in Yoga mean ascending kundalini from the heart towards the crown of the head, including the physiologic effects such as sensation of internal noise at the top of the head. Transformation or deeper spiritual experiences start in the fourth mansion, but the actual transcendence, which we may call *mystical death* only takes place in the fifth mansion. Teresa writes about this death (1921, 54): "This is a delicious death, for the soul is deprived of the faculties it exercised while in the body: delicious because, (although not really the case), it seems to have left its mortal covering to abide more entirely in God. So completely does this take place, that I know not whether the body retains sufficient life to continue breathing." When Teresa (1921, 58) describes this spiritual experience (*mystical death*, she uses the example of archaic change from a worm into a white butterfly. Teresa interprets this change as follows: "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!" In the old cultures, a butterfly represents soul and a scene of internal transformation. This transformation is, according to Teresa, quite fast. During the process the worm dies and is reborn in the form of butterfly, which we can compare to the Paul's idea of the death of the old man and birth of the new one (Romans 6: 4–6). The fifth mansion of *The Interior Castle*, as described by Teresa of Avila, can be supposed a transforming one, where we witness

the phenomenon of *mystical death*.

There is, however, a disagreement about "placement" of the mystical death, because as we can see above, Jiyu-Kennett places it into the level of the sixth chakra – the Ajna chakra. According to Teresa, the mystical death starts in the fifth mansion, which she calls simple joining God, continues in the sixth mansion with a kind of engagement to God and finally finishes up in the seventh mansion, with mystical union with God. R. Kumar (2006, 243) also notices that something changes significantly in the fifth chakra, when he says: "Enabling the chakra leads to freeing from the bonds of secular passion (...) Energy that was up to now used to reach the earthly aims is free now, it changes its direction up and opens the gate of freedom." Now we need to say that although Jiyu-Kennett describes her mystical death in the level of the sixth chakra, the so-called third eye, she does not speak about the two previous chakras. For her, it is a continual process – from arousing the Manipura chakra to liberation. Despite the disagreement in the chakra localisation of mystical death, it is important that it stays in one line of rising kundalini.

The mystical engagement happens, according to Teresa of Avila, in the sixth mansion. Teresa says that this sixth mansion is a place with frequent ecstasy states, accompanied by visions, inner voices, visions of unknown countries and so on. Teresa (1921, 89) speaks on this: "To return to this sudden rapture of the spirit. The soul really appears to have quitted the body, which however is not lifeless, and though, on the other hand, the person is certainly not dead, yet she her-

self cannot, for a few seconds, tell whether her spirit remains within her body or not. She feels that she has been wholly transported into another and a very different region from that in which we live, where a light so unearthly is shown that, if during her whole lifetime she had been trying to picture it and the wonders seen, she could not possibly have succeeded."

Teresa's experiences indicate that even in this mansion we may speak about mystical death (freeing the soul from the body), which brings further agreement with other traditions. However, in this mansion, the ecstatic journeys of the soul are important, formally comparable with other traditions, for example Taoist and Zen Buddhist. In the Taoist book *The Secret of the Golden Flower* it is mentioned the fourth grade of meditation – the "centre in the middle of conditions" (Jung and Wilhelm 2004, 71); similar descriptions offers Jiyu-Kennet as well (1997, 93–138).

In the seventh mansion, however, Teresa (1921, 121) says these ecstatic states cease and are exchanged by tranquillity, spiritual stabilisation and total unification of the soul with God, when she writes: "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." This union is full and perfect, according to Teresa we may

only speak about differences during engagement, when the soul is still separated from the Groom.

We speak about experience that is very similar to mystical experience in Hinduism, especially in Advaita Vedanta and Yoga, but also in Buddhism, Taoism and Islam. The old Vedanta text *Katha Upanishad* (*Lead us from darkness to light* 1997, 50) says: "A wise man, capable to distinguish spiritually, has to contemplate hard and utilise his tongue and other organs, merge his mind with intellect, intellect will join the Great Soul and the Great Soul will submerge the tranquil Self – the Essence." The continuator or Advaita Vedanta (philosophy of oneness) Shankara (1999, 58) explains the realisation of the Self in this way: "Similarly the adept fully realises naturalness of Himself when he is separated from his body, intellect and the Spirit in Himself and sees the Witness, Self, Knowledge of the Absolute, the cause of everything."

Similarly, a new continuator of Vedanta tradition, Ramana Maharshi, (Mudaliar 1996, 63) speaks about self-realisation: "You will finally become the pure knowing, in which there are no more thoughts or worries because they are left behind in the beginning. It is a flood and you are just a glade of grass, you are engulfed, but it is very blissful because you combine into a single entity with the flood that covers you. This is fusion of *jiva* and Brahman, when ego melts in the real Self, this is the fade of hallucination or illusion and achievement of the Truth."

The *Bhagavad Gita* (1999, 69), which is based on the tradition of Vedanta and Yoga, also mentions the fusion of Atman and Brahma:

"The heart will melt in Brahma, the eyes see the all-present Brahma everywhere, his atman is in all the creations and all the creations are spread in his Atman."

Mircea Eliade (1997, 85) explains this state in Buddhism: "Buddha does not define *nirvana*, but constantly speaks about some of its attributes. He says that Arhats reached the state of bliss, that nirvana is bliss, that he, Blessed, achieved Immortality, and monks can also reach it (...) Vision, in the canon called 'the eye of the arhats' (*Arija Cakhu*) enables contact with the unconditional, unfabricated, with *nirvana*."

In Taoism, especially in the elementary Taoist work the *Tao Te Ching* (Laozi, 63), we can also find many references to fulfilment in the Tao: "If you submit yourself to the Tao, you will become a part of it and the emptiness inside you can be filled with anything."

It is similar in Sufism. Although there is an emphasis on experience of unity with God, it is about transcending I-Thou duality. H. Inayat Khan (Witteveen 1998, 110–111) explains that in this state a Sufi hears God with his ears, sees God with his eyes, and uses God's hands, God's legs. His idea becomes God's idea; his sensation becomes God's sensation. For him, there is no more difference that a God's follower sees between him and God. He refers to the Persian poet Khusraua, who says: "When I became You and you became Me, when I became the body and You became the soul, then, Loved, there is no difference between us."

The above-mentioned examples show us that the *mystical union* (*unio mystica*), as the final stage of mystical journey, is well

demonstrable in all of the great spiritual traditions. Teresa of Avila may speak of the symbolic drop in the sea or light inside light, but this expresses precisely unity without distinction. Other traditions, especially Eastern ones, speak about nothingness, emptiness, unconditioned state, but this all can be expressed also by Teresa's symbolic way, namely that it is about unity without distinction and without a possibility to positively distinguish the nature of me or consciousness. All of these cases describe the state of consciousness (because we realise it) that goes beyond all the limits. In the present discussions influenced by postmodern period, there are some disputes about whether this consciousness is pure, unconditioned or defined by language. The claim that the "pure consciousness" is constructed is not in accordance with statements of the mystics, philosophers in various spiritual tradition, who claim it is the last and unconditioned reality. Martin Dojčár (2011, 34) notices that we have to distinguish between the *per se consciousness* and the *relational processes of awareness*. Pure consciousness is continual and must ontologically precede all concepts of consciousness as well as relational processes of awareness.

There are also significant similarities between Teresa's descriptions of subtle energies (see for example her description of the so-called milk-like beams; 1921, 121) and the kundalini energy and the chakras in the Eastern approaches. We have found certain differences in awakening of the chakras, in the Eastern traditions it is usually the Manipura chakra that opens as the first, while in Teresa's case it is the fourth mansion that is related to spir-

itual heart and the physical heart. This difference might have been based on Teresa's relation to God, loving and friendly, coming from the "heart" rather than the intellect. By borrowing *Bhagavad Gita's* expressions we may say that Teresa showed bhakti-like love respect to God. This might be the reason why the heart chakra is opened as the first. We can also see and prove that there is a flow of delicate energies to the crown of the head, which also supports the opinion that, also in her case, it was the kundalini energy. There is a hint of disproportion in placement of the mystical death. Teresa of Avila speaks about the fifth mansion, while in the Eastern traditions it is usually placed in the sixth mansion. Perhaps this puzzle is not entirely compact in neither of these cases, because Jiyu-Kennett does not, for example, describe the previous two grades (Anahata and Vishuddhi) and Teresa of Avila does not set a precise placement for the fifth mansion. We believe these inconsistencies shall not be overestimated because the phenomenon of mystical death is very well described and this is important. There is a full agreement in description of the rest of the ecstatic journeys in the level of the sixth mansion and the sixth Ajna chakra. This all leads us to an assumption that also in the case of Teresa of Avila we may speak about her mansions as about the system of Yogic chakras. Teresa of Avila, being a 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish mystic, did not have a slightest idea about other spiritual traditions, maybe except Judaism and Islam, which she might have know about a little, therefore these similarities really support the idea of a universal character of mysticism.

## 5 Conclusion

We studied the question of universality of mysticism on the bases of comparison of Christian mysticism and several Eastern spiritual traditions such as Yoga, Buddhism, and Taoism. Christian mysticism was represented by one of the greatest mystics, doctor of the Church and a saint, Teresa of Avila. The comparison was focused on the chakra system, their localisations and effects as described in individual traditions. The advantage of such a comparison is in the fact that each chakra is linked to a specific location in a human body, which makes the process of comparison more precise.

The very first impulse for the comparison came from the claims of Hans Küng and Eduard Tomáš, who hinted some significant similarities between the Teresa's mansions and the chakras. However, these authors did not go any further. That is why we had been facing a fundamental question from the very beginning – does Teresa of Avila really speak about the same "system" – "the system of chakras", which is recognized and described in Yoga?

A more detailed study of Teresa's *Interior Castle* showed us surprising similarities, but also some differences. Surely, Teresa does not speak about the chakras, because she is not familiar with Hinduism or Yoga, but she is metaphorically speaking about the seven mansions. We suppose that her descriptions of the fourth, fifth, sixth and the seventh mansion are similar to the descriptions of the chakras in Yoga. She places the fourth mansion in the region of the heart (the Anahata chakra). In the fifth mansion, which

is not precisely localised, Teresa describes the mystical death, with even stronger effects in the sixth mansion. We can suppose that it was, analogically, the rising energy of kundalini, because Teresa speaks metaphorically about “milk-like beams”, “water”, “light”, even noise that is rising up to the crown of the head. It is the seventh chakra that is, in Yoga, placed over the crown of the head. Based on Teresa’s descriptions, it seems quite apparent that she might have been speaking about the awakening of kundalini and opening of the so-called centres of delicate energy – the chakras.

Along with these similarities, we can also see some differences. The first one is in the description of the first three mansions: they do not correspond to the first three chakras in Yoga. Teresa’s description of the mansions matches more likely the phase of purification (*purificatio* in Latin) on her mystical journey.

The second difference is in the order of opening of the chakras. Teresa’s mystical experience started in the fourth mansion, while in Taoism and Zen Buddhism it is the third Manipura chakra.

We found the third difference in placement of the mystical death. Teresa of Avila mentions the fifth mansion with the remark that the process of separating the soul from the body continues in the sixth mansion, while Zen Buddhist Jiyu-Kennett localises this into the sixth Ajna chakra.

Beside these structural differences there surely are some differences in the content. Teresa of Avila lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain. Her Roman Catholic belief had an influence on her spiritual experience, which was theist

and interpersonal. We however have to say that in her last, seventh chamber, the spiritual images that Teresa of Avila describes are very similar to the Eastern ones, which are not based on content but on the state of pure, contentless consciousness. Also the course of the mystical death itself, accompanied with the feeling of dying, is very similar to other mystical traditions. Mysticism of Teresa of Avila thus offers compelling similarities with the Eastern spiritual traditions, especially when speaking about formal and structural features (kundalini and the system of chakras), but also two content-based similarities (mystical death and contentless consciousness).

As a result of our comparison we can claim that despite some more or less content-based differences, there are some important formal and structural similarities between various mystical traditions. Thus we believe that it is possible to speak about universality of mysticism. This universal-like understanding of mysticism offers some important consequences for philosophical understanding of man and his spiritual evolution. We also believe that it offers a great starting point for interfaith dialogue.

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