

## Haunted Souls

### *From Meditation into Hallucinations*

*“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

Emphasis Added, 1 Peter 5:8, NASB

As borrowed from the eastern mystical religions, meditative or contemplative spirituality—the operation of which involves engaging in ascetic practices and retreating into solitude (getting alone with God) and silence (remaining quiet before God)—has emerged among evangelical Christians as a popular way to experience God’s love and receive revelations from Him, for intimacy breeds communication. **[1]** Interestingly, this discovery among evangelicals about how to find “spirituality” now parallels the “mindfulness” revolution taking place in secular society.

By shucking their ever-present cell phones, tabloids, I-pods and other distractions, increasing numbers of people from all walks of life—athletes, educators, corporate execs and workers, politicians, government workers and members of the military—attempt to “de-stress” their lives by attending “mindfulness” retreats where under the direction of spiritual tutors, they learn to meditate with the hope they will discover “a new consciousness” to help them cope with life. **[2]** To promote “mindfully” working, playing, parenting, test taking, and even going to war, the practice of meditation is rising in America. Based on the increase of its popularity over the last decade, it’s estimated that in the near future more than 27 million American adults will engage in meditation. **[3]** To cope, they contemplate.

But amidst the rising popularity of this mindfulness revolution, a dark secret lurks in the background. One advocate of “Christian” contemplation, the Quaker Richard Foster, recommends meditation as a means for developing a deeper spirituality. But as to its practice, he also issues a disclaimer (**Mark this quotation!**):

I also want to give a word of precaution. In the silent contemplation of God we are entering deeply into the spiritual realm, and there is such a thing as supernatural guidance that is not divine guidance . . . there are various orders of spiritual beings, and some of them are definitely not in cooperation with God and his way! **[4]**

Though a significant majority of non-Christian meditators report benefits derived from the activity, some indicate that the exercise does not invariably promote psychological wellness. **[5]**

So it would be well for any would-be meditators, Christian or otherwise, to consider what could happen to their minds if they engage the practice. Meditation can go mad. Examples where this has happened, both modern and ancient, are known. We begin with reports from a rehab center which focuses on helping people restore the soundness of mind they possessed before they began to meditate.

## “The Dark Knight” of the Soul

Recently, *The Atlantic* reported about a spacious 19th century house owned by a university professor/researcher. Located in a well established neighborhood in Providence, Rhode Island, the house’s atmosphere is inviting. All four floors exude a sanctuary-like atmosphere of welcome, peace and quiet. Organic foods stock the cupboards. A large dining room and table can accommodate a dozen guests. Decorative plants are placed throughout the house. Private living quarters in the basement often host “a rotating cast of yogis and meditation teachers.” [6] From the description given by *The Atlantic*, one might get the impression that the residence, named Cheetah House, provides the ideal environment for seeking souls to congregate and practice the art of meditation. But surprisingly, notes reporter Tomas Rocha, the visiting guests are “not there to restore themselves with meditation—they’re recovering from it.” [7] Consider a few testimonials.

### Testimony 1

Attracted to meditation by attending a retreat, one polite and well-spoken guest named David, 27 years old, relates that though at first he found stress-relief from meditating, his life changed for the worse. “Everything he had found pleasurable before the retreat” he says, “turned to dirt’.” [8] The beautiful and delightful plate of spiritual food that served his soul at first, to repeat his words, “turned to dirt.”

He “started having thoughts like, ‘Let me take over you,’ combined with confusion and tons of terror.” [9] He relates having “had a vision of death with a scythe and a hood.” The thought ‘Kill yourself’ [ran] over and over again [through his mind].” [10] David described the paranormal world he experienced as “Psychological hell.” He tells the reporter that these altered states of consciousness “would come and go in waves. I’d be in the middle of practice” he says, “and what would come to mind was everything I didn’t want to think about, every feeling I didn’t want to feel.” [11] His experience also possessed a physical sensation. “Pebble-sized” spasms would emanate from a “dense knot” inside his abdomen. Other fantasies would captivate and obsess his mind. [12] So in 2013, he arrived at the house for treatment.

### Testimony 2

Another guest, age 25, was a certified yoga teacher. Michael explains that physically “during the course of his meditation practice his ‘body stopped digesting food’. I had no idea what was happening,” he relates. For three years Michael thought “he was ‘permanently ruined’ by meditation.” [13] The Atlantic notes that descriptions like “recovery” and “permanently ruined” are “not words one typically encounters when discussing a contemplative practice.” [14] Nonetheless, this is the “dirty laundry”—as some call it—that can result from doing meditation. These testimonies however, are not alone.

### Testimony 3

For a time in his life, Bill Smith, (not his real name) with whom I stayed while ministering in Sydney, Australia, during late September, 2013, testified that his devotion to eastern meditative practices induced within him psychological disorder which necessitated he be institutionalized. In combination with other New Age spiritual practices he engaged, Bill related that meditation temporarily drove him insane. But by trusting the Gospel, the Lord delivered Bill, and today in his right mind, he has a wonderful marriage and family, successfully works for large corporation,

and maintains a stable Christian witness as he pastors a church which regularly meets in his home.

Though admittedly anecdotal, Smith's admission bears similarity with the previously cited testimonials from the recovery center for former meditators run by Brown University neuroscientist and researcher Dr. Willoughby Britton. [15]

### **The Doctor and "The Dark"**

Britton's "effort to document, analyze, and publicize accounts of the adverse effects of contemplative practices (what elsewhere are called "rockier parts of the mindfulness path," [16]) is known as "The Dark Knight Project." [17] Because of what she saw in recovering meditators who visited her research and rehab center, Dr. Britton (herself a trained and experienced meditator) decided that, like her patients, she should attend a retreat to experience firsthand what they had been exposed to—and experience it she did! She described how like those undergoing treatment at her rehab center, she too fell into "an extreme and distressing mental state" after meditating . [18] She testifies:

I thought that I had gone crazy. I thought I was having a nervous breakdown . . . like terror was a big symptom of mine. [19]

These contemporary testimonies fall in line with accounts of other persons who either sought out or were forced to experience solitary. Though perhaps not normal—whatever normal is in a paranormal world—these testimonies indicate the effect which isolation and meditation can have upon a soul's sanity. Consider, for example, the effect of solitary confinement, employed by many penal systems to handle incorrigible prisoners, can have upon a human soul.

### **Solitary Confinement**

Within the Pennsylvania penal system at Eastern State Prison around the time of the Civil War (*circa* 1860), solitary confinement arose as a way, it was hoped, to rehabilitate prisoners. Inspired by the Quakers, the theory goes that placing criminals alone would help bring them "closer to God." [20] As originally conceived, "solitary" seems to have been used as a method to rehabilitate prisoners rather than, as is true now-a-days, to punish them. It was hoped that being placed in isolation would help them to reflect upon their crimes and restore their "relationship with God" (Ed., that is, if they ever had a relationship.). [21]

It must be noted that in denial of the biblical teaching of the universal apartness of the human soul from God because of "original" or "birth sin" (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12), Quakerism assumed that "true religion consisted in 'the divine light of Christ' in every man." [22] So it can be seen how, given Quakerism's influence upon this theory of criminal rehabilitation, it was hoped that "solitary confinement" might quicken a prisoner's awareness of "the divine light of Christ within" and, in a rehabilitative way, to fellowship with it. The method of solitary confinement became popular and crossed over the Atlantic where European prison systems began to employ it. But news drifted back to America that the method did not work.

"Clinicians in Germany, which built multiple prisons modeled on Eastern State," reported

*Rolling Stone*, “attributed hundreds of cases of psychosis to solitary confinement, concluding that it caused ‘elementary hallucinations’ and ‘suicidal and maniacal’ outbreaks.” [23] Danish psychiatric studies revealed how solitary confinement induced the same affect upon that nation’s prison population. [24]

It should be noted that the experiences of prisoners in solitary confinement resemble those of early Christian monks who in order to draw closer to God and cure their hearts of idolatry, retreated into the desert to escape society’s worldly influence. [25] They too, like today’s recovering meditators, experienced altered states of consciousness resulting from having engaged in ascetic practices and the discipline of meditation. Basically, this is how Christian monasticism entered the church.

### **Deserts, Demons and Deceptions**

In early Christian history, devout men renounced the world and fled to the desert to focus their attention on God and interact with the supernatural realm, with powers that included angels and demons. According to Rowan Williams (1950- ), the liberal Archbishop of Canterbury,

The desert was seen as a place teeming with hostile spirits, and a major part of the monk’s vocation was repeated confrontation with the destructive and deceptive power of demons. Sometimes this might mean spending time in the ruins of a pagan shrine, exposing oneself to the wiles of the evil spirits who had served there. More often, though, it was a matter of learning to discern between authentic and inauthentic ‘religious experiences’—acquiring a degree of suspicion of vivid or consoling visions and revelations, easily manufactured in the extreme conditions of hunger and isolation, learning to endure faithfully, in boredom, depression, frustration, without taking refuge in the devilish lure of dazzling spiritual dramas (angelic voices and visitations, etc.). [26]

#### *St. Anthony of Egypt*

St. Anthony (c. 251-356) was born into a wealthy and respectable Coptic Christian family. From his youth and because he was illiterate, Anthony had “little interest in matters of worldly learning” but was possessed of “deep religious feeling, and a craving after the intuition of divine things.” [27] While attending church one day, he heard a sermon on “The Rich Young Ruler” (Luke 18:18-27). Jesus’ words convicted his soul and he proceeded liquidate his inherited wealth, give the money to the poor, and move to the desert to cultivate his devotion and love for God. Though he did not found the monastic movement (the separatist and isolationist spirit of it was imported into Christianity from the animists, Eastern religions and Egyptian *Therapeutae*—i.e., Jewish holy men who isolated themselves from society to pursue “the contemplative way”), St. Antonius (as he’s also known) became known as the father of monasticism within the Christian tradition.

By isolating himself in the desert and engaging in ascetic and meditative disciplines, Anthony sought to purge his heart from worldly distractions in order to bask in God’s love. In the desert, Anthony became a counselor, a source of strength (physical as well as spiritual) and a father figure to other men who moved to the desert to pursue “the contemplative way.” As a teacher, Anthony instructed monks to keep diaries of their secret thoughts (i.e., “journaling”) because

self-improvement was the cost of eternal life. [28] He also taught ecstasy characterizes perfect prayer.

#### *Awful (not Awesome) Asceticism*

He, as others who followed him, retreated into the desert to experience the supernatural, and that they did. The record of Anthony's life contains "strange stories of his visions, in which he describes himself as engaged continually in deadly conflict with evil spirits manifesting themselves not infrequently in forms more ludicrous than terrible." [29] On one occasion, after having separated himself in a cave away from the village to seek God, the German theologian and church historian Augustus Neander (1789-1850) relates that,

Here, as it is probable, by excessive fasting, and by exhaustion from his inward conflicts in the unnatural place of abode, he brought himself into states of an over excited imagination and nervous derangement, in which he fancied he had received bodily harm from the spirits of darkness. He fell at last into a swoon and was conveyed back to the village in a state of unconsciousness. [30]

Like other modern examples of meditation gone mad, Neander assessed that, "the extravagances of asceticism . . . [gave] birth to many wild sallies of the fanatical spirit, and many mental disorders." [31] To this point, it must be noted that one fruit of true spirituality is "self-control" (Galatians 5:23). What impresses a student of desert spirituality is the common occurrence of men going "out-of-control"!

These many examples, modern and ancient, call into question the optimism that, "Meditation causes nothing but good for those who practice it. It is one of the healthiest things a human being can do for mind and body." [32]

#### **Dark Night of the Soul**

Interestingly, of seeing visions, hearing voices or having visitations, the contemplator reaches a point where experience exhausts itself. [33] A day comes when the music dies. As such, the contemplator feels abandoned and alone, and "No matter what the mystic does—praying, contemplating, meditating—the sense of God's presence cannot be regained." [34] A "dark night" or a "cloud of unknowing" engulfs their psyche. Buddhists refer to this as "falling into the Pit of the Void." [35] To find comfort in or to explain the soul's dark night from the Christian perspective, the feeling of being estranged from God's love is compared to the Shulammitte Bride who on her "bed night after night . . . sought [her beloved] . . . but did not find him" (Song of Solomon 3:1); or to Moses' experience on Mount Sinai where he ascended "Into cloud and darkness to meet God" (Exodus 19:9, 16; 20:21). [36]

To comprehend the meaning of darkness in the meditative experience, one must understand the context of "the mystic way"; that is the stages of "knowing" which meditators go through to experience the presence of God with the goal of realizing union with Him (i.e., *unio mystica* or *theosis*). Some view the phases to be as many as seven while others as few as three. To explain "the mystic way," we shall view meditative stages or "zones" to be entered as three—*contemplation* of the supernatural, *illumination* by the supernatural and finally,

personal *unification* with the supernatural.

Attention has been drawn to the psychological disorder that can (but not necessarily does) result from practicing meditation. The occurrence of paranormal phenomena (i.e., altered states of consciousness) most often happens during the illumination phase. [37] Upon entering this zone, the meditator hears voices, sees visions and experiences visitations. This stage anticipates that ecstasies, raptures and dark nights will occur. From the meditative perspective, these paranormal experiences might be called *normally abnormal*. Nathan Fisher, manager of Dr. Britton's "Dark Knight Project" understands this when, in line with other scholars and students of the mystic way, he explains that negative experiences from meditation may be accounted of for two reasons. First, the director's instructions on how to meditate may have been misguided. Or second, the meditator may have incorrectly pursued the discipline. Yet whatever the explanation, intimidating psychological/spiritual experiences are considered "necessary and expected stages" of meditation and as such, "useful signs of progress in contemplative development." [38] Negative experiences are an expected part of the mystic way.

#### *The Light that's not Dark*

But do descriptions of experiencing darkness by meditators indicate they have moved nearer to or farther away from the heart of God? Scripture tells us "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5); that God "dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16); that God is "the Father of lights" (James 1:17); and that the Lord "appeared to [Moses] in a blazing fire" (Exodus 3:2-4). Christian believers are declared to be "sons of light and sons of day" (1 Thessalonians 5:5). And furthermore, Jesus "transfigured" Himself before three disciples—"His face became like the sun . . . His garments became white as light" (Matthew 17:2, NASB). The experience of spiritual darkness belongs to those who are running away from, not to, Jesus the Light (John 3:19-21). Also, in the present reality Satan and his cohorts are known as, "the world forces of this darkness" (Ephesians 6:12). Scripture also describes God's salvation as being "rescued us from the domain of darkness" (Colossians 1:13). So when set against the backdrop of Scripture, the soul's enduring of darkness becomes difficult to understand. What if in reality the expressions "the dark night of the soul" or "cloud of unknowing"—and I only pose the question—are descriptions of a state experienced by meditators which indicate they have moved away from, not nearer to, the heart of God?

#### *The Promise of the Spirit's Presence*

Jesus also promised that He would not desert His disciples but would send "another" Comforter (i.e., the Holy Spirit) to be with them (John 14:16-18). So all these feelings of being forsaken by God must find comfort in the Divine promise where the Lord has said: "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Amidst all this Scripture, it becomes difficult to understand how the "darkness" or "cloud" metaphors can provide comfort to persons who on their mystic journeys encounter a dead end of darkness or a depressing cloud of unknowing. The Bible describes the Christian journey is that of walking in and drawing closer to the Light! Experiences of forsakenness are not of the Comforter. In fact, if Jesus' promises mean anything at all, such experiences are quite the contrary (See Matthew 28:20, "I am with you always"; Hebrews 13:5, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you. . . . The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid . . ."). The Lord's children never have to be afraid of the dark because they live with and in the Light!

But not only did the contemplative life foster a continuing spiritual tradition within Christianity, but several hundred years later proved to be a breeding ground for the religion of Islam. Interestingly, the story of Mohammed bears similarity to that of St. Anthony—i.e., their youthful inclination toward the contemplative life, their relative illiteracy, their advantage of possessing wealth, their pursuit of the isolated life to experience God, and respectively, their seeing, hearing and experiencing supernatural visions, voices, and visitations.

### **Mohammed the Prophet**

The historian Robert Payne (1911-1983) noted that by the age of eight, Mohammed's pattern of life "was being determined—long days of contemplation, swift journeys, the sense of being abandoned, visitation of spirits, and always the dream of Paradise . . ." [39]

When he was about 25 years old, Mohammad attracted the attention of a wealthy and beautiful twice-widowed woman who was 15 years his elder. They married, and together Mohammed and Khadija had six children. Because of Khadija's wealth, for ten years Mohammed's life was secure and comfortable. During this time, he lived in contact and exchanged religious ideas with other spiritual men, whether they were animists, Jews or Christians. One such man was his wife's cousin, a man named Waraqa, with whom Mohammed experienced deep spiritual kinship. But Waraqa was a spiritually restless man who though he translated both the Old and New Testaments into Arabic, returned later in life to the primitive faith he held in earlier years. Despite his illiteracy, Mohammed remembered everything others taught him, and perhaps because of Waraqa's counsel, also refined the practice of meditation, the disposition toward which he had possessed since he was a young boy. But as Payne points out, the early years of his comfortable life with Khadija and his four daughters (their two sons died prematurely) "was the quiet before the storm." Allow the historian to describe what Mohammed experienced.

The storm came suddenly one night, at the hottest time of the year, after a long period of meditating alone in a cave outside of Mecca. No one knows what brought him to the cave. It may have been the memory of ascetic monks in the Syrian desert who also worshipped their God in caves, alone with the Alone. Or perhaps he was influenced by the wandering hermits called Hanifs, meaning "those who have turned away from idol worship," who emerged . . . to proclaim the virtues of solitude and the worship of the One God. It may have been the seed of restlessness communicated to him by the visionary Waraqa which sent him out into the desert to live for weeks on end in silent contemplation. What is certain is that the storm broke over his head, and the world was never to be the same again. [40]

Wrapped in his coat, lying alone in a cave in the dark, whether asleep or in a trance is not known, the illiterate prophet heard a voice which told him to read the first great visionary revelation of what would become a part of *The Koran*. The point is: Communications can be received, in fact are to be anticipated, when practicing meditation. Voices will speak. Visions will be seen. Visitations will occur. Visions will be seen. The deception that continued in the desert began in the garden! After all, Eve was alone when the tempter approached her in the garden. Perhaps she was practicing solitude and silence when she received an added revelation, when a voice told her not even to "touch" the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:3).

## **The Mind Possessed**

As we can see from this survey of the last 2,000 years, retreating into solitude and silence to meditate can become a breeding place for experiencing psychological derangement and/or altered states of consciousness which meditators interpret to be encounters with God or other divine beings, perhaps angels or worse, demons. So the question becomes, what relation does contemplative spirituality have to the Christian life? Is it a benefit or a detriment? Can the contemplative life become a dangerous pursuit that might pave the way to encounter unfriendly powers or entities? To deal with these questions, the Scriptures need to be consulted.

## **The Bible and Meditation**

Aided by their profiteering publicists and publishers, Christian celebrity-gurus (i.e., Richard Foster, Beth Moore, Sarah Young, et. al.) advocate meditation as a “spiritual discipline” by which to “draw near to God,” “experience His Presence,” and “hear Him speak” because intimacy breeds revelation. [41] They do so based upon their interpretive abuse of Psalm 46:10 (the “poster verse” for advocating Christian meditation, “Be still, and know that I am God . . .,” KJV, NKJV, ESV, NRSV) as well as other scriptures in which they grope to find biblical precedent and support (this is called “proof texting”) for recommending mystical meditation (Psalm 46:10[42]; 1 Kings 19:12[43]; Habakkuk 2:20[44]; Psalm 62:1[45]). But as we have seen, meditation in isolation does not invariably benefit the human soul.

## **Solitude’s Slippery Slope**

### *Gargoyles in Gadara*

Madness is what characterized the man from Gadara possessed by demons named “Legion.” He lived in isolation from society on the cliffs and in caves overlooking the Sea of Galilee’s on the lake’s east shore (Mark 5:1-20). The application to be taken from the man’s example is not that demons possessed him because he was an ascetic and a mediator, a Therapeutae—he might have been—but that he lived in a sort of “solitary confinement” like a hermit-monk, and in his isolation, Legion attacked, tormented, and possessed him. Though in comparison his experience appears to have been far more extreme—“on steroids” as it were—his recorded behavior (“And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones,” Mark 5:5, KJV) indicates severe psychological derangement, not unlike what some of today’s recovering meditators say they have gone through.

But Jesus healed the man from the presence of demons who had possessed, afflicted and terrorized his soul and body. Knowing him only as “a crazy caveman,” his neighbors were astounded when, after Jesus healed him, they observed him “sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind” (Emphasis added, Mark 5:15). [46] This man represents the spiritual danger of what might happen to the human soul when a person retreats into solitude. In such a state, he/she becomes prey to the influence of, even possession by, evil entities. This brings us to consider the temptation of the Christ (Matthew 4:1-11).

### *Wiles in the Wilderness*

After His birth, boyhood and baptism when “a voice out of heavens said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,’” the Spirit led Jesus “into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Matthew 3:17-4:1, NASB). Jesus followed the Spirit’s leading away into the silence and solitude of the desert where after being deprived of food for forty days, Satan directly

attacked the Son of God. The tempter's approach to Jesus involved two strategies. First, he tried to make Jesus doubt that He was God's Son. In two of the temptations, Satan challenged Jesus, "If You are the Son of God, command . . . throw Yourself down" (Matthew 4:3, 6). The tempter tried to destroy the *relationship* between the Father and the Son. Second, the devil attempted to make the Father displeased (contra the voice from heaven who said, "I am well pleased") with the Son. He tried to ruin the *fellowship* between the Son and the Father. Both satanic strategies attacked the Divine Trinity. In the third strategy, the tempter tried to seduce Jesus to take power over the nations from him, not God. To this point, the Father had already promised to give to the Son the nations as His inheritance so the promise was not Satan's to fulfill! (See Psalm 2:8).

One aspect about the devil's temptation of Jesus was the consciousness or visionary aspect of it. The question must be asked, given that physically Jesus was located in "the wilderness," how was it that "the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple," and that, "Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain"? (See Matthew 4:5, 8.) Of these phases of His temptation, it is evident Jesus experienced a visitation, heard a voice and saw visions. Did Jesus experience altered states of consciousness, even an OBE (an out-of-the-body experience)? Given Jesus' location where the Spirit led Him, and where the devil "took" Him, the question can only be asked, not answered. But if the preceding might have been the case, then Satan inspired these paranormal experiences! Oh, by the way, Jesus did not thwart the devil's deception by practicing silence in order to hear an inner voice speak to Him, but in all three instances, He quoted Scriptures, the Word of God, that were a witness external to Him. It was then, after being thwarted by Scripture, that the devil left Him alone. As such, the Lord's example warns any believer of the temptation that can invade the soul when solitude and silence are aesthetically practiced.

#### *Sound Minds and Sober Souls*

Both the Apostles Peter and Paul in their epistles, both of whom were most likely aware of the contemplative life (i.e., *De vita contemplativa*) practiced by Jewish mystics (called Therapeutae) throughout the Hellenistic world of the dispersion, advised believers on how to care for their minds, and their recommendations did not include soliciting solitude and silence in order to meditate. Rather, Peter told believers that because "the end of all things [was] near," that they were to "be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer" (1 Peter 4:7, NASB; Compare 1 Peter 1:13.). Peter calls upon believers to be sober, not silent! Paul too taught Christians to ponder whatever is "true . . . honorable . . . right . . . pure . . . lovely . . . of good repute" (Philippians 4:8-9). On this basis, meditation, which has a possibility of inducing insanity, runs counter to the counsel of the apostles and one fruit the Spirit works in the Christian, "self-control"! (See Galatians 5:23.)

#### *Resist the Devil*

Furthermore, James advises believers to "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7b, NASB). Paul tells the Ephesians, "Neither give place [i.e., an opportunity] to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27). Apparently, Richard Foster is aware of the danger of meditation. [47] From the examples of eastern gurus, the desert fathers and monastery monks, he is aware of the trauma and disorientation, even insanity, that deprivation and meditation can work in the souls and minds of contemplators. He knows that the practice can lead to encounters with not-so-

benevolent-spiritual beings who “want to take a person over” (See footnote #9). Incidents of such “takeovers” litter the history of contemplative spirituality.

Yet despite offering a “tongue-in-cheek” caution against it, Foster, perhaps disingenuously, recommends the practice anyway! That’s like a state trooper parked alongside an Interstate highway with his lights flashing and screeching blow horn warning drivers of an obstacle on the road ahead, but telling them to continue to drive 70-80 miles per hour anyway. So it must be asked, in light Scripture’s admonition to “resist the devil” (James 4:7), why should Christians flirt with any spiritual practice that might expose them to see, hear or experience an evil entity? **[48]** In light of Scripture’s admonition to “submit to God” (James 4:7a), why should Christians engage in any practice that might expose them to hear the unsubmissive voice of Satan or a demon speak to them?

### *Discerning Deception*

Because of the negative consequences which might happen when someone pursues meditation, in the Christian DVD *Be Still*, there is a segment rightfully called “Fear of Silence” because as stated in the presentation, “intimacy automatically breeds revelation.” **[49]** So who might give the revelation? What might be the origin of the speaking voice, appearing vision or materializing visitation? Richard Foster offers advice about how to discern who might communicate in the stillness. He said:

Learning to distinguish the voice of God . . . from just human voices within us . . . comes in much the same way that we learn any other voice. Satan pushes and condemns. God draws and encourages. And we can know the difference. **[50]**

Though there could be others, Richard Foster admits to a cacophony of voices that might speak: first, human voices within and without (that would involve listening to oneself or others speak); second, Satan’s or a demon’s voice; or third, God’s voice (which raises the issue of continuing revelation). As regards Foster’s characterizing Satan’s voice as one which invariably “pushes and condemns,” what if the tempter, given his wily nature (“the schemes of the devil,” Ephesians 6:11) and as with Eve (“You surely will not die!” Genesis 3:4) and with Jesus (“All these things I will give you,” Matthew 4:9), “draws and encourages”? Foster’s categories for discerning Satan’s as opposed to God’s voice do not always fit the way Bible describes that the devil communicates. At times, the evil one can be quite positive!

### *Doctrines of Demons*

The Apostle Paul warned of the devil’s deceptions. He wrote that “the Spirit [The Holy Trinity sounded the alarm about spiritual deception!] explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1, NASB). One aspect of the deception involves a practice that is integral to mystical meditation—asceticism (i.e., “men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods,” 1 Timothy 4:3). Thus John the Apostle warned: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether are from God” (1 John 4:1a).

## **Conclusion**

### *Causes of Trauma*

The Bible describes human reality to be one that involves warfare with unseen “powers . . . world forces of this darkness . . . [and] spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12, NASB). Recovering meditators and those who, laudably, are trying to help them may dismiss the psychological insanity being a result (Whether in part or the whole, who knows?) of the soul’s ongoing warfare with unseen powers as too unworldly an explanation, choosing rather to attribute the derangement suffered to a more this-worldly “scientific,” “researched” and “diagnosed” complex which involves physical deprivation, disease or sexual, alcohol and drug abuse, etc., all of which and more do affect the wellness of the human soul. But what cannot be denied is the resemblance between the symptoms of the devil’s work recorded in Holy Scripture and the derangements of soul reported by recovering meditators.

A word of caution: I am not of the persuasion (like many TV evangelists, exorcist priests or witch doctors), “When in doubt cast it out!” But I am persuaded that Satan is real and his reality is, like the archangel Michael, to be respected (Jude 9). Martin Luther one said that he believed in the devil’s reality for two reasons: the Bible told him so and he’d been troubled by him. What may be at work in the souls of recovering meditators is a complex of various factors. But to get to the root of the matter, we must recognize too the reality of Satan and demonic hosts because the Scriptures tell us so, and because people today, perhaps including ourselves, are suffering from doing business with them.

From Scripture’s perspective, what if what recovering meditators are recovering from involves psychological derangement instigated by and affected upon the soul by a demon or the devil? In His controversy with the Jews, Jesus declared that not only is Satan a destroyer, but he is also a master deceiver. “He” Jesus said, “was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44). As well as being a murderer (a destroyer of the body), he is a manipulator (a destroyer of the truth). “Whenever he speaks a lie,” Jesus said “he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44b). Sure, for most people meditating can produce psychological wellbeing in their mind/souls. This is why meditation can be so wrong when it feels so right. But anytime people isolate themselves in solitude and silence to contemplate, they also open their consciousness to be victimized from within (the arousal of repressed memories of past traumatic experiences) or from without (psychological devastation instigated by “the ultimate murderer and manipulator.”).

### *Cure*

In the spiritual reality of His soul during His wilderness experience, Jesus neither sought nor received “personal” or “internal” revelations from His Father. The voice which assaulted the Lord was Satan’s! To confront and counteract that voice, that visitation and those visions, Jesus quoted the Law which was “propositional” and “external” to Him! (See Jesus quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 in Matthew 4:4, quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 in Matthew 4:7, and Deuteronomy 6:13 in Matthew 4:10.) Though in the wilderness He was in solitude, Jesus was not practicing silence. His meditation was not vacuous or empty, but on Scripture, and according to His example, so should ours.

The Psalmist tells of the “blessedness” (the inner sense of well being) which can belong to the soul of a person who does not live in rebellion against God, choosing rather to “delight” and

“meditate” in “the law of the Lord” (Psalm 1:1-2), the latter influencing the abandonment of the former. As has been reviewed and shown, psychological maladjustment and affliction can result from the dark void that meditators can expect to experience on their mystical journey, and when the dark void is entered, one never knows what or who might be around to fill it. In the darkness of deception, Satan can transform into “an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). That’s why the psalmist says that beneficial meditation involves cognitive cogitation upon the law or word of God. His “word is a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path” (Psalm 119:105). Matthew Poole (1624-1679) comments that, “The word meditate implies a deep, and serious, and affectionate thoughtfulness about [the law].” **[51]** God’s thoughts contained in God’s words therefore serve to counteract and insulate us from ideas, hunches, impressions, nudges, whispers or revelations the devil might instigate within our hearts. Poole noted that,

The law of God may be understood as the whole doctrine delivered by God to the the church, consisting of doctrines, precepts, promises, and threatenings . . . ; and so it is noted as the peculiar character of a good man, that he delighteth himself not only in the promises, which a bad man may do . . . but even in the commands of God . . . which are unwelcome and burdensome to a wicked man. **[52]**

God’s law, as it did for Jesus, exposes the fraudulent voices, visions or visitations experienced in the onslaught of the soul to be what they really are, viral attacks of Satan, and as our Example, the Lord Jesus, indicates, meditation on and recitation of God’s Law is the only antidote for these attacks. Only God’s word can promote wellness in the human soul.

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and *in his law doth he meditate day and night.*”  
Emphasis added, Psalm 1:1-2, KJV

---

## Endnotes

**[1]** Larry DeBruyn, “Be Still (Updated),” April 9, 2010, *Guarding His Flock Ministries* (<http://guardinghisflock.com/2010/04/09/be-still/#more-936>).

**[2]** Kate Pickert, “The Mindful Revolution: Finding peace in a stressed-out, digitally dependent culture may just be a matter of thinking differently,” *Time*, January 23, 2014 (<http://time.com/1556/the-mindful-revolution/>).

**[3]** Tomas Rocha, “The Dark Knight of the Soul,” *The Atlantic*, June 25, 2014 (<http://m.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/06/the-dark-knight-of-the-souls/372766/>).

**[4]** Emphasis added. Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1992): 157.

**[5]** For example, it has been reported that Aaron Alexis, the middle-aged man accused of shooting-killing 12 people at the Washington Navy Yard regularly practiced meditation. See Maia Szalavitz, “Aaron Alexis and the Dark Side of Meditation,” *Time*, September 27, 2013 (<http://healthland.time.com/2013/09/17/aaron-alexis-and-the-dark-side-of-meditation/>). Reporter

Maia Szalavitz, a health reporter, was roundly accused of journalistic malpractice for associating murder with meditation. By itself it should not be construed that Alexis' meditation instigated the murders. He was an alcoholic and possessed of other mental problems. Yet from a biblical perspective it should be asked, "Did his meditating put his mind in contact with "dark forces" that lowered any inhibitions he might have possessed against committing murder?" Jesus after all warned that "the devil . . . was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44, NASB). He also warned that the ought of murder begins in the emotions (Matthew 5:21-22). If there is a connection between meditation and violence, it is esoteric and, other than Scripture, lies beyond objective proof.

[6] Rocha, "Dark Knight."

[7] Ibid.

[8] Rocha, "Dark Knight." All the quotes in this section have been extracted from this article from The Atlantic.

[9] Ibid. Emphasis added. Of course, the question becomes, "Who or what wanted to take over David?" Was this a request for "possession" by an outside entity of some kind? I only pose the question about possession, but something transcendental is going on here.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Dr. Britton's academic credentials can be found on the Internet at *Researchers BROWN* (<https://vivo.brown.edu/display/wbritton>). Interestingly, it is stated of Dr. Britton that, "She spent several years in Asia studying meditative techniques and received her mindfulness instructor certification training at the Center for Mindfulness at the UMASS Medical School." Emphasis added.

[16] Szalavitz, "Dark Side of Meditation."

[17] Rocha, "Dark Knight."

[18] Szalavitz, "Dark Side of Meditation."

[19] Ibid.

[20] Jeff Tietz, "Slow-Motion Torture," *Rolling Stone*, December 6, 2012: 63 (<http://fight2forgive.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/slow-motion-torture-jeff-tietz.pdf>).

[21] "Solitary Confinement," *Wikipedia: the Free Encyclopedia*, quoting the separate research of Bruce Arrigo and Jennifer Leslie Bullock then Stephanie Elizondo Griest ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solitary\\_confinement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solitary_confinement)).

[22] Eamon Duff, "Quaker Spirituality," *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, Gordon S. Wakefield, Editor (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983): 327.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid. *Wikipedia* documents its source in entry's footnote #6.

[25] "There is a *sutta*," a canonical discourse attributed to the Buddha or one of his close disciples, "where monks go crazy and commit suicide after doing contemplation on death," says Chris Kaplan, a visiting scholar at the Mind & Life Institute who works with Britton on the Dark Night Project. See Rocha, "Dark Knight."

[26] Rowan Williams, "Desert, Desert Fathers," *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*: 110.

[27] Augustus Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, Volume II, Joseph Torrey, Translator (Boston, MA: Crocker & Brewster, 1849): 229-230.

[28] Isaac Gregory Smith, "ANTONIUS, St.," *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrine*, Volume I A-D, (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1877): 126.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion*, 231-232.

[31] Ibid: 238. Milman also notes that, "The indolence and prostration of the body produce a kind of activity in the mind, if that may properly be called activity, which is merely giving loose to the imagination and the emotions, as they follow out a wild train of incoherent thought, or are agitated by impulses of spontaneous and ungoverned feeling. Ascetic Christianity ministered new aliment to this common propensity; it gave an object both vague and determinate enough to stimulate, yet never to satisfy or exhaust." Henry Hart Milman, *The History of Christianity: From the Birth of Christ to the Abolition of Paganism in the Roman Empire*, Volume III (London: John Murray, 1903): 198-199.

[32] See comment by Therapist60, September 21, 2013, in response to Szalavitz, "Dark Side of Meditation."

[33] Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul and Other Great Works* (Orlando, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2007). Through meditation "the soul becomes detached . . . as the soul experiences the Crucifixion of Christ" (p.24). During this spiritual journey "the soul leaves its bodily home in order to find union with God. This happens during the darkness of night, and the soul encounters numerous challenges, conflicts, hardships, and difficulties that must be faced and overcome in order to become detached from the world and gain union with God" (p.21). Within the mystical tradition, the "dark night" describes "an individual's spiritual crisis in the course of [pursuing] union with God. . . . In a sense, it's Enlightenment's Evil Twin." See Rocha, "Dark Knight."

[34] Leonard George, Ph. D., *Alternative Realities: The Paranormal, the Mystic and the Transcendent in Human Experience* (New York, NY: Facts On File, Inc., 1995): 63.

[35] Rocha, "Dark Knight."

[36] William Johnson, Editor, *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, Foreword by Huston Smith (New York, NY: Image, Doubleday: 1973). Like "the cloud of unknowing," the English author is unknown. Elizabeth Dreyer summarizes the theme of the writing: "The transcendence of God makes it difficult to know him by way of reason. The superior way to God is the way of mystical or hidden knowledge which is intuitive and ineffable. God lies beyond the cloud of darkness and unknowing and the will alone can attempt to pierce it with its naked impulse of love." See Elizabeth Dreyer, "Cloud of Unknowing," *The Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 91. The means for piercing the cloud surrounding God and experiencing God's love is negation (entering the cloud of forgetting by meditating on one's sins and the Cross) and working-up the love necessary to penetrate the cloud of unknowing.

[37] Ray C. Petry, Editor, *Late Medieval Mysticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 1957): 21. This volume is part of *The Library of Christian Classics*.

[38] Rocha, "Dark Knight."

[39] Robert Payne, *The History of Islam* (New York, NY: Dorset Press, 1959): 11.

[40] Ibid: 15.

[41] I do address the subject of biblical meditation. See Larry DeBruyn, "On Meditating: Adjusted Living in a Maladjusted World," April 27, 2011, *Guarding His Flock Ministries* (<http://guardinghisflock.com/2011/04/27/on-meditating/#more-1741>). Some have accused me of "throwing out the baby with the bath."

[42] Larry DeBruyn, "Be Still (Updated)," April 9, 2010, *Guarding His Flock Ministries*

(<http://guardinghisflock.com/2010/04/09/be-still/#more-936>).

**[43]** Larry DeBruyn, "A Still Small Voice?" April 29, 2010, *Guarding His Flock Ministries* (<http://guardinghisflock.com/2010/04/29/a-still-small-voice/#more-1043>).

**[44]** Larry DeBruyn, "Let All the Earth Keep Silent," May 14, 2010, *Guarding His Flock Ministries* (<http://guardinghisflock.com/2010/05/14/let-all-the-earth-keep-silence/#more-1143>).

**[45]** Larry DeBruyn, "Should We Wait in Silence?" May 19, 2010, *Guarding His Flock Ministries* (<http://guardinghisflock.com/2010/05/19/should-we-wait-in-silence/#more-1164>).

**[46]** Right mind translates the singular Greek verb *sophrone* in its present active participle form (*sophrounonta*). Though previously characterized by insanity, the man came to be of "sound mind." By Jesus' healing, he experienced psychological wellness. But meditation, as has been testified to by those rehabbing from it, can induce within seeking souls a "wrong mind" or "sick mind." As to the question of the relationship of demons to insanity, only God knows. I am not of the persuasion, "When in doubt, cast it out." However, the influence upon a person's consciousness on the part of malignant spirits cannot be summarily dismissed. The desert fathers believed in those spirits, even sought them out, and experienced warfare with them, even to the point of, if only a short time, going insane.

**[47]** See footnote #5.

**[48]** Larry DeBruyn, "Who Goes There?—Encountering Voices in the Quiet of Contemplative Prayer," November 16, 2010, *Guarding His Flock Ministries* (<http://guardinghisflock.com/2010/11/16/who-goes-there-2/#more-1416>).

**[49]** Be Still (DVD © 2006 Twentieth Fox Home Entertainment LLC).

**[50]** Ibid.

**[51]** Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, Volume 2, Psalms—Malachi (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1962): 1.

**[52]** Ibid.