



PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL DYNAMICS OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

This essay is an attempt to explore the dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises* in the first place. It examines the the first Two Weeks of the *Exercises* in detail. The third and the fourth Weeks are to strengthen the experience the exercitants had. The dynamics follow the three phases of mystical experience, namely, purgative, illuminative and unitive. The third and the fourth Weeks are in the illuminative phase which are not given consideration here because of the reasons given above.

In the second part of the essay the effects of psychotherapy and spiritual experience are dealt. Whereas the effects of psychotherapy are mostly for personal self-consciousness, the effects of spiritual experience urge the experienter to move out into society. Thus, the similarities and the dissimilarities between the two are explored.

Introduction

There is ample literature on the ‘dynamics’ of the *Spiritual Exercises*. One wonders whether there is a need for one more. Over the centuries, however, there is a growing awareness of the spirituality as experienced and, that experience in turn making the experienced to move out of themselves in compassion. The development in psychological science also compels the experienced to examine the difference or similarity between the spiritual experience and the experience one gets during psychotherapy. While gathering the materials for dynamics an attempt also is made to compare and contrast psychological studies. This essay is hoped to give an overview of what one means by dynamics, similarities and dissimilarities between spiritual experience and psychology, and the effect of having spiritual experience by doing the *Spiritual Exercises*. It is suitable to start with the clarification of the term ‘dynamics’ and see implication of it.

The term ‘dynamics’ is taken from Greek word, ‘*dunamikos*’ meaning ‘powerful.’ The term is applied to physics to mean ‘study of bodies in motion and changes in that motion.’ in mechanics it is used to mean ‘power’ especially the power in motion. From the above observation one can conclude that the term ‘dynamic’ is something to do with power and motion. Motion can mean movement and also change. The Thomist definition for God as ‘unmoved mover’ means as the causeless one who causes the world; the phrase also can mean, the Changeless One who causes the change. In the *Spiritual Exercises* the dynamics mean all the above discussed! It means primarily a motion, ‘movement.’ this movement is seen from one state of consciousness to another state, from one week to another week, one level to another level of being and so on and so forth. The part connected with ‘power’ can be applied as strengthening one’s spirit in order to attain the fullness of life. This will be clarified as one examines and goes through the *Spiritual Exercises*.

In this essay an attempt is made to bring out the salient features of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. This is the primary focus of the essay. The first two 'Weeks' are taken for consideration because the third and fourth Weeks are to strengthen and to stabilise the exercitant's experience to move ahead. There are two parts in this essay: the first gives an overview of the dynamics of the *Exercises* and the second, an application of it to psychology and social implications.

The Starting Point: 'Desire'

People seek for fulfillment and fullness in their life. The terms 'fulfillment' and 'fullness' means that there is something lacking in the ordinary way of one's life. This lacking needs to be detected or better, in spiritual terminology, realized in order to seek for the fullness. On the outset St. Ignatius puts forth the instructions as to whom the *Exercises* are meant; it is for those who 'desire to progress as much as possible' (*Spiritual Exercises*, 20). The term 'progress' indicates that there is a higher reality to be realized than that of the ordinary way of life. There are two points to sum up the starting point of the *Exercises*: 1. There is a realization of lack of fullness in the ordinary way of life and 2. 'Desire' to the fullness. Hence, 'desire' takes the primary place in doing the *Exercises*.

There are different levels of realization of the lack of fullness in one's life: it can be seeking for God and not knowing how to find God. One might have sought various ways and come to a frustration. It may also be implicit longing for satisfaction or rest from a situation of restlessness. It can be that one does not know what one wants but experiences that there is something s/he wants. All these experiences of dissatisfaction, restlessness etc. are indications of a deeper longing for God, the Ultimate Reality which fulfills that longing.

The ultimate longing for God is covered up in debris like ignorance, worldly attachments etc. as told by Jesus in the parable of various fields and the seeds (Mt. 13:18-23). Through the *Exercises*, St. Ignatius leads one to the realization of present state of one's life through patient listening to her/him. Once a person realizes the 'debris' then that person comes to the real 'desire,' that is, inner longing for God; the term 'God' can be replaced with 'Goodness' or 'the Ultimate' depending on one's religious and social state.

When the exercitant is ready St. Ignatius invites her/him to make 'some exercises in accordance with the degree of progress made and adapted to the needs a soul so moved' (*Sp. Ex.* 17). Once the 'desire' is clear, then he would focus on the moments of the natural growth of faith and grace. In actuality, these moments of growth are brought to one's notice by the *Exercises*. St. Ignatius assists the exercitant with his own experience and suggests the exterior conditions and the interior climate of the faithful (*Sp. Ex.* 73-90). As the deeper longing (desire) grows he would harness it to further growth with a view of the end.

To conclude, the first element of the dynamics of the *Exercises* is to bring the clarity in one's desire, which is obscure because of the entanglement of the worldly pleasures that frustrates a person. It would be to bring the 'proper desire' of the end, i.e., purpose of a person. The 'proper desire' is discussed below.

Desire

The term 'desire' is not to be misunderstood as the desire for sensual pleasures. This is what is meant by the Buddha when he says, 'desire is the root cause of all sufferings.' The desire for sensual pleasure leads one to the dissatisfaction and frustration. It is so because the senses can never be satisfied by the objects of the senses (*Ecclesiastes* 1:8: All words become wearisome and speech comes to an end, but the eye has never seen enough nor the ear heard too much, *New Community Bible*). When St. Ignatius speaks about desire, he is speaking of the inner longing for satisfaction, peace, fullness etc. This 'desire' is the first element in the dynamics of the *Exercises*.

Progressive Element: *Magis*

St. Ignatius takes the topic the ultimate knowledge that is sought by the Intellect from St. Thomas Aquinas (cf. *Summa Theologica*, I. q. 12). The intellect seems to be constantly searching for knowledge. It is seen in day-to-day activities that the intellect gets various degrees of satisfaction through the knowledge that it acquires. But the fullness of satisfaction never happens with the ordinary, mundane knowledge. The ultimate object of seeking is the knowledge of God. The 'degrees' indicate the progression the intellect attains. This seeking for the fullness is termed as desire.

The desire is distorted in its expression and as a result of distortion one finds dissatisfaction. It is common to human experience. Because of dissatisfaction the search goes on and on till one gets satisfied with the ultimate knowledge, i. e., knowledge of God. This progression is expressed by St. Ignatius with the terms like *maior*, *maius*, *magis* etc. This progress is expressed in 20th annotation (*Sp. Ex.* 20). The terms, *magis* or more or greater indicate the progress of the inner self.

To attain to such fullness one needs to be *more* generous, magnanimous (*Sp. Ex.* 5). The disposition of oneself is indicated in 5th and 15th annotations. Annotations are preliminary suggestions given to both the one who is making the *Exercises* and to the one who is giving the *Exercises*. This can be termed as the ‘introductory’ elements in the dynamics. The *Exercises* proper starts with the *First Week*, and ‘Principle and Foundation’ as the guiding principle to make the *Exercises*. Psychological aspect of the ‘Principle and Foundation’ will be seen later in this essay. The spiritual aspect, as put forth by St. Ignatius, is given an explanation in the following section.

The Guidance: Principle and Foundation

St. Ignatius puts forth ‘Principle and Foundation’ as the guiding principle at the start of the *Exercises*. “It is a touchstone that reveals in some way how far he (the exercitant) is likely to go or not to grow” (Veale, 5). It is a dry text that is free from emotional resonance. The unfolding of one’s purpose and destiny is briefly put in this text. It is more like a seed of life, a principle of force of movement and growth than the foundation of a building.

The principle of growth is not in the text but in what it expresses that is to be experienced by the exercitant. It is like torch in the hands of a person who is in darkness to see the ultimate reality, truth and an inspiration to walk the path. It reveals to the person seeking the guidance, the ambiguity of his desires and the darkness in his heart. In the world one is not free; but one can desire to be free. Ultimately freedom is what one’s destiny is. To attain that inner freedom ‘Principle and Foundation’ gives guidance.

The spiritual experience is called mysticism, a word derived from Greek root that means ‘closed lips’ (*mustikos*). It is so called because of the inability to express the experience clearly in day-to-day language. There are three phases in mysticism, namely, purgative, illuminative and unitive. The text of the *Exercises* proper is put in four divisions called the Weeks. The four weeks in the *Exercises* lead a person to have this experience step by step through these phases. The following is a brief overview of the four weeks.

Purgative Phase: The First Week

The first phase in the journey to mystical experience is called purgative phase and the first Week is towards the experience of this phase. It is a phase of burning (purging) the disordered attachments so that one can be free, to be purified, to be healed and to repent. This is in accordance with dynamic of the Gospel, ‘Repent and believe the gospel.’ The exercitant is invited to enter into a prayer, i.e., an intimate conversation with Christ on the cross; He is the way to the end of the *Exercises* and beyond. Christ is both the object of one’s desire and the way to satisfy that desire.

There is something called ‘triple colloquy’ through which the exercitant desires light to see all that has been burden in the past, which hindered his freedom and that which distorted the relationship of love between him and Christ. It is also an effort to see the disorder in one’s life that is the root of one’s sins. This disorder needs light from above in order to eradicate it. This is a path of knowledge that makes one to see human nature, one’s self, through which one knows the undiagnosed attachments, the cause of bondage (unfreedom). By attaining the knowledge of such disorder one purges one’s disordered attachments in order to be free to love God. This attainment of freedom has a force that moves one to have the ultimate desire. When that is attained one experiences the release, the consolation. It is a path towards the disclosure of God’s nature, destroying the false images of God one has had earlier.

The fruit of the First Week is consolation; it is necessary to invigorate the desire for freedom. It is “to act against their own sensuality, against their carnal and worldly love” (*Sp. Ex.* 97). The self-abnegation remains meaningless, nay, even harmful, “if it is not experienced as an intrinsic requirement of love, as a determination to be free, as a precondition of growth in desire” (Veale, 7). The First Week gives one a direction towards the satisfaction of one’s ultimate desire to be free.

Illuminative Phase: The Second Week

The Second Week is to progress from purgative phase to illuminative phase. The illumination comes from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The First Week clarifies what one wants, i.e., freedom to attain the love, and the Second Week is a movement to the affinity to Christ and His teachings. This is achieved in the Ignatian Contemplations. St. Ignatius introduces the exercitant to the *lectio divina* (divine reading) in contemplative way.

A ladder method, which accomplishes in one to get off the ground, is introduced in *lectio divina*. There are four steps, as it were, of the ladder in *lectio divina*. The first one, *lectio*, corresponds with “calling to mind the history, i.e., salvation history” (*Sp. Ex.* 102), of a particular mystery in Jesus’ life in Ignatian contemplation. The term ‘contemplation’ refers to what is called *meditatio*, which is the second step. The third step, *oratio*, is what one asks and desires; it is what is called colloquy. The fourth step, in the monastic tradition, is something called *contemplatio*, which is the grace given by God. It cannot be acquired but given. The term that corresponds to this step in the *Exercises* is consolation.

The exercitant is not to give more importance to the above mentioned terminology: “What is important is to recognize that reading is with a view to meditation, that meditation is with a view to prayer, that prayer is with a view to that openness to God or readiness for his gift that disposes the spirit to receive what God freely desires to give” (Veale, 1985, p. 9). The same follows the preliminaries in Ignatian contemplation: in view to prayer, to colloquy, to speaking “as a friend speaks with a friend” (*Sp. Ex.* 54). The ultimate satisfaction is the goal of Ignatian contemplation: “at point where I find what I desire, there I will remain in repose, without being anxious to go forward until I have been satisfied” (*Sp. Ex.* 76).

Relationships

There are a series of relationships enumerated in the *Exercises*. The paramount relationship is between God and the exercitant; this is a two way relationship, that is, the free, initiating, sustaining and active relationship of God with the soul and the intimate response from the exercitant. Next comes the relationship between God and the director; it is to seek God’s will, which is the first duty of a director. And, finally, the relationship between the director and the exercitant in the Spirit; in this relationship God works to accomplish His designs.

The series of relationships has wider implication. The director represents the believing community, which is the visible body of Christ; he also represents the tradition and carries the faith of the Church, since “between Christ our Lord the bridegroom and the Church his bride there is the same Spirit that governs and guides... because by the one Spirit who gave the ten commandments our Holy Mother Church is ruled and governed” (*Sp. Ex.* 365). The relationship has social implications too. It is the relationship of the exercitant with himself, with God and with the creation (*GC* 35).

Two Standards

The choosing part comes here in the Second Week. The Exercise of *Two Standards* is given to discern regarding one’s closeness to Christ; it is to understand the extent that Christ wants one to some degree of closeness, “Thy most holy Majesty wish to choose and receive me” (*Sp. Ex.* 98). The heart’s desire will be fulfilled by the grace of God, who has implanted this desire in the soul. The exercitant will be drawn towards the decision that affects his life. The decision is “from above, that is, from the love of God” (*Sp. Ex.* 184). It will be in conformation with the pattern of Christ, with greater responsibility, “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am” (Jn. 17:24).

There is a possibility of misunderstanding in discerning God’s will; it may be because of over-enthusiasm, may be because of the fear, or may be because of some subtle attachments to cling to the familiar. The decision (choice) is in dilemma. To overcome such uncertainty, an exercise of Three Classes is given at this point. It is “to explore and ask in what kind of life Christ desires us to serve his Divine Majesty” (*Sp. Ex.* 135). At this point there is a struggle within; because the enemy, that is, the fragile human nature, has much to lose in building God’s Kingdom. It is akin with the desert experience of Christ. To overcome the temptations, “we

will look at the intention of Christ our Lord and in contrast at the intention of the enemy of our human nature” (*Sp. Ex.* 135). The ‘Three Classes’ represents three responses, which are seemingly good, noble but not the will of God. The will of God is known through the path that Christ walked. This path is made known by St. Ignatius through the Exercises of Three Classes and Three Ways of Being Humble.

Three Classes

The exercise on Three Classes is to look for the will of God. During this exercise what one asks for and desire is “grace to choose what is more for the glory of the Divine Majesty” (*Sp. Ex.* 152). This is a test to find out the reality of one’s own desires; if one really desires the ultimate, one chooses the means. The desires of the ultimate remain unreal as long as one refuse to put them into practice in daily life. The Three Classes are described in relation with their inner freedom to choose the right path; they are related to the subtle attachments one has.

The first/lowest class of people are described as post-poners, “The hour of death comes and they have not taken the means” (*Sp. Ex.* 153). The second class (mediocre) too desires freedom but inwardly they are attached to their own desires. They want to be free of the burden, “but in such a way that they retain what they are attached to, so that God is to come to what they desire” (*Sp. Ex.* 154). It is a tricky position; they “want God to conform wholly to their ill-ordered attachments. Consequently, they make of the end a means and the means an end” (*Sp. Ex.* 169). The third class are truly free from the attachment. “As a result, the desire to be better able to serve God our Lord will be the cause of their keeping or relinquishing” (*Sp. Ex.* 155). It is to purify one’s desires, which cannot be achieved by oneself but a contemplative gift. This is the disposition of the heart to desire to be placed with the path shown by Jesus. Such person is truly indifferent, the fruit of Principle and Foundation (*Sp. Ex.* 23).

Three Ways of Being Humble

To be free of the attachments, St. Ignatius leads the exercitant step by step in this Exercise. He starts with the ordinary way that everyone needs to follow, i.e, observance of the Commandments (religious rules). It is to be “obedient to the law of God our Lord” (*Sp. Ex.* 165). In this step the exercitant takes a decision to follow the religious rules strictly and sincerely. The second step is a little deeper than the first; it leads one to the gift of indifference. Indifference is clearly pronounced here, “... I do not desire or feel myself strongly attached to having wealth rather than poverty, or honor rather than dishonor, or a long life rather than a short one” (*Sp. Ex.* 166). The perfect path would be the third step; it is to choose deliberately the latter ones of the above, i.e., poverty, dishonor, short life (*Sp. Ex.* 168). The humble way of Christ becomes a deliberate choice for the exercitant in order to perfect in the freedom.

Unitive Phase: The Third and the Fourth Weeks

The last two Weeks are not given much importance here, in this essay, because they are meant to conform a person to the person of Christ in His passion, death and resurrection. It is to help a person who seeks for the ultimate desire of freedom in the path of Christ.

The psychological aspect of the ‘dynamics of the *Exercises*’ is considered below.

The Exercises: Psychology and Beyond

‘Transformation’

The term ‘dynamics’ means a movement; the movement is towards the perfection. It implies that there is lack of perfection and one needs to strive towards the perfection. Karl Jung, known for his religious psychology, puts it as ‘transformation.’ By transformation he means, “...a psychic transition involving regression and temporary ‘loss of ego-hood’ in order to bring to consciousness and fulfil a psychological need hitherto unrecognised” (Samuels, A., *et al.*, 1986, p. 151). There is a consciousness which is not recognised in human beings. It is not recognised because of ‘ego-hood.’ It is covered by the mind (psyche, ego) and to uncover it is transformation. The dynamics of the *Exercises* is precisely for this purpose, i.e., to lose the unconscious ego and to bring out the hidden consciousness.

The term ‘transformation’ may be confused with ‘achievement’ which is a misleading understanding. Whereas achievement is static, transformation is dynamic; it is an ongoing process, the result of which is that a person becomes more complete. Accordingly, Jungian concept of ‘transformation’ can be parallel to the *Exercises*. However, in terms of spiritual development, transformation has a broader meaning which is implicit in the *Exercises*. The broader meaning is that it can move individuals of the right disposition into a more specifically spiritual realm, moving fully into transpersonal plane (Meissner, W.W. 1999, p. 232). Meissner concludes that after the second Week of the *Exercises*, psychological language no longer offers an adequate framework for understanding, because one moves into the spiritual realm.

Jung introduced the construct of the ‘transcendent function’ to represent a linkage between the real and the imaginary, or the rational and the irrational, as a bridge between conscious and unconscious (Samuels, A. 1986. p. 150). Because of this factor, one can see the role of the *Exercises* since it relies on the exercitants’ use of their imagination during each exercise. Jung has a special interest in ‘religious concepts’ and symbols, and their use as a means of personal transformation. The *Spiritual Exercises* offers ample evidence for Jung’s interest in religious symbols.

‘Transformation’ as a process in the mind has an aim. This process is termed as ‘transcendent function’ by Jung. He regarded transcendent function “...to be the most significant factor in psychological process” and from a teleological point of view “...it does not proceed without aim and purpose” (Samuel, A. 1986). It means that the transcendent function facilitates a transition from one psychological state to another. Jung refers to it as “...a manifestation of the energy that springs from the tension of opposites and it consists in a series of fantasy-occurrences which appear spontaneously in dreams and vision” (Samuel, A. 1986). The *Exercises* makes use of the exercitant’s imagination to achieve this function and to go beyond the psychological realm, i.e., spiritual realm. The result is that Jung’s perspective is restricted to psychological realm as an aim (what for?). The *Exercises* goes beyond the psychological realm to metaphysical and religious realm (why?) to derive answers for the exercitants’ existence itself.

Social Implications in the Exercises

The purpose Jung’s thesis of the psyche is to emphasise that each individual can find meaning in her/his life by developing awareness (consciousness) to interact with the unconsciousness. By this interaction one comes to a greater consciousness and find meaning in life. This may be viewed as the goal of psychotherapy. It could also be applied to the *Exercises* with a different purpose to be achieved. The difference lies in the orientation the exercitant gains through the experience of the consciousness in spiritual realm. Self-understanding in the spiritual realm moves (or compels) the exercitants out of their own world into community (society). There is a felt urge to compassion towards the suffering world with the spiritual experience. Psychotherapy, on the other hand, may but not necessarily achieve this (Empereur, J.L. 1997, pp. 42ff).

Social implications of doing the *Exercises* are evident through Jesuit missionaries throughout the history. It is described as a central aspect of Christian spirituality, “...the authenticity of real transformation ‘always and absolutely carries a demand and duty’ a central aspect of Christian spirituality” (Wilber, K. 1997). It is the great command by Christ when He said, “Whatever you do to the least my brothers, you do to me” (Mt. 25:40). The real transformation drives the exercitant towards social action in order to transform society.

An overlap between the result of doing the *Exercises* and psychotherapy in relation to the goal, i.e., to have better judgment and to be able to make better life decisions is seen (Ruth Tiffany, B., p. 76). Ruth Tiffany refers to the *Exercises* as “...a school of prayer and learning to make positive judgments in the here and now, for the clarification of inner movements, feeling and attitudes, both positive and negative” (Ruth Tiffany). The difference is in the effect. Whereas psychotherapy is directed to self-development, the *Exercises*, necessarily, is geared to the transformation of the world.

Jung also uses the term ‘translation’ in psychology. There is a difference between translation and transformation. Translation is a necessary condition for transformation. Translation is defined as “...a new way to think or feel about reality...” in which “...the self may learn to translate its world and its being in the terms of this new belief or new language or new paradigm” (Wilber, K. 1997). According to Wilber, translation is a prerequisite for transformation. It is an absolutely necessary and crucial function for the greater part of our lives and a necessary preliminary to transformation. Translation is to be discarded in order for the transformation to take over. Real transformation challenges “the very process of translation itself to be

witnessed, undermined and eventually dismantled to allow the self to be inquired into and transcended” (Wilber, K. 1997). Thus, transformation, in the spiritual realm, is the mystic experience.

Conclusion

The *Spiritual Exercises* is mainly directed towards personal experience of the divine by being aware of the inner movements, which are termed as the ‘movements of the Spirit’ by St. Ignatius. The awareness of the movements leads the exercitants to a greater awareness of the metaphysical reality and purpose of their life in the light of the life of Christ. The experience thus attained is not only for the personal gain but also directed towards social transformation. The order of the Jesuits has the spiritual experience as its foundation. Helping the neighbour is found not in the *Exercises* itself but in the *Constitutions* that has its foundation in the *Exercises*. In regard to the expression “helping souls or serving the neighbor,” various parallel and interchangeable expressions are found in the writings of Ignatius. Some of them would be “to help souls,” “care for souls,” “aid souls,” “the good of souls,” “help of your neighbor,” and “the salvation and perfection of the souls of the neighbor.” Thus, the spiritual experience by doing the *Exercises* goes beyond self-satisfaction, urging one to enter into active life of society to transform it for better.

In this essay an attempt is made to bring out these aspects by pointing out to the dynamics first, followed by the parallels in psychology, especially of Jung’s and going beyond the psychological goals.

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