

Chapter 1

Turned Without and Within

A small body of recent psychoanalytic findings indicates that when mystical experiences produce personality changes, they do so in the same manners as psychoanalysis. Most mystical experiences do not meet psychoanalytic standards of therapeutic success; but cross-cultural examples that meet psychoanalytic criteria have been documented in Navajo healing and Inuit shamanism (Merkur, 2005), the biblical tales of Abram and Job (Merkur, 1995–96, 2004), the conversion of St. Ignatius Loyola (Meissner, 1999), the conversions produced through John Wesley's method in eighteenth century British Methodism (Haartman, 2004), possibly the story of Arjuna's encounter with Shiva in the Hindu Bhagavad Gita (Reddy, 2001), and possibly also in the narratives of Milarepa and Naropa in the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism (Finn, 1998, 2003). Whether mystical or psychoanalytic, wholesome personality change evidently depends on common processes of therapeutic action.

These findings suggest that therapeutic personality change mobilizes a naturally occurring healing process that has historically been conceptualized in a variety of religious and secular manners. Freud (1933) was evidently of a similar opinion:

It is easy to imagine . . . that certain mystical practices may succeed in upsetting the normal relations between the different regions of the mind, so that, for instance, perception may be able to grasp happenings in the depths of the ego and in the id which were otherwise inaccessible to it. It may safely be doubted, however, whether this road will lead us to the ultimate truths from which salvation is to be expected. Nevertheless it may be admitted that the therapeutic efforts of psychoanalysis have chosen a similar line of approach. Its intention is, indeed,

to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of perception and enlarge its organization, so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id. Where id was, there ego shall be. It is a work of culture—not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee. (pp. 79–80)

Freud denied that metaphysical truth and salvation may be attained through mysticism. However, he acknowledged that psychoanalysis proceeds in a fashion that is similar to mysticism and he implied that mysticism, like psychoanalysis, is properly to be regarded as “a work of culture.” It is or can be a means to facilitate psychotherapeutic healing.

The concept of a naturally occurring process of psychological healing has implications for the history of psychotherapy. The natural healing process has been remarked from time immemorial in a variety of different cultures. Several religious traditions devised techniques to facilitate the occurrence of the natural healing process long before equivalent procedures were conceptualized in the manner that led to their designation in 1887 as psychotherapeutics (Pivnicki, 1969). The conceptual shift from a religious paradigm to a naturalistic approach was a comparatively recent achievement. This book concerns a shift in the fourteenth century within Christian mystical theology, when the traditional concern with spiritual access to supernatural beings and locations, was replaced with a concern with the effect of divine grace on processes within the human soul. The metaphysical question: Is this contemplation true? was replaced for pragmatic purposes by the psychological question: Is this contemplation good for you?

JAMES OF MILAN

To begin my narrative, let us examine the *Stimulus amoris* of James of Milan, a late medieval devotional text that was often mistakenly attributed to St. Bonaventure. James of Milan discussed a technique of meditation that scholars term “meditation on the passion,” and he remarked that the fruits of meditation on the passion of Jesus included occasional spontaneous occurrences of the soul’s conformity with the sweetness of Jesus. It is my claim that he was discussing what we may today recognize as therapeutic personality change.

James of Milan was a Franciscan of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries who is known to us almost entirely through the one text. The Latin text of the *Stimulus amoris* is extant in two markedly different rescensions (Fleming, 1977). The text was repeatedly augmented with additions that were placed both before and after the original composition by James of Milan. The developed

manuscript was translated into Middle English in the late fourteenth century under the title *The Prickynge of Love*. The translation includes notable interpolations by the translator. Three of the ten surviving manuscripts of *The Prickynge of Love*, including one at Cambridge, name the translator as Walter Hilton (Hilton, 1952, p. 19). An English translation of the Latin manuscript was made and published in 1642, before being revised, edited, and published again in 1907 (Bonaventure, 1907). A modern translation of the Middle English translation was published in 1952 (Hilton, 1952). For present purposes, I have quoted Clare Kirchberger's translation of the Middle English version, which identifies the medieval translator's additions with angle << >> brackets.

James of Milan referred to meditation on the passion in summary terms that implied the reader's familiarity with the details of the meditative technique.

Unless I may have passion and compassion with Christ, as St. Paul saith, I shall not reign with Christ. But what is more fruitful and sweet than for to bear in our hearts full compassion of Christ's passion . . . ? Nothing here in this life! And what is more worthy than to be like God's son Jesus Christ? Soothly nothing. But how may we be like to him in heaven, when we are all unlike to him in our <<life here>>? What is more vlatsume than to see God's son in man, suffer wrongs, shames, reproofs and vilest death, for me a stinking wretch . . . ? (Hilton, 1952, pp. 121–22)

The phrase “to bear in our hearts full compassion of Christ's passion” explained the emotion that was to be cultivated through meditation on the passion. The wording “to see God's son in man, suffer wrongs, shames, reproofs and vilest death” referred to the use of mental imagery by which one might see the events of the passion in one's imagination.

For James of Milan, meditation on the passion was a routine component of preparation to receive the Eucharist. The sacrament of the altar was to be interpreted as a type of the passion:

And namely then, when he shall go to Mass that he greithe him thus. First that he withdraw his mind from all outward things and gather himself all whole into himself if he may, so entirely that neither he be scattered by bodily wits nor by vain thoughts. And then ransack his own conscience and that that he findeth unclean, that he wash it away with tears of compunction. And go to his confessor and cast out through meek shrift all venom of sin. And when he has done yet eft lift up his heart and think on the meekness of God and of the wretchedness of himself; how much and how worthy God is, how little and how unworthy himself is, and thus nought himself. <<And

thank God>> so that he be as he were turned into God, that he see none other thing nor feel but God. Then, <<if time suffer>>, he may think also of the great love of our Lord, that would to himself, that is so worthy (take) on him the vileness of mankind; and then he may think points of Christ's passion for to stir his own heart to compassion. And over that, for to wonder of his wonderful charity, that not only would offer himself for us on the cross, but he offereth himself to us in sacrament of the altar, for to be fully with us and in us. (pp. 139–40).

After meditation on one's sins and making confession, a person was to "think points of Christ's passion for to stir his own heart to compassion." Identification with Jesus formed a component of the meditation. A meditator was to "be as he were turned into God" before he thought "points of Christ's passion."

James of Milan also regarded meditation on the passion as one of three preparations that a person might make to receive consolation in the form of contemplation of Christ.

The second is that thou strengthen thee in all that thou mayst for to have compassion of Christ's passion, overall bearing it in thy heart, for but if we can have compassion, we may not receive consolation. If thou mayst think on his passion deeply and mayst enter with thine affection into the wound of his side, thou shalt soon then come to his heart and <<then thou mayst rest thee there as in thy bedstead>>. Whoso weeneth to come to contemplation of Christ and cometh not by this door <<nor by this way nor by the bitterness (and compassion) of Christ in his manhood>>, he is but a thief and a micher, for when he weeneth to be within, he is full far without. (pp. 142–43)

The third preparation was to be mindful of the omnipresence of Jesus (p. 143), a traditional topic of Christian contemplation.

The effect of meditation on the passion was a transformation into Christ. The transformation began with the horrors of the passion but led presently to Christ's living embrace.

This is a gracious change, worth much good, for to change the wounds of sin into the wounds of Christ, and filth of his soul into <<Christ's cleanness, (his pride into Christ's meekness)>>, and his vileness into <<Christ's>> majesty, his own malice into <<Christ's>> goodness, his own bitterness into <<Christ's>> sweetness <<and his own darkness into Christ's light. Then might he say with Paul: 'I live and not I for Christ liveth in me.' [Galatians ii, 20] Thus is a man

turned into Christ, that hath spoiled himself of himself and with full offering of his soul to Christ is clothed and lapped all in the love of Christ. (p. 145)

A meditator would undergo a gracious change by which his personal wounds of sin became the wounds of Christ crucified. Later the bitterness would turn to sweetness.

Turning into Christ in this manner was conceptualized specifically as a mystical union. In a later passage, James of Milan asserted that a “man . . . may perfectly be oned to God and changed into him.” (p. 146)

James of Milan remarked that meditation on the passion led to two different emotional reactions. “A deep and an inly [=inward] beholding of Christ’s passion” might be followed by a drunkenness that consisted of gladness, mirth, merriment, and a perception of Christ’s presence in all creatures.

The first drunkenness is a great abundance of gladness and an high mirth of heart <<that cometh so suddenly into a soul>> through a new lightning <<of Christ’s presence>>, after mickle weeping going before or after a deep and an inly beholding of Christ’s passion; or else after great fervour of desire long kindled <<through assidual beholding of Christ. These are soothfast chesons and not deceivable>>. And this gladness when it is conceived, increaseth so mickle within, that it reboundeth into the body and maketh <<all limbs>> for to be fain <<and merry of Christ’s comforting>>. And sometimes for our mickle gladness they stir and may suffer no resting <<in a manner as a man were drunk>>. And in this time <<the soul is so stirred through mickleness of Christ’s love that her thinketh she may find Christ in all creatures>> and liketh for to halse them. But the heart is not bowing to vain delight of the creature but only <<of Christ in the creature>>. (Hilton, 1952, p. 152)

James of Milan did not refer to “drunkenness” as a contemplative state, even though his description of the soul thinking that “she may find Christ in all creatures” corresponds to one of two major topics of Christian contemplation. Monks traditionally aspired to “the contemplation of the physical world, and . . . the contemplation of God” (Evagrius, 1981, p. 19).

A second reaction that a soul might make to meditation on the passion differed from the first by not translating into physical activity. Neither did it entail a contemplation of Christ’s immanence in all creatures. The impact of meditation remained within the soul and was, for that reason, possibly a deception.

Another drunkenness is this: when a man in contemplation . . . feeleth his heart filled with a wonderful sweetness through Christ’s

presence, and this sweetness so mickle aboundeth in the heart that all limbs of the body take part of it, so far forth that a man thinketh all his feeling without or within sweeter than honey. . . . this drunkenhead that is cause of over mickle sweetness maketh the body for to rest in stillness. . . . in this drunkenhead may come deceit. . . . For why?>> the fiend . . . would that a man had pride and set well by himself for feeling of such sweetness and that he fully feed himself in such manner delights as in full rest of his soul, and so by this manner way shall he be turned from God, <<for he would none other beholding have but only feeling of such sweetness. Thus are some contemplatives deceived>>. . . . Some contemplatives <<when they feel aught of God>>, anon they presume of themselves and despise other men and weenen that they are next God, when they are through pride full far cast from him. (Hilton, 1952, p. 152)

What James of Milan described in this passage was a “unitive distortion” (Haartman, 2001) or pathological complication of mystical experience, of the variety that Carl G. Jung (1952, p. 315) termed “inflation.” It is a grandiosity over the fact of having had a mystical experience. It substitutes self-importance for religious devotion to God. James of Milan was sufficiently astute to recognize that the grandiosity coincides with contempt for others.

The fiend “casteth . . . in suggestions of pride and of presumption: that a man ween himself: (he) is contemplative and <<great in God’s sight>>, and then deemeth he all other vicious and <<defaulty. The least default that ever other men doeth, he seeth it and riseth against it unpatiently. But he seeth right nought or little of himself,>> and taketh upon himself unwisely the authority (of the Apostle). (Hilton, 1952, p. 156; compare p. 162)

And now we come to the particular passages of our keenest concern. James of Milan also noted responses to mystical experience that we may recognize as changes not of moods but of long-term character. He remarked, for example, that differing extents of change were to be expected of novices and past practitioners of meditation.

That devotion which thou travailest after for to have, is in others, had of old, and mightily rooted in them, and that may be a cause why them seem not so stirred by outward tokens about ghostly profit as thou art. For why? ghostly sweetness when it is fresh <<and new felt>> maketh open changing of a man, but I hope it doth not so in him, that hath been through devotion, stirred and changed, of old.

And therefore when thou seest thyself melt all into water for devotion, and other God's servants not so, think then that it is well. (Hilton, 1952, pp. 162-63)

Because past practitioners had already undergone profound changes, spiritual experiences no longer transformed them as dramatically.

What sorts of changes took place? The *Stimulus amoris* noted that conformity with Christ sometimes took form as a general sweetening of the personality. "And some also through grace wax ripe, so that they are all turned <<into Christ's sweetness>> without and within, and all bitterness is cut from their hearts so cleanly that they seem more waning in heaven than in earth" (Hilton, 1952, p. 163). James of Milan described what we may understand as conflict resolution that ended bitterness and left them "turned without and within" in a manner that was more appropriate to heaven than to earth.

In other cases, however, corruption prevailed: "And also some are waxend as trees and ever profiting in God's grace from day to day. And some <<rot>> and turn to corruption as wicked men do." (Hilton, 1952, p. 163)

The hope to conform with the pure spirituality of God had led the fourth century Desert Father Evagrius Ponticus (1981) to advocate *apatheia*, an emotional indifference to the material world, as an ideal for mystics to achieve. The monastic goal of *apatheia* was attached to meditation on the passion, for example, in *Christ Crucified*, a fourteenth century text by an anonymous Benedictine monk of Farne.

The third degree is reached when a man is so fired with the love of God that he is neither elated by prosperity nor cast down by adversity, and if riches abound, he by no means sets his heart on them; if he happen to lose them, it causes him no regret at all.

This is the wisest and most perfect love of God and is itself proof that all worldly love is dead. (Monk of Farne, 1961, p. 90)

A Friar Minor, James of Milan entertained a significantly different ideal. Jesus, whose lifestyle Franciscans sought to emulate, had by no means been indifferent to material creatures. The reaction to meditation that James of Milan singled out for praise was not an indifference but a powerful emotional engagement "without and within." Meditators achieved it when "all bitterness is cut from their hearts." The Middle English translator of *Stimulus amoris*, who was probably Walter Hilton, added the phrase "into Christ's sweetness."

Beginning with the conversion of St. Paul on the road to Damascus, Christian reports of transformative mystical experiences discussed the events as miracles that occurred spontaneously as gifts of grace. James of Milan innovated by discussing personality change as an occasional effect of a particular

type of meditation. We may assume that similar reactions to meditation had been experienced by many individuals over the centuries. However, it was Francis of Assisi's expansion of the Church's ministry from the City of God into the City of Man that made it possible for Christians to conceptualize conformance with Christ's sweetness in a positive manner. The monastic ideal of *apatheia* had depended on a Platonic view of spirit in opposition to matter and the body as a prison for the soul. Franciscan devotion to Christ instead emphasized the theological doctrine of the Incarnation of God, not only in the person of the historical Jesus, but also in the Word's continuing presence throughout creation. To be Christ-like in the world, with a sweetness and an absence of bitterness, was understood as an ideal that was valid in its own right. It was not a failure to attain perfect detachment. Apathetic withdrawal from the world was not the only salvific option.

As a Franciscan, James of Milan welcomed therapeutic personality change. He did not see it as a failure to attain *apatheia*. However, he did not prioritize conformance with Christ as the goal of his meditations. The decisive step from a welcome occurrence to a deliberate procedure was instead taken by Walter Hilton, who was very likely the Middle English translator of *Stimulus amoris* (Clark, 1984). Hilton made the claim in his *Scala perfectionis* that "reforming in faith and feeling" can reliably be cultivated, with God's grace, through meditation on the passion. Centuries earlier than anyone presently dates the invention of psychotherapy (compare Zilboorg & Henry, 1941; Kirschner, 1996), his claim deserves close attention.