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## **Beyond words. Continuous contemplation as a third way between religion and secular life**

Nieustanna kontemplacja jako trzecia droga między religią a życiem świeckim

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**Abstract.** The topic of the present article is the life and teachings of three less known, but important, modern mystics: Russian Sufi Irina Tweedie (1907–1999), and two non-confessional mystics: Indian U.G. Krishnamurti (1918–2007), and Romanian Ilie Cioara (1916–2004). It shows that method of permanent, silent contemplation, being non-sectarian, is the essence of spiritual life. It is an alternative to both the religious and secular lives, derivative from differences which can lead to religious intolerance. It shows that the essence of spiritual life is to be found in man, it is impossible to put in into words and can be realised in solitary contemplation.

**Keywords:** contemplation, meditation, non-duality, mysticism, silence.

The topic of the present article is to show that continuous contemplation is the third way between religion and secular life. It's situated between the secular life connected with reproduction and consumption, and life of institutionalized religions which show believers hope for happiness in the afterlife.

Researchers of mysticism in world religions believe in Rufus Jones thesis, accepted in version presented by Gershom Scholem that every mystical experience must be connected with a tradition (Scholem, 1969, pp. 8, 16). So Christians have Christian visions, Buddhists have that of Buddhism etc.

However, the conviction of Jones and Scholem is false because independent mystics exist in many traditions. In India, June McDaniel found Bengal mystics

whose beliefs cannot be classified as Shamanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or even as mysticism typical for Bengal Sahajiya (McDaniel, 1989). Also, Ilie Cioara, one of the main characters of the present essay, was aware of it because he recognized all visions as just „deceitful apparitions” of ego (Cioara, 2012b, p. 78).

We regard religion to be a faith in beliefs, scriptures, and participation in ceremonies and individual practices like prayers and prostrations. The praxis divides religious people. What is common to religions is contemplation. Contemplation transcends differences between religions. Take for example the Dzogchen teachings which are regarded as the highest ones in both Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism and Bön religion. This nondualistic contemplation transcends both dogmas of Buddhism and Bön. The aim of contemplation is the achievement of the primordial state of each individual (Namkhai Norbu, 2000, pp. 32–33), similar to that of an infant who does not see differences between oneself and the world (*Gospel of Thomas*, log. 4, in Robinson, 1977, p. 118).

This presentation concerns three unusual figures of 20th Century history of non-confessional mysticism: Russian Irina Tweedie (1907–1999), Romanian Ilie Cioara (1916–2004), and Indian Uppaluri Gopala (U.G.) Krishnamurti (1918–2007). Life-stories and experiences of these three contemplatives show that one can achieve peace of mind outside the main world’s religions, and it is possible even without regular practice. Though their views and visions show similarities to the ones proclaimed and experienced by mystics of universal religions, all of them are independent of any religious affiliations. Cioara rejected Christianity, and U.G. rejected Hinduism. Only Irina Tweedie was associated with an ancient tradition (Naqshbandi Sufism), but – as we will see – the most important thing for her was the personal relationship with her teacher, not with Islam. Let’s take a short look at their life-stories.

Irina Tweedie (1907–1999) was born in Russia, and educated in Vienna and Paris. Following World War II she married an English naval officer. His death in 1954 resulted in her deep personal crisis. Then she developed an interest in spiritual matters, especially in Theosophy. In 1959 she travelled to India, where she met Sufi master Bhai Sahib whose teachings combined Sufism with that known from other traditions. Under his direction she underwent training from 1961 until his death in 1966 (including two-year break), which led her to experience unity. She achieved it not through performing of any systematic practice, but mainly through devotion to her guru. Though from time to time she prayed or repeated first part of Shahadah, mostly she just sat in presence of her master. At his request she led a diary which is remarkable evidence of her experiences. It was published as a book of more than 800-pages under the title *Daughter of Fire* (1986).

Ilie Cioara (1916–2004) was a Romanian mystic which all his life spent in Bucharest, the capital of Romania. Between 1951 and 1957 he was imprisoned for political reasons. During this time his experiences like prophetic dreams and out-of-the-body experiences, intensified. In the beginning when he was connected with Orthodox Christianity, he was repeating the Jesus prayer. Later he started to practice meditation with a mantra. For the next 20 years he repeated it continuously (Cioara, 2011, p. 112–132).

He had no teacher. As he wrote: „No one can offer us enlightenment. No saint, master or teacher can give it to us in any shape, way or form.” (Cioara, 2001, p. 44). He achieved internal peace at the age of 55, in 1971. One morning after waking up he noticed that chaos and anxiety disappeared from his mind:

A silent mind allows the senses to perceive things as they are. Through silence, the mind in its totality become an immense mirror in which the outside world was reflected. And the world I was perceiving directly through my senses revealed its own reality to me. My fellow beings, close friends or complete strangers, were being regarded indiscriminately, with a feeling of love I had never felt before. (Cioara, 2011, p. 131)

Due to this event, he stopped repeating a mantra. Since then he practiced only „Self-knowing”, the „silence of the mind” as he named it. His perception of surrounding world was different: everything around him looked new, and his mind perceived things as they are. With clear, all-embracing attention he observed everything without pursuing any aim (Cioara, 2011, p. 38). He achieved the state of effortless, objectless and nondual contemplation. By deepening of it he experienced dissolving of his ego.

He wrote 16 books, which consist of about a thousand poems and prose auto-commentaries to it, in which he described his experience of internal peace. According to Petrica Verdes, a translator of Cioara’s books into English, his books do not describe meditation but they are meditation themselves, as they carry a reader into a state of contemplation (Verdes, no date).

According to his teaching all thoughts and emotions are created by the mind, and as such are unreal:

Be still, stop, be attentive – a total attention!  
Be just pure listening, a whole being, boundless.  
You listen and watch, outside and inside yourself (...)  
here are no expectations, no ideal projections. (...)  
Practice this all the time, in every circumstance (...)  
The whole being in harmony – in a timeless state. (Cioara, 2011, p. 3)

According to Sarah Forman Cioara’s teachings can be captured in just one sentence: „when the mind is silent our inner divinity is revealed” (Forman, no date). One can experience contemplation in state of silence of the mind. The expectation of success, of becoming enlightened, Cioara treats as ego’s trap, another dream (Cioara, 2011, p. 72). All one should do, is to get rid of all expectations. Then body and mind are here and now, in a timeless state in which there is no centre and no boundaries. Through the deepening of the state of contemplation ego-shell cracks and in the end one frees ourselves from desires and phantasies created by one’s mind (Cioara, 2011, pp. 5–6). One gains completely new mind (Cioara, 2011, p. 46), by which one perceives world as it is. In the state of pure consciousness, a man becomes a mirror reflecting everything which appears in the field of one’s mind (Cioara, 2011, p. 107; Cioara, 2012c, p. 41). The title of one of Cioara’s poems is „I See Pure Consciousness in Everything and Everywhere” (Cioara, 2012c, p. 100). In another he wrote:

The Mind is completely silent, we are attentive – a clear consciousness,  
 All meanings, boundaries disappear – us and the Infinite are “One”;  
 Practically, we have a new mind – always fresh. (Cioara, 2011, p. 7)

U.G. Krishnamurti (1918-2007) was born in Masulipatam in South part of India in a family of a rich brahmin. He was raised by his grandfather who was a devotee of Theosophy. Together with his grandfather young U.G. travelled around whole India, visited holy places and spiritual centers. Between 1932 and 1939 he was a disciple of a famous yoga teacher Shivananda Sarasvati. Though he was certain that under his direction he achieved highest states of yogic absorption, he was not satisfied. He lost his faith in all methods of spiritual progress. He was certain that asceticism, meditation, and studies did not help him (U.G., 1982, pp. 8–10).

From 1943 to 1960 he was married to woman who bore him four children but he was never emotionally attached to her or their children. After separating from his wife, he led a life of a vagrant in London for three years. He lost the will to change anything. He spent his days browsing through books in British Library or going to cinemas, and at night he was wandered through the city or slept on benches in parks.

From 1961 to 1967 he experienced something that he called incubation (U.G., 1982, p. 18). He had impression that he lost his head and went insane. He felt energy vibrating in his whole body. He had terrible headaches. His body started phosphorescing when rubbed, and emitted light in darkness. In 1967 he experienced nonduality when he was watching a show in a theatre he had impression that dancers are in him, and he is in them.

In July 1967 his mind came to a standstill. All doubts and sense of “I”, along with the sense of his body and mind disappeared. His memory was completely cleansed of all its content. He had an impression that during internal “explosion” all cells of his body and functioning of his senses were completely transformed. Some smells, for example, perfume, lost their scent for him. When he was eating he could feel the taste and smell of only the one dominating ingredient. He had impression that all objects and sounds emerged from his body. His mind turned on only when it was needed, for example when someone asked him a question. The culmination of this process was experiencing of one’s death: his body stiffened, his breath, pulse and heartbeat slowed down. After coming back from this unconscious state he had to learn to speak and name things as if he was new-born child (U.G., 1982, pp. 21–29).

### **Tweedie, Cioara, U.G. and mysticism**

Though Irina Tweedie’s path was nonformal and nonconfessional, one can find there close affinity to many spiritual and mystical traditions. One can see in it:

- activation of chakras (Tweedie, 1986, pp. 287, 791) known in Hinduism and New Age
- awakening of „snake-like” energy of kundalini known in Hindu Tantra (she felt a soft, hissing sound in her lower back) (Tweedie, 1986, pp. 287, 313)

- sensation of a burning body known in the practice of *gTum-mo* of Tantric Buddhism (Tweedie, 1986, pp. 216, 283)
- experience of a mystical sound (nada) (Tweedie, 1986, p. 791) known in Hinduism
- suffering which was hard to bear and driving one to despair (Tweedie, 1986, pp. 283, 596)
- feeling of a „perfect (...) bliss” (Tweedie, 1986, p. 190)
- disappearance of thoughts and mind (Tweedie, 1986, p. 178); in the result of that all problems of personal and philosophical nature lost its importance
- disappearing of sense of „I” (Tweedie, 1986, pp. 178–179, 283) through dissolving one’s ego into boundlessness of deity (Tweedie, 1986, p. 631), analogically to the experience of the author of *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.2.8) a personal ego compared to drop of water dissolving into the ocean of divinity (Mascaro, 1979, p. 81).
- sense of very deep peace, impossible to describe and reminiscing nothingness (Tweedie, 1986, p. 621)
- feeling of boundless love and unity, the result of emptying the mind of all content (Tweedie, 1986, pp. 178–179, 659, 804)
- broadening of consciousness and the sense of understanding of everything (Tweedie, 1986, p. 775)
- sense of an overwhelming unity (Tweedie, 1986, pp. 804, 807)
- sense of deep silence (Tweedie, 1986, p. 808)
- death of an ego (becoming nothing) through the absolute and unconditioned devotion to one’s guru (Tweedie, 1986, pp. 540, 222)
- sense of a deep relationship with her teacher; everything but the guru lost meaning to her; the only thing which mattered to her was his will (Tweedie, 1986, p. 179).

U.G. talked about

- dissolving of the separation between ego and non-ego, meaning that there is no “I” (U.G., 1982, pp. 19, 35–36)
- vanishing of the sense of one’s body (U.G., 1982, p. 38)
- disappearance of all questions (U.G., 1982, p. 20) tremendous inner silence and peace (U.G., 1982, p. 35)
- primordial pure consciousness (U.G., 1982, pp. 36, 30)

In Cioara’s description of spiritual experiences we find some identical experiences known from Tweedie’s book:

- „dissolving the ‘ego’” (Cioara, 2012c, pp. 32, 101)
- „death of the ‘ego’” (Cioara, 2011, p. 45)
- „demise of the ‘ego’” (Cioara, 2012b, p. 106)
- demise of the sense of duality (Cioara, 2012c, p. 43)
- sense of „total Liberation” (Cioara, 2011, p. 4)
- feeling of internal peace (Cioara, 2011, pp. 4, 7–9) which „separates us from the past” (Cioara, 2011, p. 18)

- sense of the timelessness and eternity („There is no time, no space – just everlasting Eternity”) (Cioara, 2011, pp. 7, 29–30)
- experience of immortal (Cioara, 2011, p. 23), infinite (Cioara, 2011, p. 11), and all-encompassing (Cioara, 2011, p. 20) love, which is Eternity, „perfect harmony, beauty and kindness” (Cioara, 2011, p. 23).
- experience of „pure Consciousness” (Cioara, 2011, pp. 20, 9, 47, 54; Cioara, 2012c, p. 39) and „superconsciousness” (Cioara, 2011, p. 45)
- experience of „Pure Energy” (Cioara, 2011, pp. 7, 9)
- experience of „Primordial Energy of the God present in all things” (Cioara, 2011, p. 134)
- „perfect union” without trace of individuality (Cioara, 2011, p. 46)
- feeling that „The Universe and I are ‘One’” (Cioara, 2011, p. 66)
- experience of Joy which „manifests itself spontaneously, when the intellect ceases all its activity” (Cioara, 2011, p. 19)
- experience of „boundless happiness” (Cioara, 2011, pp. 47, 67) and „all-pervading Happiness” (Cioara, 2011, p. 67)
- experience of „emptiness” and „psychological emptiness” in between thoughts (Cioara, 2011, p. 7)
- experience of „psychological nothingness” (Cioara, 2011, pp. 10, 47, 51), being – as Buddhist *śūnyata* (emptiness) – the source of everything
- disappearing of an old man and the birth of a new man (Cioara, 2011, p. 9), called also „true man” (Cioara, 2012c, p. 105)
- „return to the Source of the Sacred” (Cioara, 2012c, p. 109)
- „encounter with the Sacredness of Life” (Cioara, 2012c, p. 71)
- and the „manifestation of the Sacred within us”, or „our divine nature” as analogous of realization of sense of divinity (Cioara, 2012a, p. 1).

Cioara identified such concepts with himself as What Is, Everything, All That Is, reality, great Infinite, nothingness, psychological emptiness, lucid Attention, eternity, freedom, Being, Non Being, divinity, divine nature, true nature, world, Life, God, Absolute, Unknown, Boundlessness, Primordial Energy, Pure Energy, Immense Energy, Great Energy, Cosmic Energy, Great Whole, Beauty, Intelligence, Perfection, Simplicity, perfect Harmony, Complete Oneness, Absolute Truth, Silence, enlightenment, Limitless Love, unconditioned Love, infinite Kindness, limitless Joy, Great Joy, boundless Happiness, sacredness, Sacred Innocence, Source of all Sources (Cioara, 2011, pp. 18, 24, 107; Cioara, 2012c, p. 72; Cioara, 2012a, pp. 1, 10–11, 18, 20, 36–39; Cioara, 2012b, pp. 14, 27, 33, 39, 46–47, 52–55, 78, 89, 100, 118–119). This way he showed that what he experienced is impossible to be put into words and described.

According to him, the enlightened one embraces the whole world:

I am here as well as everywhere in the Immense Infinite,  
 I permeate everything.  
 All is within Me, I Am present in All,  
 There is nothing outside of Me, seen or unseen. (Cioara, 2012a, p. 7)

## Who am I?

The method of self-knowledge through continuous asking oneself „Who am I?” used by Cioara, was introduced by Tamil mystic Ramana Maharishi (1879-1950). In his view constantly asking oneself this question will cause thoughts to stop moving and will lead to reaching a peace of mind (Godman, 1985, p. 56). This method is also used by some practitioners of Japanese Zen. American Zen teacher Philip Kapleau wrote that one who wants to reach enlightenment should continuously ask oneself „Who am I?” or „Who is listening?”, „Who is seeing?” etc. (Kapleau, 1965, p. 138). His teacher, Japanese Zen master Hakuun Yasutani, mentioned that „Thought is the sickness of the human mind” (Kapleau, 1965, p. 29). An anonymous Japanese professor of philosophy noticed that „In the beginning you have to utilize concepts to get rid of concepts” (Kapleau, 1965, p. 210). The dictum of Descartes „I think, therefore I am”, Cioara deemed one of the most stupid phrases the human mind had produced. According to him one should say: „I think, therefore I am not”. (Verdes, no date) U.G. deemed all questions, including „Who am I?”, as futile, because they are all coming from one’s memory. In fact, those are questions of other people which we mindlessly repeat (U.G., 1982, p. 68).

When U.G. met Ramana Maharishi in 1939, he asked him: “Can you give me what you have? (*moksha* or liberation)” Ramana answered: “I can give you, but can you take it?” (U.G., 1982, p. 12). At that moment U.G. understood, what Cioara will become aware of years later, that nobody can offer us enlightenment, because it is not “a thing” among other things of physical world.

## How to achieve the aim?

Cioara regarded dissolution into Boundlessness as an aim of human life on Earth (Cioara, 2011, p. 31). The aim one can be achieved by removing the obstacles standing in the way, not by effort. One can do that only by coming into contact – each for himself – with our behavior in relationship with Life, without pursuing any purpose, ideal, advantage or expectation. Through this simple encounter, our psychological structure become silent; in this silence, we discover that we nevertheless exist as a state of all-encompassing, alive, lucid, active and perpetually present Superconsciousness. (Cioara, 2012b, p. 98)

Contrary to Indian and Buddhist teachers Cioara rejected the need for a teacher and practice methods and rituals which – in his opinion – only strengthen ego’s cage. One cannot realize inner peace by effort (Forman, no date). But still, his views were close to Buddhism, especially to the practitioners of Vipassāna meditation, who point out that one can reach enlightenment by emptying the mind of all content, especially of illusions, dreams and desires. In order to reach it, one needs no preparations. All we need is conscious observations of everything that happens inside and outside us (Cioara, 2011, p. 12): „our whole work consists of watching and listening to each



wandering thought, each murmur of thinking, each desire, each fear as they attract us into the thicket of time.” (Cioara, 2011, p. 51).

In a corresponding manner, U.G. stated. that there is no method leading to reaching of enlightenment. Because of that, he rejected all paths of spiritual progress and all religions (U.G., 1982, p. 32). He considered spiritual teachers to be charlatans, who prey upon human naivety, and their proposals to be kind of „holy business” (U.G., 1982, pp. 86, 110). He deemed asceticism, meditation, sublimation of drives, and the concept of sins as an „absolute nonsense” (U.G., 1982, p. 82), a creation of the mind, which is a myth (U.G., 1982, p. 121). In a manner typical for the English Ranters of 17th Century, he said: „Having a glass of beer or smoking a cigarette is exactly the same as repeating prayers, holy words, and scriptures. Going to the pub or the temple is exactly the same; it is a quick fix.” (U.G., 1988, p. 44).

According to U.G. all attempts to control thoughts and emotions are futile. With the help of effort one cannot find oneself in a state of meditative insight or realize freedom. All one can do is free oneself from internal struggle, including thinking in categories of the point of life (U.G., 1982, p. 43). He said that he had no message for others (U.G., 1982, p. 110). He expressed it in one sentence: „I cannot help you.” (U.G., 1982, p. 115).

U.G. pointed out that we cannot change the natural course of things. Everyone who wants to experience a deep internal transformation has to reject one’s culture and its ethical codes, including the concepts of good and evil (Maverick, 2005). He deemed spiritual enlightenment to be a myth. His transformation was only biological and chemical transformation of his own body. It has no cause, and nobody can control it. From the perspective of enlightenment ordinary life appears to be a dream, and the world is seen as an illusion. He called his experience total rinsing (or flushing out) all content from the human body (U.G., 1982, pp. 29-30). Hormonal changes in his body caused terrible suffering. But after the internal revolution was finished, he had experienced tremendous inner peace (U.G., 1982, p. 35).

## **Discussion: similarities and differences**

U.G. never wrote any book. His discourses were published by his disciples. Tweedie wrote an 800-pages journal. Cioara is an author of 16 books.

U.G. presented his experience in categories taken from Hinduism, Cioara used the terms of Indian-Western esotericism (for example he wrote of astral planes), and Tweedie used some Sufi categories, but in a very limited way.

All of them experienced the sensation of infinitive love, an impossible to describe and very deep peace resembling nothingness, the disappearance of thoughts, mind, and sense of “I”.

Both Cioara and U.G. rejected any need of having a teacher, and practicing of methods and rituals which, in their opinion, only strengthening the cage of “I”. Both were certain that one cannot reach internal peace through effort.



Like Buddhists, U.G. claimed that life is suffering, and the result of enlightenment is the realization that self (ego, soul, person) is a fiction. No permanent consciousness exists, only the unconnected sensations and thoughts (U.G., 1982, p. 46).

Both U.G. and Cioara experienced emptying their mind of all its content (U.G., 1982, pp. 29–30; Cioara, 2012b, p. 55).

While Cioara wrote about a new man or true man (Cioara, 2011, p. 9; Cioara, 2012c, p. 105), U.G. mentioned a „natural man” (U.G., 1982, p. 47). But, from the other side, he pointed out that there is no „perfect man” or „normal man” (U.G., 1982, pp. 80, 84).

Both Irina Tweedie and U.G. experienced suffering, which was hard to bear and was driving to despair.

Tweedie and U.G. used the term “natural state” (U.G., 1982, pp. 33–35, 39, 42; Tweedie, 1986, p. 244). It is name of unchangeable and unconditioned state identified with Buddhist enlightenment or Hindu liberation.

Cioara used terms „Pure Presence” and „Pure Awareness” (Cioara, 2011, p. 67), and U.G. talked about a „primordial, pure state of consciousness” (U.G., 1982, p. 30). Those terms are well known in the Dzogchen teachings (Namkhai Norbu, 2000, pp. 32–33, 113). Cioara’s comparison of an enlightened mind to a mirror which impartially reflects everything that appears in front of it (Cioara, 2011, p. 107), is typical to the Dzogchen teachings (Namkhai Norbu, 2000, pp. 97–98). In the state of pure consciousness or full attention all phenomena are „instantly dissolved, without leaving any memory residues” (Cioara, 2012b, pp. 85–86). Dzogchen practitioners would rather say that phenomena disappear without „leaving any trace” (Namkhai Norbu, 2000, p. 200, n. 3).

The main difference between them is the method of achieving peace of mind. According to Bhai Sahib and Irina Tweedie one can reach the goal only with the help of one’s guru. Ilie Cioara had no teacher, and he had used method of continuously asking “Who am I?”. For U.G. Krishnamurti there are no methods at all.

U.G. and Cioara were critics of an empty religiosity consisting of dogmas, ceremonies and devotional practices (U.G., 1982, pp. 11, 52). Cioara wrote: „Real religion has no rituals and no formulas, it has no purpose, no limits” (Cioara, 2012c, p. 110). Both rejected faith, hope, and prayers as rooted in ignorance (Cioara, 2012b, pp. 62, 65).

## Conclusion

The minds of people, both religious and non-religious, are often prone to negativities of nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and simple ignorance which are results of perceiving of world in categories of dualities. On the other hand, contemplatives do not divide the world into “I” and “not I”. They can see it as it is without judgment. Contemplation as such is connected with no religion because it is nondual. There is no “I” in it, no subject who can say “I am so and so”.

Because of that we can see continuous contemplation as the third way between religion and secular life. It is the middle way between secular life connected with reproduction and consumption, and the life of institutionalized religions which show believers hope for happiness in the afterlife. The method of self-knowledge through continuous asking oneself "Who am I?" is non-sectarian, and can be practiced in any circumstances by everyone regardless of cultural and religious affiliation

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