

TABLE 1: THE CONDENSED STRUCTURE OF CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

	Hinduism	Buddhism	Daoism
Common Theme	Patanjali India 2nd–4th century CE	Buddhaghosa Sri Lanka 5th century CE	Sima Chengzhen China 8th century CE
Development of Faith			Faith, the root of the <i>Dao</i> , develops when one hears the methods for sitting in oblivion, has faith in Daoist cultivation, and pursues this practice.
Regulation of Behavior	<i>Yamas</i> : Vows of self-restraint with abstention from violence, falsehood, theft, sexual incontinence, and acquisitiveness.	Development of Virtue: Abstention from killing, lying, stealing, sexual intercourse, and covetousness. The function of this is to stop misconduct which results in virtue.	One abandons worldly affairs and the karmic accumulations which result from them. Stillness and leisure increase while defilements and entanglements diminish.
Development of Concentration	<i>Dhyana</i> : The uninterrupted flow of the mind towards the object of concentration.	Concentration: Anchoring the mind on a single object to eliminate distraction.	One must sit calmly and tame the mind, letting go of projected reality and learning to abide in nonexistence. Attachments fall away, and one enters into emptiness and nonbeing, joining with <i>Dao</i> .
First Absorption: The mind achieves identity with the object of concentration	<i>Savitarka Samadhi</i> : The mind achieves identity with the gross object of concentration and alternates between three kinds of knowledge. The essence of the object of contemplation gradually clarifies.	First <i>Jhana</i> : An initial trance state characterized by applied and sustained thought, happiness and bliss, and the unification of mind.	

Judaism	Christianity	Islam
Dobh Baer Poland 19th century CE	St. Teresa of Avila Spain 16th century CE	Abdullah al-Ansari Afghanistan 9th century CE
<i>Nephesh</i> of the natural soul: The practitioner wants to be closer to God. There is an intellectual acceptance of the Divine but this has no effect on a person's behavior. It involves the study of the Torah, and the commentaries on the Law.	The soul draws closer to God by listening to God's appeals to enter further within itself. It still does not avoid sin.	Intention, <i>etc.</i> : The accuracy of intention and the sincerity of one's purpose and determination are the seeds of action. Intention is to yearn for God by leaving and abandoning everything other than Him. [1–10] ⁴
<i>Ruah</i> of the Natural Soul: This stage is known as godly thought joined to the deed. The soul becomes emotionally committed to God, with behavior change to live more in accordance with God's Law.	The soul begins to live according to moral precepts and abandons sin to avoid offending God. A gradual movement of abandoning one's own will to align with the will of God.	Self-examination, <i>etc.</i> : The wayfarer distinguishes acts of transgression, awakens to seeing oneself as the source of errors and sins, and renounces the world and oneself. One abstains from blameworthy acts and immorality. [6–10]
(Not explicitly described by Dobh Baer, but this stage is implied by the Hasidic practice of <i>Kavvanah</i> , which is a type of self-effaced absorption during prayers.)	Prayer of Recollection: The process of remaining attentive and aware of God instead of striving to engage in discourse with God. Love for God is awakened in the soul, and one begins to forget one's self in contemplation.	Steadfastness, <i>etc.</i> : The wayfarer produces a consistent firmness, including steadfastness in breath. Then reflection arises in order to discover and understand what is unknown. From this comes remembrance of God and finding Him. Reflection is seeking, but remembrance is finding. [27–30]
<i>Neshamah</i> of the Natural Soul: The heart is moved to ecstasy by contemplation such that the whole extent of the divine matter is reduced to a point of overwhelming and ecstatic feeling. Has many substages and is inwardly directed.	Prayer of Quiet: The soul is absorbed with God, producing ineffable blessings and going beyond sensory experience. The will begins to be united with God's will.	Haven, <i>etc.</i> : Haven is living with God and being in union with Him. Wonderment is a marvelous bewilderment shining into the heart of a wayfarer, mainly occurring during ecstasy. It involves taking refuge in the Lord and shutting tight the door of separation [from God]. [40–42]

⁴ The Muslim author identified 100 stages of spiritual development. This range indicates the set of his stages condensed into this one stage on the table.

	Hinduism	Buddhism	Daoism
Second Absorption: The cessation of thought and the union of mind with the subtle object of awareness	<i>Savicara Samadhi:</i> The mind achieves identity with the subtle object of awareness mixed with awareness of the three kinds of knowledge.	Second <i>Jhana:</i> A trance state developed from the first jhana and characterized by inner confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought. This marks the movement into the fine-material sphere and the cessation of thought.	Perfect Observation: One prays deeply and maintains meditative stability. Outward actions gradually diminish, and the mind rests in a more significant and deeper peace. All desires are gradually relinquished. The mind becomes utterly detached and can clearly observe what is real and what is not. ⁵
Third Absorption: A unification of mind without the emotional component	<i>Nirvicara Samadhi</i> is the state in which the mind is united with the subtle object of concentration based solely on an intuitive knowledge of the object.	Third <i>Jhana:</i> Characterized by the unification of mind and equanimity, with the fading away of happiness and bliss.	Perfect Observation: (See also Daoist stage above. One prays deeply and maintains meditative stability. Outward actions gradually diminish, and the mind rests in a greater and deeper peace. All desires are gradually relinquished. The mind becomes utterly detached and can clearly observe what is real and what is not. This stage appears to correspond to the second, third, and fourth absorptions.)

Judaism	Christianity	Islam
<i>Hayyah</i> of the Natural Soul: The mind is lost in contemplation of the Divine, but the details of the object of contemplation are not lost to overpowering feeling. Perception of God in all things, with automatic and spontaneous ecstasies. ⁶	The soul experiences union with God: All faculties (senses, will, imagination, and memory) are suspended. One has no awareness of anything but God. No sin is possible. Spontaneous occurrence with a variety of degrees of intensity.	Conjunction, <i>etc.</i> : The wayfarer experiences blessings in the breath, an increase in one's aspiration, and an expansion of wisdom. It involves vigilance and constant remembrance, leading to reverie in the heart, bringing preoccupation with knowledge, unification with Reality, and looking toward God. Aspiration frees one from all other needs and liberates one from all other attachments. [46-49]
<i>Hayyah</i> of the Natural Soul: ⁷ (See also Jewish stage above. The mind is lost in contemplation of the divine, but the details of the object of contemplation are not lost to overpowering feeling. Perception of God in all things, with automatic and spontaneous ecstasies.)		Tranquility, <i>etc.</i> : The peace that God pours into the heart of His friends so they taste freedom. It is acceptance of God's guardianship, so that one becomes free from all attachments. Serenity is peacefulness joined with intimacy, resulting in loving God rather than oneself. From this, one becomes mindful of one's inner consciousness, becomes free from the self, and returns to God through intimacy. [51-53]

5 While Sima does not describe the markers for this stage, it appears to correspond to the second, third, and fourth absorptions.

6 Dobh Baer appears to combine the 2nd and 3rd absorptions.

7 Dobh Baer appears to combine the 2nd and 3rd absorptions.

	Hinduism	Buddhism	Daoism
Fourth Absorption: Availability of psychic powers, rapture, and visions.	<i>Sananda Samadhi:</i> The mind perceives a universal consciousness in which each object is distinct as itself. Psychic powers become available.	Fourth <i>Jhana</i> : A trance state developed from the third <i>jhana</i> and characterized by neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. Psychic powers are available here.	Perfect Observation: ⁸ (See also Daoist stage above. One prays deeply and maintains meditative stability. Outward actions gradually diminish, and the mind rests in a more significant and deeper peace. All desires are gradually relinquished. The mind becomes utterly detached and can clearly observe what is real and what is not. This stage appears to correspond to the second, third, and fourth absorptions.)
Beliefs Appear as Objective Reality	<i>Sasmita Samadhi:</i> The mind is aware only of universal consciousness, without any marks or distinguishing characteristics.	Conformity Knowledge: The observation of the formations from the base of boundless consciousness. In this stage, one perceives that all objects of awareness are impermanent, painful, and not-self. As a result, one disengages from objects of awareness.	

Judaism	Christianity	Islam
(Psychic powers are mentioned in other Jewish texts, ⁸ and I infer that they are also present in Baer but are not mentioned.)	The soul dissolves in love, wanting to be even closer to God. One experiences locutions from God, intense raptures, and visions. When these absorptions cease, one remains in a state of withdrawal from the world. Psychic powers are available at this stage.	Consigning oneself to God, <i>etc.</i> : One leaves all matters and affairs to God. Then an unexpected grace from the Unseen which has to do with divinely infused knowledge that cannot be acquired by learning. This opening comes from the supernatural realm. ⁹ There is a purification of one's innermost consciousness to personally realize the actual meaning of remembrance of God such that one's heart is free from all save Him. [66–69]
<i>Neshamah</i> of the Divine Soul: The actual comprehension of the Divine by the divine soul. An overwhelming experience of emotional ecstasy with many substages.		Knowledge, <i>etc.</i> : Divinely-infused esoteric knowledge is understanding the divine Will through contemplation of the invisible realm. It results in a light that shines on the heart and is direct knowledge. From this, wisdom arises, which is the ability to see something as it is. This leads to the perception of God's Mercy and is the field of gnosis, the alchemy of lovers, and the way of the Elect. It is the way that beautifies the heart, increases one's joy, and expands the feeling of love. [71–75]

8 Kuperstok, 1978.

9 This appears to refer to the development of psychic powers.

	Hinduism	Buddhism	Daoism
First State of Unitive Consciousness: Qualitatively different from the preceding states, with the elimination of individual content from the mind	<i>Nirbija Samadhi:</i> The mind suppresses all modifications of mind, including awareness of universal consciousness. Mind no longer has any remnant of individual content. This state is qualitatively different from the preceding states.	Change-of-Lineage Knowledge: The mind enters into, becomes settled, steady, and resolute in non-arising. Thus it is Change-of-lineage. It enters into non-occurrence, non-despair, and into cessation, <i>i.e., nirvana</i> , thus it is Change-of-lineage. This is the first enlightenment state.	Stability of Cosmic Peace: The ultimate point of leaving worldly life and the first firm foothold of reaching <i>Dao</i> . There are no more desires or impulses. The mind is utterly empty and still and has reached the perfect contemplative state of serenity. <i>Dao</i> resides from within the mind, and insight arises.
Final Enlightenment State: The perfection of non-attachment such that the practitioner attains union, communion, or complete cessation	<i>Dharma-Megha-Samadhi:</i> The mind is not attached to even the most exalted state such that the individual unit of Divine Consciousness is established in one's real nature, which is pure Consciousness.	Fruition Consciousness: This is the final stage of Enlightenment. Here the practitioner has reached his goal and destroyed the fetter of becoming. He is rightly liberated with complete and final knowledge.	Attaining <i>Dao</i> : The <i>Dao</i> strengthens within the individual and works subtle changes in body and spirit. The physical and the spiritual are fused into one such that the body no longer changes or decays, and the practitioner no longer experiences death. One is no longer limited by the usual constraints of space and time. One has attained the ultimate and is united with <i>Dao</i> .

Judaism	Christianity	Islam
<i>Hayyah</i> of the Divine Soul: An ecstasy where the concentration of mind penetrates to the heart of the object of concentration, which is the Divine, such that the object of concentration is known cognitively. Other Jewish writers call this stage 'Wisdom' or 'Understanding.'		Isolation, <i>etc.</i> : The isolation of those who are united with God consists in the annihilation of self, absence of worldly attachments, and drowning the self in God. The inner consciousness that results is the hidden secret that the tongue cannot speak and which cannot be shared with others. This annihilation occurs like a sudden twinkling glance that flashes out through the eye of the heart from God. It is an opening that God bestows upon the heart and results in exhilaration. [82–86]
<i>Yehidah</i> of the Divine Soul: Full and open communion with God such that the essence of the soul is attached to the essence of God. Here there is one will only, that of God. One's whole being is absorbed into God so that nothing remains, and one has no self-consciousness. It is the state of limitless love of God.	The soul is fully united with God and experiences the immediate presence of the Trinity in every moment. One no longer experiences intense raptures but a different kind of pleasure that is extreme and indescribable. There is a sense of inner peace and a return to activity in the world.	The metaphysical moment, <i>etc.</i> : The ecstatic person inwardly sees the object of his yearning. This gives rise to the metaphysical moment, which is an instant in time where nothing but God can be contained. This moment is overwhelming and eliminates the conditioned habits of the human state so that the transcendent Truth alone abides. Unveiling is when the heart sees God, leading to intimacy, comfort, and tranquility through being near to the Friend. Then one sees things fully, the self is annihilated, and one exists in God alone. [91–100]