

# Hildegard & Psychotherapy

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# WELCOME!



*“For God then looked  
upon the flesh that he  
would one day wear,  
and held it with  
burning love”*

***The Book of Divine Works,  
Part I, Vision 4***

## Disclaimer

This presentation is not medical advice. This is a brief exploration of my research on Hildegard’s psychotherapy. Please consult your doctor, psychotherapist, psychologist, psychiatrist, and other health team members for mental health advice. Danée Ashley is not liable for any loss caused, whether due to negligence or otherwise arising from the use of, or reliance on, the information provided directly or indirectly, by this presentation.



# *Our* HILDEGARD

What does this group know about Hildegard?



## *Exercise 1*

Take two minutes each and share with a neighbor or in a triad how you first encountered Hildegard. What intrigued you most?



## *Exercise 2*

What do we know or think we know about Hildegard and her healing work, specifically in mental health?





# Looking at Hildegard through a Holistic Lens

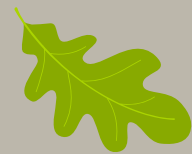
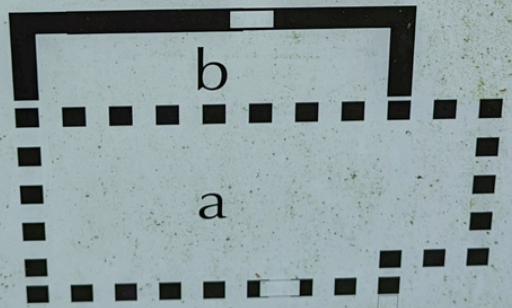
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## Hildegard's Family System & Environment

14

a: Kirche der Kanoniker, um 1000

b: seidl. Anbau nach 1108  
für die erste Frauenklausur



10th Child - Dedicated to Church from birth



Frequently ill and saw visions  
from the age of three




Lived with Jutta of Sponheim from age eight



Lived in the lush Rhine Valley her entire life








# *The Living Light*

## THE STILL SMALL VOICE WITHIN

This is the foundation of Hildegard's psychotherapeutic approach: **When one's soul is in alignment with the Living Light, one has peace and purpose, resulting in the health of body, mind, and soul.**





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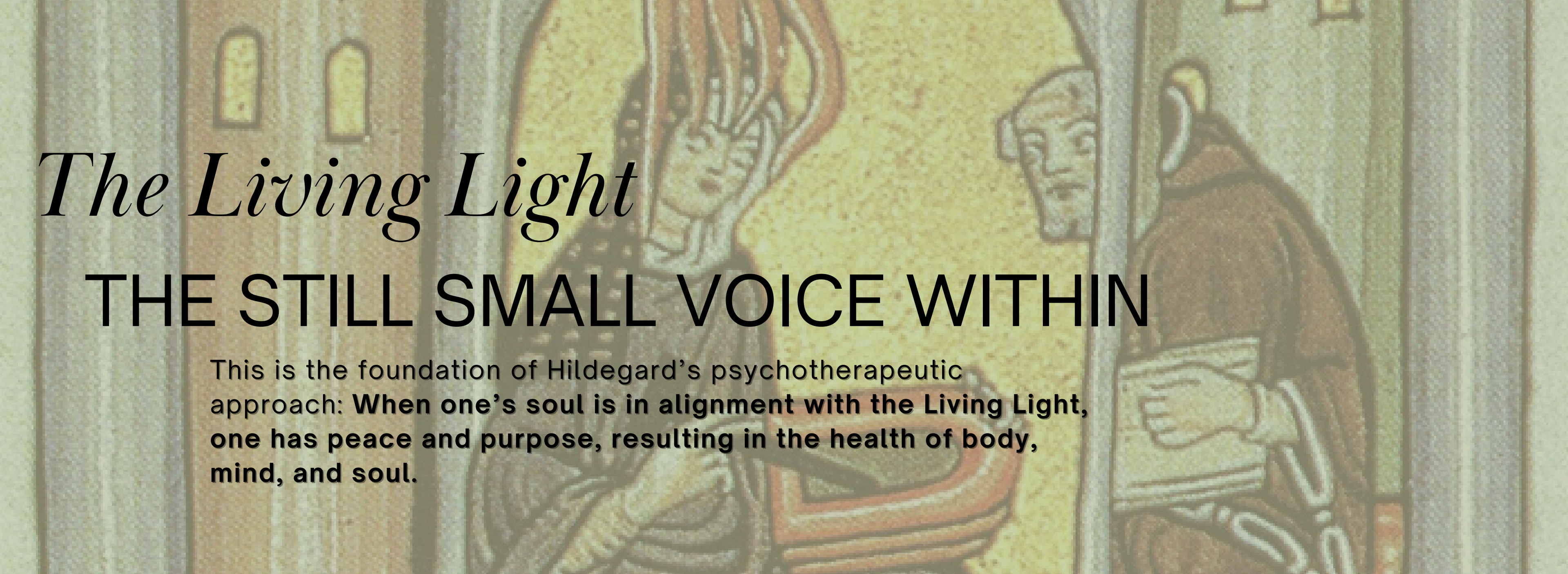
*Body Talk: When we betray our values*

1

2

3





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*Body Talk: When we betray our values*  
*1*

*Slow Medicine: Hildegard as Gardener*  
*2*

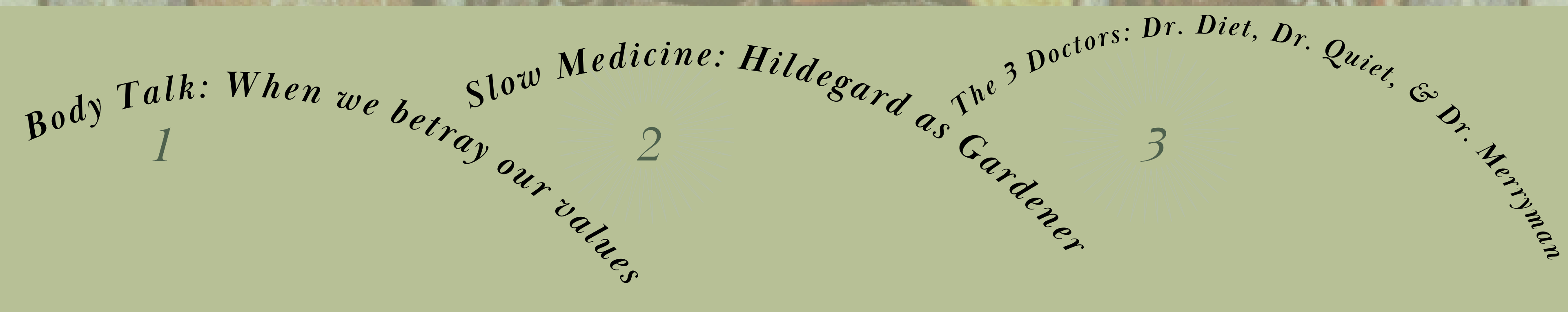
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“Yet the body would be nothing without the soul,  
and the soul could do nothing without the body...”

(The Book of Divine Works, Part I, Vision 4)

## VICES AND VIRTUES: KEEP THE DEVIL AWAY FOR HEALTHY LIVING TODAY



Soul and Body



“Yet the body would be nothing without the soul, and the soul could do nothing without the body...” *(The Book of Divine Works, Part I, Vision 4)*



# Soul and Body



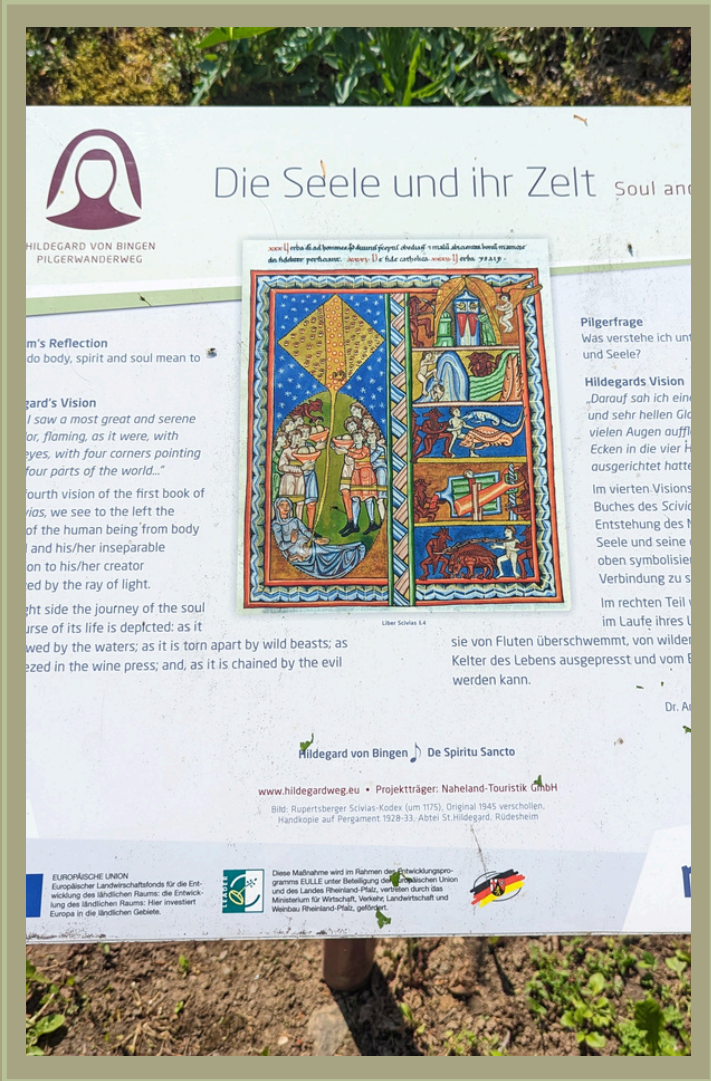
# Virtues

Photo credit: Sacred Heart Red Bluff School



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VICES AND VIRTUES: KEEP THE DEVIL AWAY FOR HEALTHY LIVING TODAY



Soul and Body



Photo credit: Sacred Heart Red Bluff School

Virtues

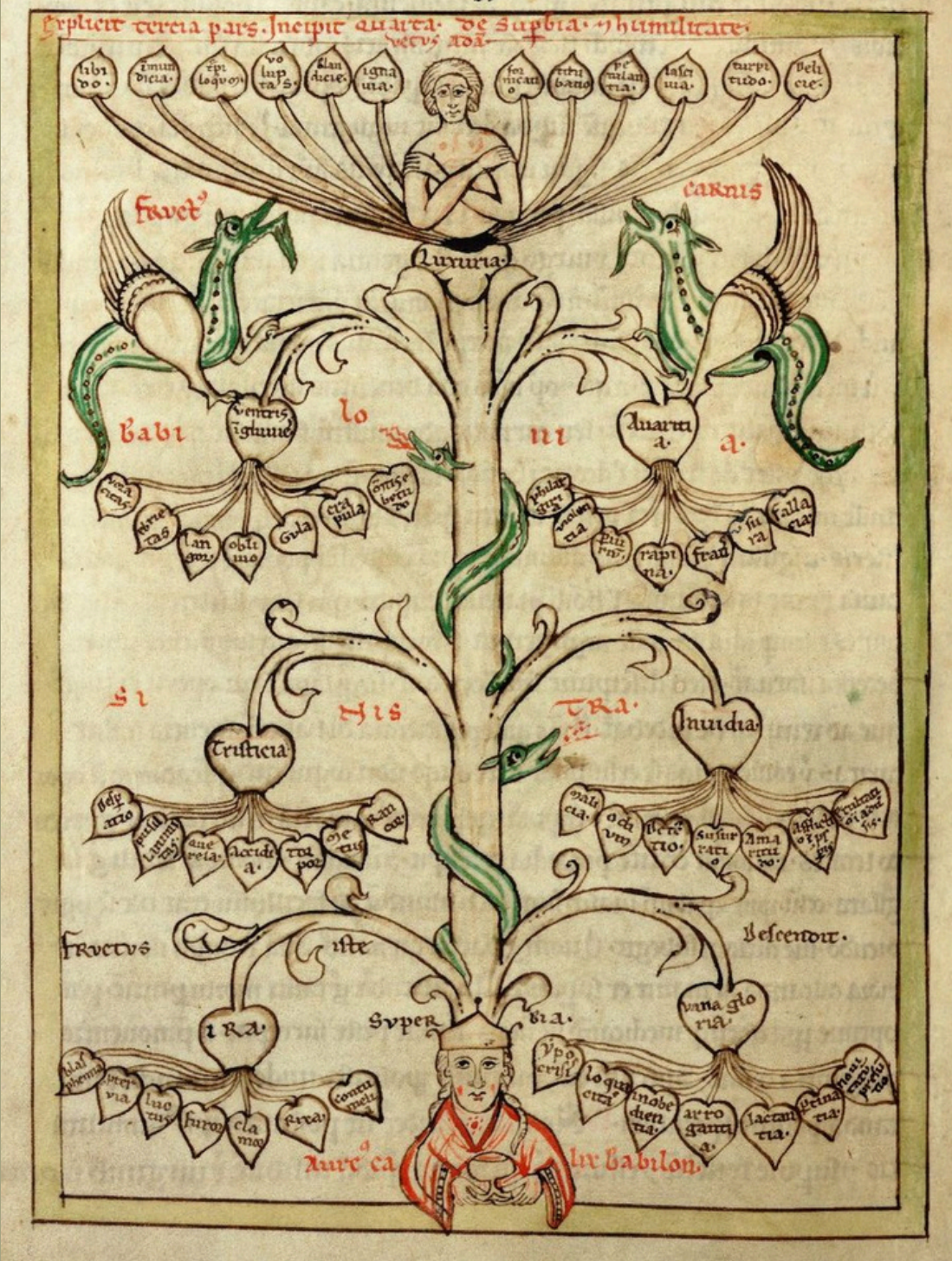


Photo credit: Walters Art Museum

Vices



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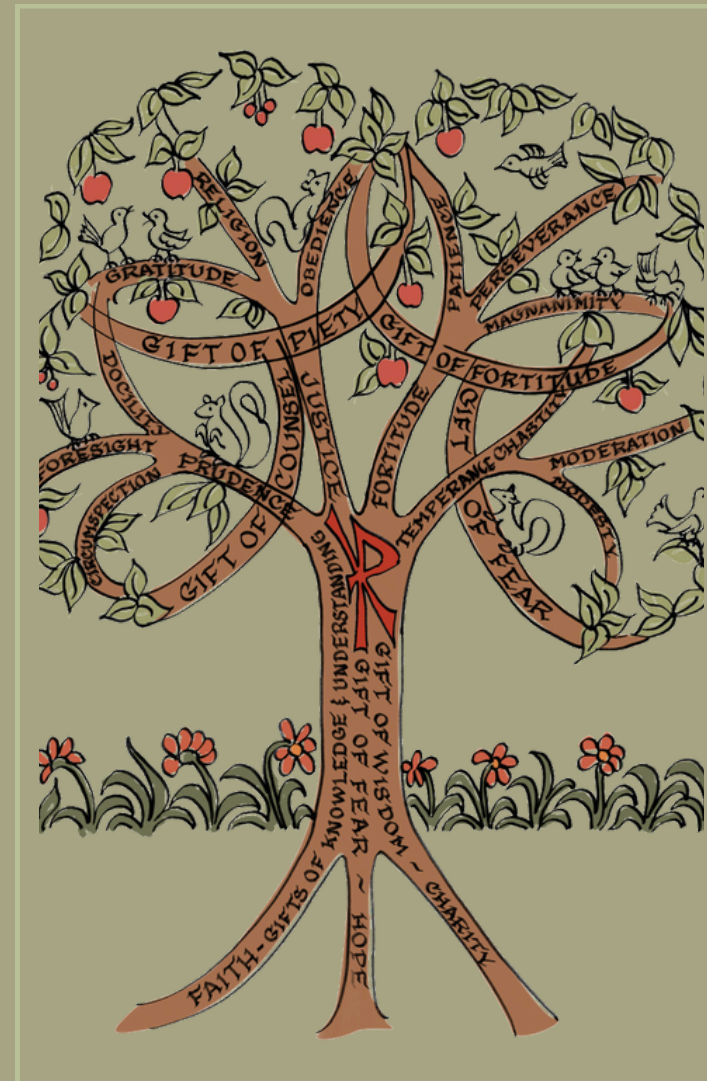


Photo credit: Sacred Heart Red Bluff School

# Virtues

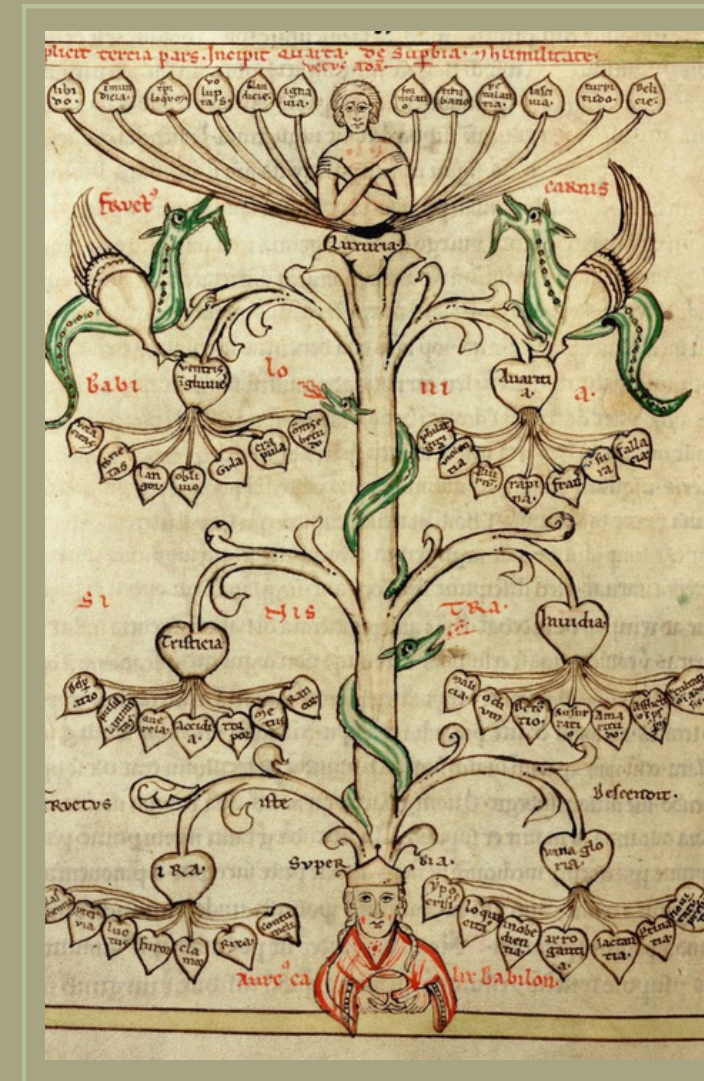


Photo credit: Walters Art Museum

## Vices



## Incarnating Our Virtues



# Virtues

Prescriptions for a general healthy lifestyle--the fruits of the Spirit are a result (Galatians 5:22-23).

Margot E. Fassler has an excellent chart and in-depth exploration of the virtues in the *Ordo virtutum* (pp. 191-192) in her work *Cosmos, Liturgy, and the Arts in the Twelfth Century: Hildegard's Illuminated Scivias*.

Additional virtues are found in *Scivias* III.iii-x.



- |                  |                       |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| Knowledge of God | Contempt of the World |
| Humility         | Love of Heaven        |
| Charity          | Discipline            |
| Fear of the Lord | Modesty               |
| Obedience        | Mercy                 |
| Faith            | Victory               |
| Hope             | Discernment           |
| Chastity         | Patience              |
| Innocence        |                       |



- Knowledge of God
- Humility
- Victory



- |                  |            |
|------------------|------------|
| Humility         | Discipline |
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# Vices

Behaviors and diseases that would create mental, physical, and spiritual unrest (Galatians 5:19-21).

Vices are from *Liber Vitae Meritorum* (*The Book of the Rewards of Life*).

- Love of the world
- Petulance
- Diversion
- Hardness of heart
- Laziness
- Foolish joy
- Gluttony
- Severeness
- Impiety
- Falsehood
- Desire for Contention
- Unhappiness
- Immoderation
- Hex



- Worldly Desire
- Discordia
- Fatuity
- Frivolity
- Avarice

- Perdition of souls
- Pride
- Envy
- Conceit
- Disobedience
- Incredulity
- Despair
- Lust
- Injustice
- Forgetting God
- Inconstancy
- Concern for earthly things
- Obstination
- Sadness of living in the world





# Incarnating Our Virtues and Vices

“Hildegard’s virtue are seats of wisdom; they are ‘incarnating.’ The women reenacting the play *Ordo virtutum* did so with their knowledge of the treatise providing an exegetical understanding of what they were doing and why. The play, in the context of Scivias, represents the procreative power of their actions as nuns. They are models for the defeating of evil, both in the monastery and in the world at large, and Satan wants them to fail...It is the prophetic understanding of Incarnational power that lies at the heart of Anima’s regaining of spiritual health, represented by what she is able to sing” (Fassler, 195).

## Find a Vice

There are Vice cards all around the room. Find a Vice that you struggle with and stand near the sign.

## Discussion

Discuss with others at your Vice why you chose it.

## Reflection on Incarnation

What do you notice about this “incarnation” of these things? Reflect on how you would like to engage them in the coming months.

What can you commit to that brings more connection with the virtues and less with the vices?



# HILDEGARD AND THE ROLE OF VIRIDITAS IN HEALING

*Viriditas*: Green Sap - The Humor of Plants - Life Force & Vitality

**Black/Earth. Yellow/Water. Yellow+Black=Green.**

**Black → Yellow → Green → Red → Black**

*[ Place ]*



Hildegard's geography influenced how she learned and understood healing

*[ Physical ]*



Hildegard's use of *viriditas* was physical: greenness - the color itself and green sap- the name for the humor of plants

*[ Spiritual ]*



Hildegard wed the physical concept of *viriditas* to the Divine presence of life





# EXERCISE: WHAT IS BLOCKING YOUR VIRIDITAS?

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*Hildegard's question for healing was to examine "What is blocking your viriditas from healing your body, mind, and soul?"*

1

*Work*

2

*Social (Friendship/Community)*

3

*Love*

4

*Self*

5

*Spirit*



# Hildegard and Medical Interventions for Mental Health

## *Moderation*

### The Key to Good Health

“Do not lay on more strain than the body can endure.

Immoderate straining and abstinence bring nothing useful to the soul.” *Hildegard to Elisabeth of Schönau*

## *Physica*

### Pharmacopoeia

*Physica* was Hildegard’s traditional encyclopedia of nine books exploring medicinal ingredients and how to use them, including plants, elements, trees, stones, fish, birds, quadrupeds, reptiles, and metals.

## *Causae et Curae*

### A Practical Recipe Book

“Hildegard’s work follows a temporal and linear chronology, beginning with the Divinity, Creation, the Fall, and the Flood, arriving at the human creature’s present state of disease, and then looking into the future to predict as fully as possible the bodily outcomes of human activity.” Florence Eliza Glaze in *Voice of the Living Light*, 132



# HILDEGARD'S MENTAL HEALTH AILMENTS & TREATMENTS

“When the elements in a person operate in good order, they preserve him and keep him healthy. When they are incongruous within him, they cause illness and kill him.”

“The brain is affected by a person’s good and bad humors, therefore it is always soft and damp. If by chance it completely dries out, it soon is brought to infirmity. Naturally very damp and fatty, it is the material of a person’s awareness, wisdom, and understanding. It contains these properties, sending them forth, and drawing them back; it also holds the powers of thinking.”

- Hildegard in *Causes and Cures*

## MELANCHOLY

- Sadness, with doubt of all solace.
- No joy, which belongs to heavenly life and to the consolation of the present life.
- Natural to everyone from the original suggestion of the devil, when the human transgressed God’s order in eating the apple.
- From this food, melancholy grew in Adam and all his kind, and it stirred up disease in humans.

*Depression*

## ANGER

- Some people are naturally prone to anger.
- Their soul, affected by weariness, is in quiet repose, sometimes, from their anger, a deficiency befalls them, whence their body is oppressed.
- The soul recovers its powers and resurges...
- Other people...very often grow hot in anger. The anger in these people often moves all their blood in a great, bloody inundation.

*Unresolved Pain*

## MADNESS

- If the damp and tepid, which then are the livor of the foamy and dry, surpass moderation, the damp is soon rolled around like a wheel, and plunges the person sometimes into water, sometimes into fire;
- Tepid sends him into madness...since his knowledge has vanished.
- He is neither fully healthy nor fully ill.

*Brain Diseases*



# Hildegard & Ailments from Magic and the Devil's Hatred

## { Insanity through Magic }

"If someone through magic or by evil words is rendered insane, take the earth which is around the roots of this tree [Plum Tree] and warm it vigorously in the fire, until it burns a little bit. When it has burned a bit in the fire, place rue and a little less pennyroyal on it. Let it absorb their sap and odor. If you do not have pennyroyal, place fresh fenugreek on it. If it is winter, place on it the seeds of these herbs, moderately warmed. After the person has eaten, place this, with the herbs, on his head, naked stomach, and naked sides, and tie it with a cloth. Put him in bed and cover him with clothing, so that he might sweat a bit with that earth. Do this for three or five days, and he will be better. For when the ancient serpent hears magic and evil words, he takes them up and sets traps for the one for whom they were said, unless God stops him." --Physica

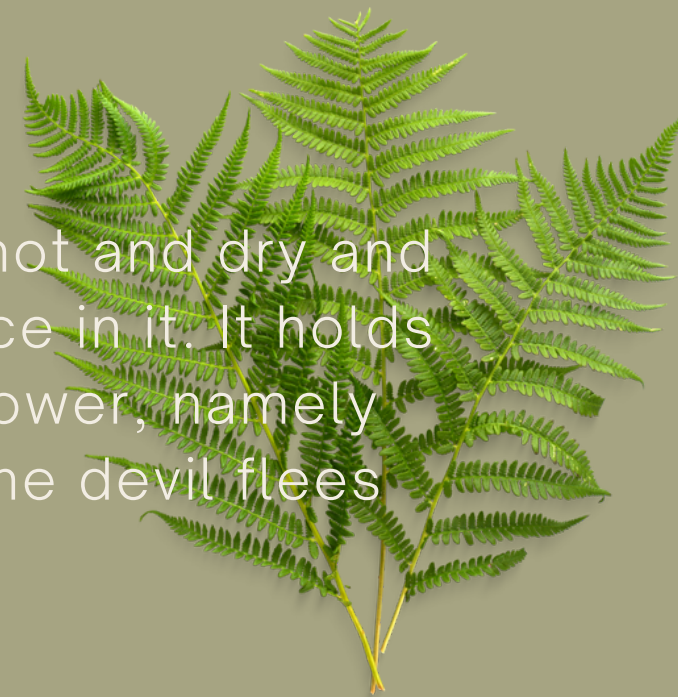


## { The Devil's Hatred }

"Since the devil hates a person's virtue, he also hates all other virtuous creatures, animals, or plants, which are clean and useful. A person, whether awake or sleeping, should seek a God-given remedy. When someone is happy, sad, calm, wrathful, or has other such emotions, he cannot remain so for a long time, but it is necessary for him to turn to another behavior or emotion..." --Causes & Cures

## { Cure: Fern }

"Fern (farn) is very hot and dry and has a little bit of juice in it. It holds within itself great power, namely such a power that the devil flees from it." --Physica



## { Cure: Lavender }

"Lavender (lavendula) is hot and dry, having very little moisture. It is not effective for a person to eat, but it does have a strong odor. If a person with many lice frequently smells lavender, the lice will die. Its odor clears the eyes [since it possesses the power of the strongest aromas and the usefulness of the most bitter ones. It curbs very many evil things and, because of it, malign spirits are terrified]."





# Hildegard & Ritual for Mental Health



## Recipes

"And if someone is always sad and always in hardship, so that he has pain and weakness constantly in his heart, he should take mandrake. This should have been pulled from the ground and placed in a spring for a day and a night. Having taken it from the spring, he should place it near himself in his bed, so that the plant gets hot from his perspiration. Then he should say, *"God, you made the human being from the mud of the earth, without pain; now I place next to me this earth, which has never been stepped on, so even my earth may feel that peace, just as you created it."* --Physica

## Miracles

"It was of little avail that two women from Staudernheim suffering from emotional illness were taken by their parents to holy places because nothing came of the efforts. But as soon as the nuns laid particles of Hildegard's hair on them, they immediately regained their emotional and bodily health." --*The Life of the Holy Hildegard*, p. 79

## Exorcism

The Lady Sigewiza (most famous case), a woman "distressed by a dumb spirit," a woman in chains because of an "outburst of madness due to her mental illness," a nun at Aschaffenburg "whom the devil incited...he presented himself as an angel of light," "two other ladies had been freed from the devil by the virgin [Hildegard]" --*The Life of the Holy Hildegard*, p. 98



# Ritual

(*noun*) a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order; a series of actions or type of behavior regularly and invariably followed by someone.

(*adjective*) relating to or done as a religious or solemn rite;  
(*of an action*) arising from convention or habit.

From the Latin: ritualis, ritus (rite)

Definitions from [Oxford Languages](#)

## Rite

### Structured & Ceremonial

(*noun*) a religious or other solemn ceremony or act; a social custom, practice, or conventional act.

Definitions from [Oxford Languages](#)

Rite vs Ritual: A rite is an established, well structured and ceremonial act; while rituals are the actions that are performed in a rite with a symbolic meaning ([Study.com](#)).

## Routine

### Procedure

(*noun*) a sequence of actions regularly followed; a fixed program.

(*adjective*) performed as part of a regular procedure rather than for a special reason.

Late 17th century (denoting a regular course or procedure): from French, from route ‘road’.

Definitions from [Oxford Languages](#)

## Superstition

### Unjustified & Supernatural

(*noun*) excessively credulous belief in and reverence for supernatural beings; a widely held but unjustified belief in supernatural causation leading to certain consequences of an action or event, or a practice based on such a belief.

Middle English: from Old French, or from Latin superstitio(n-), from super- ‘over’ + stare ‘to stand’ (perhaps from the notion of ‘standing over’ something in awe).

Definitions from [Oxford Languages](#)



# The Exorcism of Lady Sigewize\*



Photo Credit: [12th Century depiction of an exorcism on the bronze door of the Basilica di San Zeno in Verona](#)

- Sigewize is spelled in two different ways in my research, so I am using this version and will use the other version (Sigewiza) when quoting another work.



# The Exorcism of Lady Sigewize



“Meanwhile,” Theodoric writes citing Hildegard herself, “I was informed that in the lower parts of the Rhine, at some distance from us, there was a certain noble woman possessed by the devil. I heard about her frequently. And I saw in a true vision that, by the permission of God, she had been possessed and overshadowed by a smoky black, demonic glob, which oppressed all the sensibilities of her rational spirit and did not allow her to sigh out to God in her proper senses, just as smoke or the shadow of man or an object obscures and envelops. Hence she had lost all her normal faculties and actions, and frequently shouted out indecent things and acted in improper ways. But sometimes she was less oppressed when, by God’s command, this torment diminished somewhat...” (Baird, 87)

“Gedolphus, unworthy abbot of Brauweiler, and his brothers wish to expres thanks to the esteemed Hildegard, who has earned the thanks of all...Since the woman is now making her way to you with great hope, once more we send this pressing word to you...In accordance with your letter to us, inspired as it was by the Holy Spirit, we learned the demon was exorcised and for a short time had left the vessel possessed by him. But woe is me...he unfortunately returned...and tortured her more severely than before. When we exorcised him again and greatly annoyed him, he finally replied that he would leave the possessed vessel only in your presence...” *The Life of the Holy Hildegard*, pp. 92-93

“We were shocked about the news of the woman since that meant we had to see and hear the lady who had upset people for so long a time. But God trickled the dew of his sweetness down on us. And without fear and alarm and without human help we brought her here to the living quarters of the sisters. In spite of the horror and the disturbance with which the demon frightened all those nearby...we did not give up on our part.” *The Life of the Holy Hildegard*, p. 93



# *What can we learn from this case study?*

Suzanne M. Phillips and Monique D. Boivin use Sigewiza's treatment to showcase support for Hildegard's holistic thinking: "the use of narrative approaches to mental illness, acknowledging interdependence between perspectives, and applying principles of balance to the relationships between perspectives."

"The key to Hildegard's success may rest on the comprehensiveness of the care that she provided...Indeed, to Hildegard's way of thinking, these treatments should be provided within a community context to have the desired effect (Schipperges 1997, 82)."

"...Sigewiza received community, dietary/medical, and spiritual interventions under Hildegard's care."



- What do you notice about this holistic approach?
- Are there parts that you think would be helpful for healing mental health in today's time?



# *The Voice of the Living Light*

## HILDEGARD'S OWN MENTAL HEALTH

When one's soul is in alignment with the Living Light, one has peace and purpose, which promotes greater health in body, mind, and soul.

*Migraines?*

1

*Mental illness?*

2

*Life of a Wounded Healer?*

3



*Exercise*

What do you think?



# *Our* HILDEGARD

## CONCLUSIONS



1. *Context of the healer*
2. *Listening to the Living Light*
3. *Virtues and Vices*
4. *Core personality*
5. *Causes and Cures*
6. *Ministry of presence*
7. *Community*



Please share with the group:  
What is one thing you learned?





# Thank You

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