

ABOUT MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

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(Arranged and published 9-5-2018; revised 12-29-2018)

Did You Know?

Did you know that the Lord grants to some chosen few an expanded vision whereby they are able to see all existence through His eyes, and from His unified perspective? In this vision, the narrow consciousness of the individual becomes suddenly transformed into the all-inclusive consciousness of God. Then the duality of 'I' and 'Thou' vanishes like a dream, and what remains is an 'I' that knows no 'other'—an 'I' that is an eternal and limitless awareness, filling all. That 'I' is the one Mind, the original Consciousness, the sole Creator and Self of all selves.

Does everyone know about this vision? I don't think so. And yet this awakening, this transformation, keeps happening to a few young men and women throughout the duration of time— It happened to the authors of the Upanishads; it happened to the Buddha, and it happened to Jesus, Plotinus, al-Hallaj and Meister Eckhart. It also happened to me in this present era, revealing the Truth to my inward eye. And yet so few are even aware of the occurrence in our midst of this strange transformative phenomena!

Does the Lord wish to keep it a secret, or does He wish to gradually let everyone know about it in His time? I don't know! Many of those who have experienced this inner vision have spoken of it as best they were able, And yet, despite the many voices that have told of it, its occurrence remains largely unknown among the people.

No one seems to know how to bring about this rare vision, except by drawing near to God in highborn contemplative thought or prayer. It is agreed by everyone that it occurs only to those whom He chooses to reveal Himself; that it is His doing and His alone. Still, we must pursue it, for there is no other treasure so worth pursuing. It is an inestimable blessing

that makes a wise man of a fool, a joyful man of a wretch; and turns an ordinary man into a king.

Therefore, seek Him out in the depths of your heart. Call to Him in the lonely darkness of your nights. Shine the searchlight of your desire into the hidden corners of His fathomless Being and beg Him in song and in prayer to shed His mercy on your otherwise inconsolable soul.

The Unchanging Testament

Mysticism is that point of view which claims as its basis an intimate knowledge of the one source and substratum of all existence, a knowledge, which is obtained through a revelatory experience during a rare moment of clarity in contemplation. Those who claim to have actually experienced this direct revelation constitute an elite tradition, which transcends the boundary lines of individual religions, cultures and languages, and which has existed, uninterrupted, since the beginning of time. Mystical experience is, as Aldous Huxley points out, the source of the “perennial philosophy” that resurfaces again and again throughout history in the teachings of the great prophets and founders of all religions.

When we study the many speculative philosophies and religious creeds which men have espoused, we must wonder at the amazing diversity of opinions expressed regarding the nature of reality; but when we examine the testimonies of the mystics of past and present, we are struck by the unanimity of agreement between them all. Their methods may vary, but their ultimate realizations are identical in content. They tell us of a supramental experience, obtained through contemplation, which directly reveals the Truth, the ultimate, the final, Truth of all existence. It is this experience, which is the hallmark of the mystic; it goes by different names, but the experience is the same for all.

By many of the Christian tradition, this experience is referred to as “the vision of God”; yet it must be stated that such a vision is not really a “vision” at all in the sense in which we use the word to mean the perception of some ‘thing’ extraneous to ourselves. Nothing at all is perceived in “the vision of God”; rather, it is a sudden expansion, or delimitation, of one’s own awareness which experiences itself as the ultimate Ground, the primal

Source and Godhead of all being. In that “vision,” all existence is experienced as Identity.

We first hear of this extraordinary revelation from the authors of the Upanishads, who lived over three thousand years ago: “I have known that spirit,” said Svetasvatara, “who is infinite and in all, who is ever-one, beyond time.”¹ “He can be seen indivisible in the silence of contemplation,” said the author of the Mundaka Upanishad.² “There a man possesses everything; for he is one with the ONE.”³ About five hundred years later, another, a young prince named Siddhartha, who was to become known as the Buddha, the enlightened one, sat communing inwardly in the forest, when suddenly, as though a veil had been lifted, his mind became infinite and all-encompassing: “I have seen the Truth!” he exclaimed; “I am the Father of the world, sprung from myself!”⁴ And again, after the passage of another five hundred years, another young man, a Jew, named Jesus, of Nazareth, sat in a solitary place among the desert cliffs of Galilee, communing inwardly, when suddenly he realized that the Father in heaven to whom he had been praying was his very own Self; that he was, himself, the sole Spirit pervading the universe; “I and the Father are one!” he declared.⁵

Throughout history, this extraordinary experience of unity has repeatedly occurred; in India, in Rome, in Persia, in Amsterdam, in China, devout young men and women, reflecting on the truth of their own existence, experienced this amazing transcendence of the mind, and announced to everyone who would listen that they had realized the truth of man and the universe, that they had known their own Self, and known it to be the All, the Eternal. And throughout succeeding ages, these announcements were echoed by others who had experienced the same realization: “I am the Truth!” exclaimed the Muslim, al-Hallaj; “My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God Himself,” said the Christian saint, Catherine of Genoa. And Rumi, Jnaneshvar, Milarepa, Kabir and Basho from the East, and Eckhart, Boehme and Emerson from the West, said the same.

These assertions by the great mystics of the world were not made as mere philosophical speculations; they were based on experience— an experience so convincing, so real, that all those to whom it has occurred testify unanimously that it is the unmistakable realization of the ultimate Truth of existence. In this experience, called *samadhi* by the Hindus, *nirvana* by the Buddhists, *fana* by the Muslims, and “the mystic union” by Christians, the consciousness of the individual suddenly becomes the consciousness of the

entire vast universe. All previous sense of duality is swallowed up in an awareness of indivisible unity. The man who previously regarded himself as an individualized soul, encumbered with sins and inhabiting a body, now realizes that he is, truly, the one Consciousness; that it is he, himself, who is manifesting as all souls and all bodies, while yet remaining completely unaffected by the unfolding drama of the multiform universe.

Even if, before, as a soul, he sought union with his God, now, there is no longer a soul/God relationship. He, himself, he now realizes, is the one Existence in whom there is neither a soul nor a God, but only the one Self, within whom this “imaginary” relationship of soul and God manifested. For him, there is no more relationship, but only the eternal and all-inclusive I AM. Not surprisingly, this illuminating knowledge of an underlying ‘I’ that is the Soul of the entire universe has a profoundly transformative effect upon the mind of those who have experienced it. The sense of being bound and limited to an individual body and mind, set in time and rimmed by birth and death, is entirely displaced by the keenly experienced awareness of unlimited Being; of an infinitely larger, unqualified Self beyond birth and death. It is an experience, which uniquely and utterly transforms one’s sense of identity, and initiates a permanently acquired freedom from all doubt, from all fear, from all insecurity forevermore. Little wonder that all who experience such liberating knowledge wish to share it, to announce in exuberant song to everyone who will hear that, through the inner revelation of wisdom, “You shall know the truth, and the Truth will make you free!”

The Mystical Vision

Nearly everyone comes to the conclusion that there is a divine Reality that is our Source and Father, the Ground of our being, an all-embracing One, Lord and Ruler over all, permeating and coordinating all. One may arrive at this conclusion through the exercise of one’s logical intelligence, or one may *experience* this reality directly as a ‘mystical’ experience or revelation. The intellectual formulation of this knowledge through logical analysis is capable of providing a basis for a reasonable certainty of the basic premise outlined above, but the direct ‘mystical’ experience of the One brings a person to the conscious *awareness* of that One as the immediate reality of one’s own being, one’s ultimate identity.

To those of us who are reasonable men and who are slow to accept tales of supernatural occurrences that have no empirical basis, the ‘revelations’ that come through mystical experience to those who call themselves ‘mystics’ must be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, as one who has known such a unitive mystical experience, I must tell you, on my oath, that, despite the doubts of reasonable men, I declare and affirm the truth of mystical experience and I wish to add my name to those who, throughout human history, have told of having known God directly through such transpersonal experience. However rare, however undemonstrable such experiences may be, they *do* occur and have occurred in every age to normal human beings. We need only consider the example of Siddhartha, the Buddha, Jesus, Plotinus, al-Hallaj, Ibn Arabi, Meister Eckhart, and many other well-known and not so well-known spiritual figures who have known God through the subjective unitive vision known as “mystical experience.”

The question that many feel it is necessary to ask is, ‘How does one attain to that direct ‘mystical’ experience of the One?’ And I have had to confess that I have no idea how to answer that question—except to say that the one thing you can be absolutely certain of is that *you* can't make it happen. Only the eternal Lord of all can make it happen. Therefore, learn to rely upon His unflinching will. If He wishes to draw you to Him, He will reveal it as a divine urge, an implacable yearning, guiding you from within your heart. So be true to your own heart, and you can't go wrong. A guru or teacher may serve as the instrument by which the knowledge of God's presence is awakened in you, but it is God Himself who kindles the flame of heavenly desire within you, and who leads you to union. We may be able to reduce our awareness of the multiform world to a single pair: I and Thou; but only He can reduce those two to one. And so, it is not to a human teacher that you must turn, but it is to Him within yourself that you must turn.

It seems He has unique plans for each of us, and He brings each of us along the journey's path according to His own design. No one can know how or when He will lead a person to His presence. You must make your intimate acquaintance with Him entirely by your own efforts within your own consciousness. Needless to say, even your own efforts are prompted by His Grace. So, just follow His inner promptings. Know that He is aware of your desire—in fact, He has initiated it; and He will eagerly meet you in the still of your heart when the time is right. Keep your mind on Him and He will

continue to be mindful of you. And, when the time comes, when He has brought you to the purity of heart that is required, then He will bring you into His pure land, and you will be filled with His presence and know unlimited Being.

This is without doubt the greatest attainment possible in this life, providing complete and unremitting inner fulfillment. To be sure, it will not bring you wealth or worldly success; in fact, it is much more likely that your pursuit of God-realization will cause you to experience economic privation and social isolation. But it is the greatest attainment possible in this life, and it will fill you with gratitude and provide you with unending peace and abundant happiness.

Beyond Learned Ignorance

When we learn about the truth of Unity and the possibility of experiencing our identity with the One, the Absolute, we may imagine that this understanding that we have acquired is the height and summit of attainment. But no; this understanding, this knowledge *about* Truth, is not the experience of Self-realization, but merely the setting of the foot on the path to Self-realization. If we were to say that Self-realization was simply a matter of increased understanding, it would be a gross misrepresentation of that knowledge. “Understanding” is a word which we use to denote the mind’s ability to recognize the significance of a specific concept, thing, or event, and to assimilate that information into our storehouse of knowledge. But the word is woefully inadequate to represent that “realization” which is neither of a concept, thing, or event, but rather of the very Source of all concepts, things, and events.

The realization of the Self is a directly perceived knowledge, more on the order of “seeing” than understanding. “Understanding” refers to *indirect* knowledge; “Self-realization” refers to *direct* knowledge: a distinction that is brought out in a 14th century work on Vedanta, called *Panchadashi*:

"The knowledge arising from enquiry and reflection is of two kinds, indirect and direct. Inquiry ends on the achievement of the direct knowledge of the Self. The indirect knowledge is 'Brahman is'; the direct knowledge is 'I am Brahman.'¹

"The direct knowledge dissolves the distinction between knower and known; it is an experience of absolute Unity, in which the knower is aware of everything as himself." ²

The consciousness by which we experience knowledge is the screen on which we project thought. Therefore, no amount of thought, of whatever quality, which is projected on that inner screen will reveal or portray the Self to you. For the Self is the screen, the very Consciousness, on which the thoughts are projected. This is why it has so often been emphasized by the knowers of the Self that no amount of thought can reveal Him. He is the Thinker. He is the Source of that consciousness which you experience as you. And it is in His power to reveal Himself, when He so wishes it, and not otherwise.

Listen to what the sages of the *Upanishads* had to say:

"He is known by those who know Him beyond thought.
... If you think, "I know Him well," you do not know the Truth.
You only perceive that appearance of Brahman produced by the
inner senses. Continue to meditate." ³

"What cannot be thought with the mind, but That whereby the
mind thinks: know that alone to be Brahman." ⁴

"...It is not what is thought that we should wish to know; we
should know the thinker. "He is my Self": this one should
know. "He is my Self": this one should know." ⁵

The activity of the intellect, which is to say, the reasoning faculty, must be left far behind in the ascent to God, to the Self. Of course, it is by the means of this active intellect that we come to accept the fact of Unity, the fact of a transcendent Mind from which all minds devolve and to which they evolve again. But that is the extent of its function; to gather information and reach the proper conclusion. Once it has done so and has established the need for the mind's devotion to its Source, for the inversion of its gaze from outward to inward, then it has fulfilled its function. And then it is time for one's practice to begin: the turning of the mind to quiet reflection, meditation.

To many, this word, *meditation*, means the swirling around in one's mind of one or another concept or idea, as one might swirl a sip of wine in one's

mouth to garner its taste to the full. But meditation proper, is not the dwelling on thoughts and ideas, but rather the alert and expectant search of the inner horizon for absolute clarity of vision, much as a lover might eagerly scan the horizon for a sign of her returning beloved. There is no room for reasoning here; indeed, in this state, thought, other than a direct call to the Beloved, is a distraction, like weeds cropping up to obscure the distant view. It is the Infinite we wish to see; it is God's thrilling caress we wish to feel; it is the unveiling and delimitation of our consciousness that we wish to experience.

It is not reasoning or cunning that brings us to that vision of Truth; rather, it is prayer, it is longing, it is purity of heart, and naked humility of soul which brings His mercy; it is a likeness of motive and will, conforming to His, which brings the soul into the necessary transparency for merging into the Absolute. Again, hear the words of the Upanishads:

"Not even through deep knowledge can the Self be reached, unless evil ways are abandoned, and there is rest in the senses, concentration in the mind, and peace in one's heart. ⁶

"He is seen by a pure heart and by a mind whose thoughts are pure. ...Not through much learning is the Self reached, nor through the intellect and the memorizing of the sacred teachings. The Self is reached by those whom He chooses; to His chosen the Self reveals His glory." ⁷

However, let us not imagine that the exercise of the intellect in Self-inquiry and reflection is a dead-end street. It is definitely not Self-realization, but it *is* a path to Self-realization. "But," you may object, "if the Self is beyond mind, thought, and speech, how can thought, speech, or the mind enable one to reach the Self? Is not the intellect completely useless in acquiring Self-knowledge?"

And the answer is, "No. It is not useless." It is in fact most useful and necessary in bringing the soul to Self-realization. For, as the intellect focuses more and more on the Self, it, itself, becomes refined. Ultimately, the intellect *becomes* pure Consciousness, and disappears as intellect. To comprehend this, we may think of the analogy of a flame produced by burning camphor. When the flame burns up the camphor, the flame is extinguished as well. The flame is the means to dissolve the camphor, and, in the process, it dissolves itself as well. Likewise, intellectual knowledge is used to burn up ignorance; and as it does so, it uses itself up as well, and

becomes silence. As thought becomes more and more clear and refined, it leads us, beyond thought, to the silence of pure Consciousness. Then, only the pure stillness of absolute Consciousness remains, beyond the contraries of knowledge and ignorance.

The intellect, after all, is nothing but a contracted form of the one universal Intelligence. Its light is but a dim reduction of the universal Light of Consciousness. And, because it is nothing else but the one Intelligence, it is capable of expanding to its original state. It is a little like the expansion of the aperture of a lens; when it is narrowed, only a little pinpoint of light enters it; but when it is widened, its scope is greatly expanded, and the light streams in in its fullness. Likewise, the small aperture through which we presently experience Consciousness can be expanded.

This Intelligence, this Consciousness, which we *are*, is the only means we have of experiencing the Self. Therefore, yes, the universal Consciousness is experienced, in a sense, through the intellect. But to say this may be misleading; for, it is not the activity of the intellect which is capable of revealing the Self, but rather the intellect itself *is* that universal Consciousness in a contracted form. And when the Self is realized, it is known as that very Intelligence by which you have always thought and wondered and known. It is the “you” who has always been you.

The term, “learned ignorance,” which I have used in the title of this piece, is the title of a book by a 15th century Cardinal of the Catholic Church, named Nicholas of Cusa, who was extremely interested in addressing this question of whether the intellect was capable of knowing God. In Nicholas’ time, the learned Doctors of the Church were much occupied with discussing theology and dialectics, with the thought that such intellectual busyness was the holiest of activities. Nicholas wrote his book, *de docta ignorantia*, “On Learned Ignorance,” to convince these learned scholars that no amount of reasoning, no amount of intellectual effort, could reveal That which is beyond the reach of words and intellect.

His theme was that all the metaphysical haranguing and theological bickering of such learned fellows was, in fact, nothing more than ignorance, “learned ignorance”; and that the highest state to which all their learning could possibly bring them was to the knowledge that they didn’t know the ultimate Truth. It was this highest state possible through learning, which he termed, “learned ignorance.” And, it was this state, which Nicholas regarded

as the starting point from which one could then truly embark on the spiritual journey to the *direct* knowledge of God.

Here is a passage from his book in which he explains that the reasoning of the intellect cannot possibly reach to God:

"Reason strives for knowledge, and yet this natural striving is not adequate to the knowledge of the essence of God, but only to the knowledge that God ...is beyond all conception and knowledge." ⁸

He goes on to say:

"The Reality, which is the Truth of all beings, is unattainable in its purity [through learning]; all philosophers have sought it, and none has found it, as it is; and the more profoundly learned in this ignorance [we are], the more we shall approach Truth itself." ⁹

And in another book, called *de sapientia*, "On Wisdom," he describes his method of approach to Truth itself:

"Wisdom [or the one Intelligence], shining in all things, invites us, with a certain foretaste of Its effects, to be borne to It with a wonderful desire. For life itself is an intelligent Spirit, having in itself a certain innate foretaste through which it searches with great desire for the very Font of its own life. Without that foretaste, it could neither seek after It nor know when it had acquired It. It is due to this that it is moved toward It as its proper life. Every spirit finds it sweet to ascend continually to the very Principle of life, even though this appears inaccessible. For a persistent and continued ascent to (the Principle and Source of) life is the constituent element of increased happiness.¹⁰

"... This Wisdom [or supreme Intelligence] is not to be found in the art of oratory, or in great books, but in a withdrawal from these sensible things and in a turning to the most simple and infinite reality. You will learn how to receive it into a temple purged from all vice, and by fervent love to cling to it until you

may taste it and see how sweet That is which is all sweetness. Once this has been tasted, all things which you now consider as important will appear as vile, and you will be so humbled that no arrogance or other vice will remain in you. Once having tasted this Wisdom, you will inseparably adhere to it with chaste and pure heart. You will choose rather to forsake this world and all else that is not of this Wisdom, and, living with unspeakable happiness, you will die. After death you will rest eternally in that fond embrace which the eternally blessed wisdom of God Himself vouchsafed to grant both to you and to me." ¹¹

In closing, let me say that learning and the knowledge reflected in the intellect are wonderful indeed. Let us not disparage learning or intelligent discussion. It is the clarification of ideas through reasoning whereby the mind assimilates knowledge to itself, and centers in on the Truth. However, the greatest wisdom, such as that acquired by Socrates, is the acquisition of the knowledge that one doesn't know, and cannot by any intellectual means know, the ultimate Reality. The innate desire to know It can only be fulfilled and satisfied by *direct* revelation—by Grace, and not by any amount of study or thought.

It is at this stage of wisdom, as Nicholas of Cusa insists, that we are ready and able to embark on our *sadhana*, our search for God. This wisdom leads us beyond thought, beyond reasoning, to a simplicity attainable only by the wise fools of this world. It is the simple, child-like humility before our Lord and Father, by which we purify our hearts for the reception of His mercy and grace. In that grace we shall find the knowledge and freedom and perfect happiness, which we seek.

Let us then give up this discussion, these wordy ideas, and turn to the simple regard of God, who is ever-present to us within.

Meditation

There is a Knowledge beyond knowledge, won only by the brave, who soar on wings of love, beyond the knowing mind. The penetrating laser-light of intellect is able to comprehend the spoken truth—but it cannot know the source of its own light. It can form myriads of concepts about the knower, but it cannot turn its light on itself and thereby *know* the knower.

To know that knowing Self, we must set out blindly, without words, without images; even that shining intellect which is our pride and joy must be left behind. With no borrowed or reflected light, with no idea-projecting faculty to cast images on the cave-wall of the conscious mind, we must enter naked, empty-handed, and alone into that dark light.

Without intellect, without a preconceived identity or even existence; unknowing, unseeing, guided only by a faith in Truth and the longing of a pure heart, we may enter into the silence of that all-knowing Light. There, no questions rise to separate the knower from the known. There, the Knower is alone—with a Knowledge beyond knowledge, won only by the brave, who soar on wings of love, beyond the knowing mind.

NOTES:

1. Vidyaratana, *Panchadashi*, 6:16; Shastri (trans.), London, Shanti Sadan, 1965, p. 97.
2. In the revelation of that absolute Self, the separate ego-identity is revealed to be illusory, and it is revealed that the duality of 'I' and 'Thou', of body and soul, as well as all other dualities, is also illusory. The duality of matter and spirit, body and soul, arises, as do all dualities, from the establishment of an individual identity separate from God. With the existence of an 'I' (the ego), the 'other' also comes into existence; that is how duality is produced. That separate identity, or individual ego, the producer of duality, is an extremely subtle thing, masking the nondual reality; and it is dispelled only by the grace of God. This ego is a veil separating us from the awareness of our true Self, our Godhood; and *it is a veil only He, the Divine Mind, can lift.*

What, then, is this ego that stands to block our view of eternity? How can we comprehend it? It can't be grasped or dispelled or even held up to the light of knowledge. It seems that it is an imposed ignorance that automatically accompanies embodiment. In effect, it is our Lord who casts this dust in our eyes and blinds us to our true eternal Self; and He alone has the power to dispel it. No matter how we try to escape its limiting perspective, we are steadfastly caught in its grip. It separates us out from our limitless being, squeezing us into a narrow individuality, hiding from us God's face and our own divinity in Him. We can only raise our eyes to Him in love and longing, praying that

He will soon return us home once again to His all-inclusive awareness.

3. Kena Upanishad, II:1.
4. *Ibid.*, I:5.
5. Kaushitaki Upanishad, 3:8.
6. Katha Upanishad, II:24.
7. *Ibid.*, II:23; Mundaka Upanishad, II:3.
8. Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, Ch. xii; Beck, Lewis W., *Early German Philosophy*; Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1969, p. 64.
9. Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, I:3; Heron, Germain (trans.), *On Learned Ignorance*; New Haven, Yale University Press, 1954, p.
10. Nicholas of Cusa, *De sapientia*, I; Dolan, John P. (ed.), *Unity And Reform: Selected Writings of Nicholas of Cusa*; Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1962, p. 107.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

What Does Mystical Experience Teach Us?

Though mystical experience may occur to one who is a member of a particular 'religion', mystical experience is not to be associated with or attributed to any man-made religious organization. Mystical experience comes from God, and is the same for all, regardless of religious affiliation. Therefore, there is no phenomena such as 'Christian Mysticism', 'Islamic Mysticism', or 'Hindu Mysticism'. These are conceptual categories only and have no actual basis in existential fact. The mystical experience is independent of theological or philosophical dogma; it is a *spiritual* revelation, independent of conceptual convictions or psychological propensities. It is trans-mental, occurring at a more fundamental soul-level, and is a result, not of one's individual volition, but of the inscrutable grace of God.

The great nineteenth century Psychologist, William James (1842-1910), author of *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), indicated a number of types of mystical experience, but, it should be noted that when I speak of 'mystical experience', I am referring solely to the unitive experience in which the soul, or ego-identity, of the individual is absorbed in and by the

one all-inclusive Spirit, so that the soul experiences its identity no longer as an individualized soul but as the one Self of the universe and beyond.

Whether we investigate the mystical experiences of the Jews, the Christians, the Muslims, or the Hindus, we find that they each experience a similar progression of phenomena: Initially, there is the transmission of spiritual energy or 'grace', either directly from God during prayer or meditation, or from an advanced teacher or 'guru' who, having received grace at an earlier time, has accumulated an abundant and transferable fund of spiritual energy by which he is able to activate the latent energy in the new recipient. This is followed by certain symptoms that manifest physically, mentally, and spiritually.

One of the most common physical manifestations is a sensation that originates somewhere in the spine and rises upward through the spine and into the cranium. It is an electrical type of energy similar to the kind of thrill one receives from the touch of an unseen spirit, causing the body to experience a pleasant shivering sensation. Mentally, one is led to some profound realizations concerning the divine nature of existence. Spiritually, there is a blissful attraction to prayer and solitary reflection and a yearning to join oneself to God. The transmission and manifestation of this spiritual energy is common to the lore of all religions, though each has its own name for it.

This spiritual energy seems to be inherent in everyone in its latent, inactivated state, and becomes activated when grace—interior or extraneous—is brought to bear. The recipient embarks then on his or her spiritual journey. This journey may be accompanied by some involuntary bodily movements; it may be accompanied by unusual visual experiences, such as lights or deities appearing to the inner eye while in meditation. There may also be increased intellectual activity and subtle intuitions regarding the nature of physical and spiritual reality. Eventually, the spiritual aspirant is brought to a state of quiet attention, as the breath also become quiet and concentrated, and the individual's mind dissolves into a greater Mind, knowing its oneness with the eternal Source of all existence.

In that ineffable experience, the previous sense of identity as an individual person in a world of distinct individual persons and things is gone. You find yourself suddenly in another dimension, in which there is only one undivided existence—and you know that you are all-pervading, the one all-

inclusive Self of everyone and everything. You are the unmanifest Void, and you are the creative force that brings everything into being. You can see the breath-like ebbing and flowing of the entire universe as it comes and goes. And yet you are above it—witnessing it from a timeless perspective, uninvolved. In yourself you know that all is within you, that everything is you; and all the bonds of your heart are released because you realize that, since there is nothing but your Self, there is “nothing to lament, nothing to vanquish, nothing to pride oneself on. All is accomplished in an instant.”

You May Wonder

You may wonder why the representatives of science and learning refuse to take into account the many documented experiences of mystical union with the Divine Mind. I believe their unwillingness to consider these worldwide experiences in their formulations of reality is based on the long pre-scientific history of religious thought in which many contradictory and fantastic claims were made by religious fanatics whose stories often turned out to be based, not on reality, but on psychological aberrations or on scriptural mythologies. This is why learned scientists tend to remain so skeptical of mystics and mystical experience.

Scientists see themselves and their empirical discipline as a bulwark against the return to such a time when there was no distinguishable criterion for determining the truth or falsehood of any given precept. It is feared that, without the framework of empirical proofs, based on an exclusively materialistic view of reality, we would inevitably slide back into a hazy realm where all things are possible, and nothing is demonstrably certain. It is a justified fear, and one which must be respected. But how then can we return the spiritual reality based on direct mystical experience to the honorable place in the contemporary worldview that it deserves?

I have pondered this question for a long time, and yet I have failed to find a useful solution. This is because the understanding of our spiritual nature always has been and always will be a matter of the experience and evolution of each individual soul. Some few will be able to grasp the all-pervasive presence of the divine in the world and in themselves; others will not. Each one's ability or inability to recognize the presence of God is no doubt in accordance with their temporal place in the divine scheme. I believe that each of us is destined to eventually realize our existence in God and our

dependence on God, but we will not all necessarily realize it concurrently in time. And, while my urgings and the urgings of other seers of Truth wield some efficacy in swaying hearts and minds if God so wills, there is no certain way to bring God-knowledge to every heart. It is enough to know that our spiritual understanding and the progress of our souls is most assuredly in His almighty hands, as are the activities and final outcomes of all our earthly endeavors.

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