

THE GRACE OF GOD

A Collection of Articles from *The Mystic's Vision*
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Amazing Grace

I recently watched with millions of other viewers as President Barack Obama sang “Amazing Grace” on nationwide TV while attending the funeral of a friend and colleague. It is a well-known song that was written by John Newton, an English Christian clergyman, in 1773, and has been popular in American Churches and culture ever since. The popularity of this song over the years is due to the fact that it is a song to which everyone can relate, for we have all known the merciful touch of God in our lives. God’s Grace is not limited to members of any single sectarian orientation; it is universal and touches every human being on earth.

God comes into our lives of His own accord and wakens us to His ever-presence. For each of us, it is a unique experience, an experience that leaves its lasting imprint on our souls, providing inspiration for courage in our lives and solace in our troubles by reminding us of God’s mercy and of our true home in His heart. Every instance of God’s Grace is a great and valuable gift to the soul who receives it, but I would ask you to consider the special merits of a very special Grace with which only a relatively few fortunate souls are familiar, and yet which I feel is uncommonly worthy to be regarded as *amazing*:

It is the gracious revelation of one’s divine Identity, the soul’s sudden realization that it is in God, is made of God, and is nothing else but God. It is this revelatory Grace which was visited on Heraclitus and Lao Tze; and it is the experience of that Grace that enlightened the Buddha, causing him to exclaim “I am Father of myself”. It is that interior Grace that revealed to the Upanishadic *rishis* the truth that “Thou art That!” And it is the experience of that Grace that illumined Jesus when he was baptized by the Spirit in the river Jordan, leading him to declare, “I and the Father are one!” It is the Grace that awakened Plotinus to the unitive vision of God, and also revealed to Meister Eckhart his oneness with God; it was also that “amazing” Grace

that revealed to the Sufi mystic, Ibn Arabi, his own eternal Self; and there are those of us who experience this very special Grace even in these present days.

Here, please listen for yourself to the words of these various representatives of diverse religious and philosophical traditions as they tell of their own experience of that ‘amazing Grace’:

1. **VEDANTA/HINDUISM:** *Here are some words about that Divine revelation from various authors of the Upanishads* (ca. 1200 B.C.E.):

“He cannot be seen by the eye, and words cannot reveal Him. He cannot be reached by the senses, or by austerity or sacred actions. By the grace of wisdom and purity of mind, He can be seen indivisible in the silence of contemplation.”¹

“What cannot be thought with the mind, but That whereby the mind thinks: know That alone to be Brahman. ... 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.”²

“When a sage sees this great Unity, and realizes that his Self has become all beings, what delusion and what sorrow could ever approach him?”³

“When awake to the vision of one’s own Self, when a man in truth can say: “I am He,” what desires could lead him to grieve in fever for the body? ... When a man sees the *Atman*, his own Self, the one God, the Lord of what was and of what shall be, then he fears no more.”⁴

“When a man has seen the truth of the Spirit, he is one with Him; the aim of his life is fulfilled, and he is ever beyond sorrow. ...When a man knows God, he is free; his sorrows have an end, and birth and death are no more. When in inner union he is beyond the world of the body, then the third world, the world of the Spirit, is found, where man possesses all—for he is one with the ONE.”⁵

(And from the author of the *Bhagavad Gita* (ca. 500 B.C.E.):

“When the mind of the yogi is in peace, focused on the Self within, and beyond all restless desires, then he experiences Unity. His mind becomes still, like the flame of a lamp sheltered from the winds. When the mind rests in the prayerful stillness of yoga, by the grace of the One, he knows the One, and attains fulfillment. Then he knows the joy of Eternity; he sees beyond the intellect and the senses. He becomes the Unmoving, the Eternal.”⁶

“... In this experience of Unity, the yogi is liberated, delivered from all suffering forever. ...The yogi whose heart is still, whose passions are dissolved, and who is pure of sin, experiences this supreme bliss and knows his oneness with Brahman.”⁷

2. **BUDDHISM:** *Here is the way that revelation was spoken of by the Buddha* (ca. 500 B.C.):

“Monks, there is an Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned. Were there not the Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned, there would be no escape from the born, originated, made and conditioned. Since there is the Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned, there *is* escape from the born, originated, made and conditioned.”⁸

“...There is, O monks, a state where there is neither this world nor any other world, nor is there any Sun or moon. There is neither a coming nor going, nor remaining, nor passing away, nor arising. Without support, without movement, It is the Foundation of everything.”⁹

And this from a later Chinese Buddhist:

“In learning to be a Buddha, ...man should purify his mind and allow his spirit to penetrate the depths. Thus, he will be able to wander silently within himself during contemplation, and he will see the Origin of all things, obscured by nothing. ...His

mind becomes boundless and formless, ... all-illuminating and bright, like moonlight pervading the darkness. During that absolute moment, the mind experiences illumination without darkness, clarity without stain. It becomes what it really is, absolutely tranquil, absolutely illuminating. Though this all-pervading Mind is tranquil, the world of cause and effect does not cease; though It illumines the world, the world is but Its reflection. It is pure Light and perfect Quiescence, which continues through endless time. It is motionless, and free from all activity; It is silent, and self-aware. ...That brilliant Light permeates every corner of the world. It is This we should become aware of and know.”¹⁰

3. CHRISTIANITY: *Here are some words attributed to Jesus* (ca. 30 C.E.) regarding the realization of his unity with God:

“Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”¹¹

“Jesus said, ‘I am the Light; I am above all that is manifest. Everything came forth from me, and everything returns to me. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift a stone, and you will find me there.’”¹²

Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), a Christian prelate, said this about his own unitive experience:

“As the soul becomes more pure and bare and poor, and possesses less of created things, and is emptied of all things that are not God, it receives God more purely, and is more completely in Him; and it truly becomes one with God, and it looks into God and God into it, face to face as it were; two images transformed into one.”¹³

“I am converted into Him in such a way that He makes me one being with Himself—not a *similar* being. By the living God, it is true that there is no distinction.”¹⁴

“In this breaking through [of consciousness], I find that God and I are both the same. Then I am what I [always] was; I

neither wax nor wane, for I am the motionless Cause that is moving all things.”¹⁵

“I found in me all things forgotten, my own self forgotten and awareness of Thee, alone, O God. ... I found myself with Thee, being Thy being and speaking the Word and breathing the spirit.”¹⁶

“Here, one cannot speak of the soul anymore, for she has lost her nature yonder in the oneness of divine essence. There, she is no longer called soul, but is called *immeasurable Being*.¹⁷

“...Some people think that they will see God as if He were standing there and they here. It is not so. God and I, we are one.¹⁸

“The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God’s eye are one and the same—one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving.”¹⁹

4. **NEOPLATONISM:** *Here’s a little of what the great Egyptian sage, Plotinus (205-270 C.E.), said about the experience of unity:*

“ The soul naturally loves God and yearns to be one with Him, just as a noble daughter naturally loves her noble father... And suddenly, [she] is uplifted and sees, without ever knowing how; ... the Supreme has come to her, or rather has revealed Its presence. She has turned away from everything around her and has readied herself, having made herself as beautiful as possible and fashioned herself in likeness with the Divine by those preparations and adornments which come unsought to those who grow ready for the vision. And she has seen that Divine presence suddenly manifesting within herself, for now there is nothing between herself and the Divine. There is now no longer a duality, but a two-in-one; for, so long as that presence continues, all distinction between them is dissolved. The longing of a lover to unite with his [human] beloved is a longing for a mere imitation of that Divine and perfect union.

" ...In this state of absorbed contemplation, there is no longer a relationship between a subject and an object; the vision itself is the one continuous Being, so that seeing and seen are one thing; the object and the act of vision have become identical.

" ...It is a knowing of the [eternal] Self restored to its original purity. No doubt we should not speak of *seeing*; but we cannot help speaking in terms of duality, such as "the seer" and "the seen," instead of asserting boldly that it is the attainment of absolute Unity. In this *seeing*, we neither regard an object nor perceive distinctions; for there are not two. The man is altered, no longer himself nor belonging to himself; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into It, one with It. ...Duality exists only in separation; by our holding ourselves apart from It, the Supreme is set outside of us. This is why the vision cannot be described; we cannot separate the Supreme from ourselves to speak of It, for if we have seen something separate and distinct, we have fallen short of the Supreme, which can be known only as one with oneself.

" ... [In this vision] there are not two; beholder is one with the beheld ... The man who has experienced this mingling with the Supreme must—if he but recalls It—carry the memory of Divinity impressed upon his soul. He is become the Unity, and nothing within him or without can create any diversity. Nor is there any movement now, or passion, or outreaching desire, once this ascent is attained. Reasoning is suspended and all intellection as well, and even—to dare the word—the very *self* is gone. Filled with God, he has in perfect stillness attained isolation, aloneness.

" ... This is the life of the gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, ...the passing of the alone to the Alone." ²⁰

5. **ISLAM:** *And here are some words from the Sufi sage, Ibn Arabi (1165-1240), on the unitive experience:*

"When the mystery of the oneness of the soul and the Divine is revealed to you, you will understand that you are no other than

God. ... Then you will see all your actions to be His actions and all your attributes to be His attributes and your essence to be His essence. ... Thus, instead of [your own] essence, there is the essence of God and in place of [your own] attributes, there are the attributes of God. He who knows himself sees his whole existence to be the Divine existence but does not experience that any change has taken place in his own nature or qualities. For when you know yourself, your sense of a limited identity vanishes, and you know that you and God are one and the same.”²¹

“...There is no existence save His existence. ...This means that the existence of the beggar is His existence and the existence of the sick is His existence. Now, when this is admitted, it is acknowledged that all existence is His existence; and that the existence of all created things, both accidents and substances, is His existence; and when the secret of one particle of the atoms is clear, the secret of all created things, both outward and inward, is clear; and you do not see in this world or the next, anything except God.”²²

“On Him alone we depend for everything; our dependence on other things is in reality dependence on Him, for they are nothing but His appearances.”²³

“The eye perceives nothing but Him; only He is to be known. We are His; by Him we exist, and by Him we are governed; and we are, at all times and in all states, in His presence.”²⁴

“Nothing but the Reality is; there is no separate being, no arriving and no being far away. This is seen in true vision; when I experienced it, I saw nothing but Him. When my Beloved appears, with what eye do I see Him? With His eye, not with mine; for no one sees Him except Himself.”²⁵

“It is none other than He who progresses or journeys as you. There is nothing to be known but He; and since He is Being itself, He is therefore also the journeyer. There is no knower but He; so, who are you? Know your true Reality. ... He is the

essential Self of all. But He conceals it by [the appearance of] otherness, which is “you.”²⁶

“If you hold to multiplicity, you are with the world; and if you hold to the Unity, you are with the Truth. ...Our names are but names for God; at the same time our individual selves are His shadow. He is at once our identity and not our identity... Consider!”²⁷ In one sense the Reality is creatures; in another sense, It is not. ...Whether you assert that It is undivided or divided, the Self is alone. The manifold [universe] exists and yet it does not exist.”²⁸ “Therefore, know your Self, who you are, what is your identity...”²⁹ “He who knows himself knows his Lord; ...indeed, He is his very identity and reality.”³⁰

“If men knew themselves, they would know God; and if they really knew God, they would be satisfied with Him and would think of Him alone.”³¹

These are the testaments of a few of those to whom God has revealed Himself; perhaps He’ll reveal Himself to you as well. It’s all about your heart, you know: He’s no fool; you must truly come to know that without Him you are nothing, and wholeheartedly offer Him your life and work. If all conditions are just right—if it is your time and place, and He has brought you to His love and Grace, perhaps He’ll draw you into His heart and give you a taste of eternal bliss. It’s worth a try! Have a talk with Him tonight.³²

NOTES:

1. *Mundaka Upanishad*, III.1; Juan Mascaro, *The Upanishads*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1965.
2. *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, III.8; Juan Mascaro, *The Upanishads*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1965.
3. *Isha Upanishad*, I.7; *Ibid.*
4. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV.4.25; *Ibid.*
5. *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, II.1; *Ibid.*
6. *Bhagavad Gita*, 6:18-21; Mascaro, Juan, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1962.
7. *Bhagavad Gita*, 6:23-27; *Ibid.*
8. The Buddha, *Udana*, *Patalgam* 8.3., from G.M. Strong, *The Udana: The Solemn Utterances of The Buddha*, trans. by

- Dawsonne Melancthon Strong, 1902; p. 115. Reprinted 2010 by Forgotten Books.
9. The Buddha, *Udana, Patalgam* 8.3., from G.M. Strong, *The Udana: The Solemn Utterances of The Buddha*, trans. by Dawsonne Melancthon Strong, 1902; p. 115. Reprinted 2010 by Forgotten Books.
 10. Stryck, L. & Ikemoto, T., *Zen Poems, Prayers, Sermons, Anecdotes, Interviews*, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday Anchor Books, 1965.
 11. *New Testament of The Bible, Gospel Of John*, 14:11.
 12. Robinson, James M., *Gospel Of Thomas*, 77, (trans. by Thomas O. Lambdin), 1977; p. 135.
 13. Meister Eckhart, Treatise A.2, Colledge E. & McGinn, B. (trans.), *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, Ramsey, N.J., Paulist Press, 1982; p. 222.
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 16. de B. Evans, C., *op. cit.*, *Sermon XXI*.
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 18. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 18, Blackney, Raymond B., *Meister Eckhart, A Modern Translation*, N.Y., Harper Torchbooks, 1941; p. 181.
 19. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 23, *Ibid.*, p. 206.
 20. Plotinus, *Enneads*: VI:7.34, 36; VI: 9.5-11.
 21. Landau, Rom, *The Philosophy Of Ibn Arabi*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1959; pp. 83-84.
 22. *Ibid.*; p. 83.
 23. Austin, R.W.J. (trans.), *Ibn Al-Arabi: The Bezels Of Wisdom*, N.Y., Paulist Press, 1980; p. 98.
 24. *Ibid.*; p. 137.
 25. *Ibid.*; p. 108.
 26. *Ibid.*; p. 136.
 27. *Ibid.*; pp. 126-127.
 28. *Ibid.*; p. 88.
 29. *Ibid.*; p. 126.
 30. *Ibid.*; p. 153.

31. Landau, Rom, *The Philosophy Of Ibn Arabi*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1959; p. 79.
32. Anyone interested in reading my own account of the unitive experience, simply go to my website: www.themysticsvision.com, and click on the “Read or Download Books” page. There, you will find a listing for my book, *The Supreme Self*. It is in that book that I describe my own experience of “amazing grace”, and this book, as well as my other books, may be downloaded at no charge in a PDF format.

The Signature of Grace

Grace shows itself in the human heart as the quickening of love and sympathy.

It glistens in the beholder’s eye in the presence of sunlight streaming through the pines.

Have you known the quiet stilling of your breath

In the silent sequesterment of night?

Have you dreamed of a mysterious land, where smiling sages

Gaze at you in heaven’s beauteous light?

Have you longed to be free of the prison of the flesh?

This is the signature of Grace.

Have you sought Him in prayer with a heartbroken plea?

Have your tears poured torrents in longing for closeness to Him?

Have you called on His name through each hour of the day?

Have you waited for Him through the night?

Does He haunt your heart like a lover who’s lost?

This is the signature of Grace.

Like a knife through the heart it painfully aches;

It steals you from life’s simple play.

It makes a sameness of every fair shape, and leads you to quiet repose

And delight in the high-rising light-streams of thought.

Have you heard His voice breaking through in the night

As you sat watching and listening for Him?

Has His love washed like waves through the desert of your soul? Have your tears drenched your cheeks as you sat in the dark?

Has a white dove flown, fluttering, straight into your heart?
This is the signature of Grace.

One sweet silent night He will lift up your mind to a height you have not
before known;
He will draw forth your soul from its naked pure depths and open a deep
inner eye.
You'll see with His sight; you'll know with His knowing;
You'll realize you are always His own.
Like a wave on His ocean, you'll see who you are, and know that the ocean
is you.
He is your center, the Beloved you've sought, the very foundation of your
soul.
And He will reveal it; He'll heal all your doubts and lift you up to His heart.
He'll thrill you with knowledge and reveal all His art.
For this is the signature of Grace.

The Gift of Spiritual Vision

For the *bhakta*, the soul in the throes of love for God, there arises a love-longing for the union with God. And prior to the dawning of that unitive experience, there is much singing and prayers, and copious tears. But then, at the inception of the experience of revelation, there is an end to the emotion, and the soul falls into a calm that is also intensely awake. The pupils of her eyes become extraordinarily open wide, and her breathing slows and subsides to a very shallow rise and fall, as though it were approaching the balance point, where breathing would be entirely stilled. The relationship of soul to God is nearly vanished, and there is only the fine awareness focused upon its own incredible clarity, its own being; and then the prayer that bursts forth from the finally naked and surrendered soul: "O God, let me be one with Thee—not that I might glory in Thy love, but that I might speak out in Thy praise and to Thy glory for the benefit of all Thy children". And then comes the sudden awakening, as though from a dream, and this soul suddenly sees with the eyes of the eternal One, who is the Self it has always been—the Self *you* have always been.

You, who have been crying for His embrace; you, who have been awaiting the arrival of the King; you, *yourself*, are the only Existence, the Lord, the

Father; and all along you have been living in an illusory separation from yourself, in a dream-world of your own making. But now, there are no longer two. *Even now, I speak the word, 'Thou', and create duality.* There is no one else, and never had been. You are the omnipresent Mind—you! The personification you had adopted was but a fantasy; and now you see the truth. You live eternally, showering forth this huge universal display. You are the life in every creature: *I am the pulse of the turtle; I am the clanging bells of joy. I bring the dust of blindness; I am the fire of song. I am in the clouds and in the gritty soil; in pools of clear water my image is found. ...I have but breathed, and everything is rearranged and set in order once again. A million worlds begin and end in every breath, and in this breathing, all things are sustained.*

The prayer that precipitated this vision was the prayer of a soul, still caught in the illusion of a separate identity; yet the desire to praise God was God's desire speaking through the soul, and in this life, she has no other purpose but to honor that prayerful desire. It permeates this soul, and constitutes her task in this life, her only joy. It may be that she was given no mandate from God to teach; and it was she who asked to be united with Him in order that she might speak out truly in His praise and to His glory. And yet, that desire sprang from the deepest place in that soul, a soul which is itself fountained forth from God. And so that desire was truly His desire in her. His granting of that desire for intimacy constituted His mandate. When she looks at the lives and missions of others before her, like the Egyptian author of the Hermetic teachings, like the Buddha, Jesus, Plotinus, Eckhart, etc., she associates strongly with the sense of mission each possessed, having been graciously lifted up to intimacy with God, and filled with the desire to praise Him. What a singular grace, and what responsibility it confers! Yet, despite the gift of this advantageous vision, all who received it were mere mortals, with the limitations that implies. All had to endure the earthly life of bodily provision, sickness and death; and all had to endure the doubt and malevolence of the community of other men and women. Yet still they communicated their vision as best they could. Their lifelong desire to see and to give expression to the truth of God is God's enduring gift to us, His wondrous, thrillingly beautiful, gift of overwhelming joy to all of us.

And once the larger, subtler, eternal reality is known, the soul, returned to awareness of this world, can scarcely see the phenomenal reality in the same way as before. During the visionary experience of the Eternal, she is identical with the Eternal, and blissfully content to remain in that state.

However, that state wanes and gives way to the return in consciousness to this temporal and phenomenal reality. This is truly an unwelcome eviction. Having known the bliss of her all-pervading Self, she is at first greatly shocked and dismayed at finding herself back in this little world of separable images in time and space. But after her initial dismay, she reflects on her current state, and quickly realizes that she is still the eternal Self, and that the world to which she has returned consists solely of the bright Energy breathed forth from her Divinely transcendent Self. She recognizes that now she is in a dream-movie, but it is the dream-movie of God, who is indeed her very Self; and even this body in which she moves about is woven of that Divine fabric.

She realizes that, even in this projected image which God puts forth, she remains enveloped in His blissful Being, and realizes that she could never be anything but safe at home in Him. That is the great gift of Spiritual vision: that now she sees this transient world of images as suffused with ethereal light and splayed with dazzling beauty. Joyful contentment fills the air she breathes, and adoration fills her heart. This is the translation of divine vision into the world of phenomenal awareness. This is the carryover from the transcendent vision to the sensory vision here on earth.

She carries over from that higher realm no intellectual understanding of how a photon operates as both a particle and a wave, or how the force of gravity interacts with the moving earth. Let physicists puzzle over these dusty details; she is content to see her beauteous God in evidence all about her and within her. To abandon that untold treasure of joy to pick and peck amidst the crumbs of reason's paltry scrapings would be but the conduct of a fool. You can have it, you mathematicians and quantum mechanics! You biochemists and cosmo-theoreticians! It's all been settled and displayed to her utmost satisfaction: Beauty beauty beauty everywhere, and the wine of intoxicating nectar in her cup! What needs she more?

And yet, having seen so clearly that all the beings who exist on earth are truly embodiments of the one Divine Self, the desire to share this wondrous knowledge remains an insistent urge deep within her soul. But, also, she is aware that each soul follows an evolutionary path unique to itself and is able to comprehend the omnipresence of God only in the proper time, and only by the gracious gift of God. And so, her words have relevance now, and in the future, only to those whose eyes are already opened, to those on whom God's grace has already shone. Then rejoice with her, all ye fortunate souls!

And be merciful to those whose temporary blindness is also His gift. He will lift that blindness in His time, and release all from the darkness in which they now live. He will open to their eyes, as He did to hers, the light and warmth, the wonder and delight, the beauty and the joy, of His immeasurable life-giving Love. Praise God!

Mystical Experience

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.

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 all multiplicity to two: I and Thou; but only He can reduce the 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 you will 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.

From the Conclusion To *History of Mysticism*¹

It should be abundantly evident that throughout the ages men and women have come face to face with God, the absolute Source and Ground of all existence; and that it is this very experience which constitutes the one common thread that binds together in unity all the great religious and philosophical traditions which have existed since time began, and all that shall exist in the future. Each of the great mystics spoke in his own language, his own restricted terminology, and the consequence is that today many view each of these efforts to reveal the nature of reality as disparate and unrelated “philosophies” or “religions.” But the *experience* of the one Reality is the same for all, of course; and in all the declarations of the many prophets, saints, and messiahs, we can hear the attempt to convey a common knowledge based on that common visionary experience.

When that experience is about to happen to a person, that person’s mind becomes irresistibly withdrawn from worldly concerns, and becomes centered instead upon one all-consuming love, a singular sort of love, for the very source of love within. And in the process of consummating this love, solitude is procured, giving the mind the opportunity to become detached from the pull of distracting thoughts and sense-impressions; and the mind is

then focused with great intensity upon its aim. Consciousness, like an unflickering flame in a windless room, becomes pure and clear. And then suddenly it knows who it has always been.

It is God's grace which manifests in us as that divine love that draws us so compellingly toward the experience of unity. This love is not the ordinary kind of love between a subject and an object, however; for in this case the subject and the object, and the love itself are one. Nor is this love the result of a conclusion based on a rational premise; it is an inner experience. It is something quite real— breathtakingly and intoxicatingly real. It stirs from within, and centers on itself within. It is not a rationally thought-out construction based on philosophical principles, but a sweetness that is itself the object of devotion. It is this Love that bhaktas love. It has no location but the human heart, yet its source is the universal Being. It is His gracious gift, and only those who have experienced it know what it is.

It is of this love that Ramakrishna sang:

“How are you trying, O my mind, to know the nature of God?
 You are groping like a madman locked in a dark room.
 He is grasped through ecstatic love.
 How can you fathom Him without it?
 When that love awakes, the Lord, like a magnet, draws to Him the
 soul.”²

Such longing for God always precedes the experience of enlightenment, because it is the natural expression, the unfailing indicator, of a shift in consciousness toward the transcendent Unity. All of the outer events as well as the inner ones will conspire to bring one's life to that point where enlightenment is experienced. When it is time for it to come, it will produce itself, and it will announce its coming by a great wave of love that steers the heart irresistibly to the source of that love, and eventually reveals itself unaided from within.

Consider the great Shankara's final message to the disciple in his *Vivekachudamani* (“The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination”):

“Gurus and scriptures can stimulate spiritual awareness, but one crosses the ocean of ignorance only by direct illumination, *through the grace of God.*”³

No one has ever realized God except those to whom He has revealed Himself. On this point all Self-realized beings are unanimously agreed. As one commentator says in the *Malini Vijaya Vartika*: “The learned men of all times always hold that the descent of grace does not have any cause or condition but depends entirely on the free will of the Lord.” If it were dependent upon conditions, it would not be absolute and independent grace. According to yet another Tantric scripture, the *Tantraloka*, “Divine grace leads the individual to the path of spiritual realization. It is the only cause of Self-realization and is independent of human effort.”

The experience of Self-realization occurs when the mind is concentrated to a fine laser-point and focused in contemplation of God; but this happens only by the power of the universal Self, of God Himself. This is not a denial of the efficacy of self-effort, but merely an assertion that every effort or desire to remember Him, every intensification of concentration on Him, is instigated by Himself, for He is our own inner Self, the inner Controller. It is He who inspires, enacts, and consummates all our efforts.

Among the Christian mystics, we find complete agreement on this issue. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, says: “You would not seek Him at all, O soul, nor love Him at all, if you had not been first sought and first loved.” Meister Eckhart also acknowledges this truth, saying: “It is He that prays in us and not we ourselves.” And the Blessed Jan Ruysbroeck concurs:

“Contemplation places us in a purity and radiance which is far above our understanding, ...and no one can attain to it by knowledge, by subtlety, or by any exercise whatsoever; but he whom God chooses to unite to Himself, he and no other can contemplate God.”⁴

We find the same agreement among the Sufi mystics, the Hindus and the Buddhists. It is always so—always. And though the attempt is often made by charlatans to translate the description of the mental state of the mystic at the time of his experience of unity into a sort of “method” or “scientific technique” for the attainment of God, no one has ever claimed that such a technique has actually produced the advertised result. For, by themselves, the practices of shallow breathing, fixed stares, and cessation of thought, will never produce the experience of unity. This experience comes only by the will of God. Nanak, the great Guru of the Sikh tradition, stated the matter plainly when he said, “Liberation from bondage depends upon Thy

will; there is no one to gainsay it. Should a fool wish to, suffering will teach him wisdom.”⁵

When He draws the mind to Himself, the mind becomes still automatically. It is not necessary to attempt to still the mind by austere practices or artificial methods. The body becomes still, and the mind becomes still, when the heart is yearning sincerely for Him alone. Everything happens very naturally by His grace: One begins to begrudge the mind any thought other than the thought directed to God; and, with the aim of centering the mind continually on Him, one begins to sing His name in the inner recesses of the mind. It doesn't matter what name is used; Christians call Him “Father”; Muslims call Him “Allah,” or “Karim”; Jews call Him “Adonai”; and Hindus call Him “Hari” or “Ram.” Love responds to whatever name is called with love. To one who loves, His name is nectar; it is like a cold drink of water to a thirsty man. It is no discipline, nor is it an austerity. It is the refreshment of life. It is the sweetness of peace, and the delight of delights.

Since there is really nothing else but that infinite Being wherever one may look, that awareness dawns, as one begins to sing the name of God within the heart; and the bliss of recognizing one's own Self both without and within begins to well up. The more one sings His name, the more one revels in that bliss, and the more clearly one perceives His continual presence. Inherent in that perception is all mercy, all right judgment, all tenderness, all loving-kindness. It is the natural devotion by which a man's heart is transformed, and by which he becomes fit for the vision of God.

Therefore, say the mystics, we must forge our link with God, and He will lead us to Himself. He will draw us to love Him, for He Himself is that Love that awakens in us as love for God. He will draw us to seek Him in prayer and in silent longing, for He is our own heart. Follow, and you will reach Him. Draw near to Him in the silence of the night and He will reveal Himself to you as your very deepest Self, your eternal Identity. Keep on loving Him, keep on trusting in Him to guide you, and keep on praying to Him. When He puts into your heart the desire to know Him, He will lift aside the veil and reveal that, all along, it was Him who prayed, who sought, who sorrowed, as you; and that, all along, it was you who forever lives beyond all sorrow, as God—forever blissful, forever free.

NOTES:

1. Reprinted from Abhayananda, Swami., *History of Mysticism*, Fallsburg, N.Y., Atma Books, 1987.
2. Nikhilananda, Swami (trans.), *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, N.Y., Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, 1942; p. 607
3. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, Prabhavananda, Swami, *The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, Hollywood, Vedanta Press, 1947, p. 131.
4. Jan Ruysbroeck, *The Sparkling Stone*, IV
5. Nanak, Singh, Trilochan, et al, *Selections from The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1960, p. 42.

From Seeing Is Believing

When God reveals Himself in man, the illusory duality of body and soul vanishes. Like all dualities, this one exists only in the spatio-temporal reality produced by God's projected Light. When the individual mind (soul) ascends to the Eternal, it then sees from the unitive perspective of the Eternal, wherein body and soul are both contained. Here, all dualities vanish, and only the undivided Mind remains. Here, the division between I and Thou is no more; now and then both vanish in the Timeless; life and death no longer stand apart. Only the One and Its Creative Power shines eternally.¹ This experience is the revelation from which all religion derives. It is this mystical experience that provides the irrefutable evidence for the Divine identity of the soul. Those who have not experienced that 'mystical' union may argue the question of the immortality of the soul, but for those who have been graced with that unitive experience, no question remains. The Divine Mind is an experiential reality that is a thousand times more impressive than mere thought or sense experience. It is an experience more indubitable than the light of day.

God's creative Light is eternal, though the forms it takes are temporal and transient. Likewise, Soul is eternal; the forms it takes are temporal and transient and are stamped with the pattern of the heavens at the time of their embodiment. As limited souls, we journey through time from body to body in quest of the perfect joy and satisfaction that already exists in its fullness within us. Our souls are limited rays of the one Sun, droplets of the one ocean of Joy; and when we are ripe for seeing, He opens our eyes: He reveals our true nature, showing us that we are His own Beauty, His own

unlimited Vastness, His own sweet Joy. He shows us who we have always been.

It is this experience that prompted the authors of the Upanishads to proclaim, “That thou art”; it is this experience that prompted Jesus to declare “I and the Father are one”, and al-Hallaj to declare, *an al Haqq*, “I am the transcendent Reality”. It is this experience that provides the self-evident proof of our Divine Ground and ultimate Identity. It is an experience that is accessible, by the Grace of God, through contemplative introspection.

The soul experiences its “union” with God when He reveals His eternal presence in the soul. This vision is the greatest attainment possible to man, and yet it is not an attainment that can be taught. The reason is that it is not something that can be accomplished by man. A man can only make himself receptive to it, but it is accomplished by God Himself. It is a gift. I am not speaking of the mere intellectual recognition of the fact that the one all-pervading Spirit is the only one who exists; the *experience* of union entails the actual upliftment of the soul to its divine Source, so that it is no longer aware of its separate existence on this earth, but knows itself, for as long as that experience lasts, as God—transcendent to the cosmos and yet the life and conscious Spirit pervading the cosmos. It is a going-out of the limited soul-identity and an awakening to the consciousness of an unlimited, eternal and all-inclusive Identity. All questions are answered in this altered awareness—or rather, they are dissolved away in the sweetness of eternity, an eternity that is realized to be one’s own indubitable Self. Truly, there are no words to describe this ‘awakening’; but it is the foundation of all religion and all philosophy, and the bedrock of all certainty and satisfaction.

Those who have experienced that 'awakening' tend to espouse the metaphysical view, the mystical theology, that is commonly referred to as ‘the Perennial Philosophy’. It is the perennial expression of the revealed knowledge of the one eternal Spirit. Yet such reasoned arguments for the Divine creation of our world and the existence of our Divine soul are oftentimes utterly impotent to convince the determined advocates of a Godless and materialistic worldview. The materialist worldview is based entirely on the material sciences, and does not even give consideration to a metaphysics, insofar as “metaphysics” implies a non-physical reality creating, underlying and controlling the physical reality. The materialist worldview acknowledges the insubstantiality of matter at the quantum level,

but it does not recognize a supernatural cause, a noumenal Source and Ruler of the phenomenal world of matter.

The proponents of materialism say that, ‘when the body dies, the consciousness associated with it dies as well; there is no second entity such as an enduring soul.’ ‘Life and consciousness’, they say, ‘are merely transient properties of matter, and have no existence apart from individual material bodies.’ And without some inner experience of God, they remain skeptical of the spiritual view, and rely solely on what they perceive through sense experience.

Also, those who *have* known God have found no objectively rational way of convincing such people of the existence of the Spirit, though throughout history many have tried to do so. The Spirit must be experienced subjectively, and then only by God’s self-revelation. It would seem that He has retained control of this knowledge among humans by causing it to be unknowable by the senses or by rational thought, and realizable only through His grace. Once He reveals Himself within our soul, we realize that we are His creations, made of His substance, and that we are utterly dependent upon Him. Then we learn to surrender our own will to His will; and this, in turn, alleviates us of all our errors, and brings about our own highest good and happiness. Without that self-revelation, we remain blind to Him in ourselves and in the world. This, too, is His doing; as He says: “I bring the dust of blindness”. But He is also the remover of that blindness. He is not only the Light of the phenomenal world; He is also the inner Light that reveals His presence as our own Soul, our own divine Self.

This being the case, how can we enjoin others to awaken to the knowledge of God when such knowledge is only obtained through the Grace of God? Even the desire to know God arises through the workings of His Grace! What, then, can we do? It has been said that ‘The breeze of His grace is always blowing; but it is we who must set our sails to receive that breeze’. I reply that it is only by His Grace that we are inspired to set our sails to receive Him. The truth is that He is doing everything, whether we are aware of it or not. “We” are *His* manifestations, and we live and move within His omnipresent Spirit.

However, as His manifestations, we possess the abilities that He has granted us; and one of those abilities is the power to exercise our individual wills. We are able to choose, and we are responsible for our choices; and it is we,

as individual souls, who receive the consequences of those choices. Every moment, He offers us the choice of turning our intention to Him or to the illusory world:

*I have given sweets that decay to those that crave them,
I have given my wealth unto the poor and lonely.
My hands are open—nothing is concealed.²*

We choose, ultimately, not from reason's arguments or empirical proofs, but from the yearning that arises from the loving kinship of the soul to God. And the rationale for expounding rational arguments that tell of His presence and the possibility of knowing Him is that such reasonings are on rare occasions capable of prompting a recognition and a yearning in those who are readied for it, leading them to seek His revelation in their own hearts. And that too is His doing, as His presence in our hearts inspires both the expounding and the recognition.

Nonetheless, I fear that the great majority of souls living on earth today have yet to see beyond immediate appearances, have yet to experience God in their lives, have yet to experience the joy of the soul upon being uplifted to union with the Creator. They cannot therefore be expected to give credence to such a mystical worldview. They are bewitched by a fascination with and desire for the things of creation, and fail to recognize their Creator, or even their own souls. I have not the slightest doubt that these people will eventually come to recognize the Divine in themselves and in the world; but for the time being, they are blind, and therefore suffer many miseries. It is certain, however, that the Lord, in His justice and mercy, will bring them, in the course of time, to awaken from their slumbers, and will make Himself known to them, leading them to comfort and joy in His bosom.

NOTES:

1. This 'coincidence of opposites' in the unitive experience was first noted by Heraclitus. In fact, Heraclitus touched on nearly all of the elements of mystical experience, and yet his valuable insights have never been fully acknowledged or appreciated.

2. From Swami Abhayananda, "The Song of The Self" in *The Supreme Self*, Atma Books, Fallsburg, New York, 1984.

The Only Means of Attaining Enlightenment

If an enlightened person could convey or transmit his enlightenment to another, all of the Buddha's disciples would have been enlightened, all of Jesus' disciples would have been enlightened, all of Meister Eckhart's congregation would have been enlightened. How many became enlightened by reading the words of Lao Tze? How many have become enlightened by reading the words of Ibn Arabi, of Sri Ramakrishna, of Sri Ramana Maharshi? None! Why, then, should I imagine that my words will produce a different result? Enlightenment is clearly an untransmittable condition! My words, like those of countless other enlightened persons, can only awake others to the necessity of forging an intimate relationship with God Himself within their own souls. For it is He alone who is able to confer enlightenment on His children. It is He alone who holds that Power in His hands.

I have spent many years telling everyone that the direct experience of God is available to them—and yet no one has stepped forward to say that they were visited by God in the way I was. Is it possible that I am singularly favored? That I am one in a billion? That, for some unknown reason, God chose to reveal Himself only to me? That, out of all the multitude of human beings on earth at this time, He selected me and me alone to share His secrets with? There have been many others, of course: Heraclitus, Plotinus, Jesus, Meister Eckhart, al-Hallaj, Ibn Arabi, Jnaneshvar, Ramakrishna, and others—but they have been only one or two each century! That's certainly an exclusive club!

Why me? Why do you suppose He chose me? I can't help thinking that it is because He made this soul with an innate desire and ability to speak to all of you about Him, to sing His praise for your benefit. And so, He showed Himself to me, and inspired me from within to go on speaking of Him. I believed then, and I sincerely believe now that you too can know Him as I have known Him. I believe it is His purpose to illumine every soul. He has been generous to me; why wouldn't He be just as generous to you? I don't know why He has not yet revealed Himself to you; I only know that I continue to pray with all my heart that He will reveal to all of you the liberating truth that you and the surrounding universe exist in Him and consist entirely of His all-pervasive Being. In knowing Him as your own eternal Self, you will know eternal freedom and joy, and you will gladly join me in sharing that delight with all your brothers and sisters.

But, clearly, my words describing my experience of God's Grace have absolutely no efficacy in bringing about this experience in others. My words only inform others of the existence of such an experience and the possibility of its recurrence. When I asked the Lord to make me one with Him so that I might speak out in His praise and to His glory for the benefit of all His children, I had hoped that my words of praise might lead others to Him, but my words have only provided evidence for the existence of the nondual mystical experience, and nothing more. I have been unable to stimulate or bring about His Grace either in myself or in others. Grace is not the result of any human thought, word, or act. God's Grace is given of His own free and inscrutable will and to whom He will. I can only pray that He will bestow His wondrously amazing Grace on you!

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