

## **THE LIFE OF A MYSTIC**

**(from *The Mystic's Vision* by Swami Abhayananda.  
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### **Why Mystics?**

There are a number of levels of intelligence and understanding among those who profess to some spiritual understanding. At the bottom of that list are those who accept unquestionably the religious tradition into which they are born, and which comprises their early religious environment. That religious environment may be Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or one of the other less practiced religious traditions, depending on one's family history and geographical location. Such a person is generally accepting of the history, dogmatic literature, and rituals that accompany that particular tradition, and they are relatively unfamiliar with the history, tenets, and practices of religious traditions other than their own. Accordingly, they tend to be suspicious of those other religious traditions and their followers and negatively biased against them.

At a level higher, we find a stratum of students and scholars from each of these traditions, who undertake to comprehend, formulate, analyze and explain the tenets of the religious tradition to which they belong and to which they profess allegiance. These people write books, give lectures, and serve as functionaries and proselytizers of their own particular religious or philosophical tradition. In this way, the accumulated wisdom of the ages is passed from one generation to another.

Periodically, however, into this mix are born a few remarkable individuals who are gifted by God with a divine vision, a vision that reveals God's ever-presence in the soul and in all that exists. These exceptional individuals transcend the partisanship of religious traditions, and are able to see, by the power of God, the unity of God's creation and the all-inclusiveness of God's governorship and love. These are the mystics, the seers, the knowers of the divine Self in all. They bear the Light of God and share His gift of sacred knowledge with all His children. By God's grace, they know the secret that makes men free.

## **Blessedness**

It is evident to everyone that God is adept at concealing Himself; but few people know that He also reveals Himself—and yet He does! He reveals Himself in those who love Him and whose hearts are pure. Since He is in all creatures, He is easily able to reveal His inner presence in those whom He finds worthy. Those to whom He reveals Himself awaken to the knowledge that they and all things are made of God, that He alone constitutes the being of all things in the universe.

Those to whom this revelation comes are known as mystics. Prior to that awakening, they had no idea that they were God’s manifestations. They thought they were merely individual beings alone in the Universe. They didn’t understand that there is but one omnipotent Power who fills all creatures and all things; that He alone exists in every form. If He has not yet revealed Himself in you, pray to Him for His merciful Grace. Let Him know your loneliness without Him. Without the knowledge of His eternal presence, you are lost, even if you know it not. To know Him as your essence, to know Him as your very identity and breath, will so fill your heart with joy and wisdom that you will think of Him every moment and see Him in every thing and every event on earth. You will sing His praise in your heart and delight in the divine beauty all around you in His world. This blessing is the revelation of the true Kingdom of God in which the blessed live forevermore. May He grant this blessing to you.

## **The Enlightened Soul**

One who has been granted the “vision” of the absolute Reality, who has realized the absolute Truth, knows without the least doubt that everything that exists is nothing but God (the Self). He has no more need of philosophical theories about the nature of reality; he has seen that it is God (the Self) who exists as the very consciousness that lives and experiences as ‘I,’ and it is God (the Self) who exists as every perceivable form. In other words, He is, in every case, the subject; and He is, in every case, the object.

Naturally, those people who have not been graced with the realization of this truth identify solely with the individual perspective, which they possess as perceiver, and regard all that they perceive as something other than themselves. But, say the mystics, it is the one eternal Consciousness who is manifesting as the subject, and it is that same Consciousness who is manifesting as the phenomena that we perceive as the objective world. Everything is God (our eternal Self)—both the subject and the object. It is He who is the witness of the universal play, and it is

He who provides that universal drama from His own creative imagination. He projects Himself as Energy-in-form, and then lives within His creation as the many individual conscious subjects who experience that world of forms.

The subject-object relationship is most evident to us in our perception of objects in the external world, but it is just as operative, though in a subtler way, in our perception of internal phenomena—such as thoughts, images, reveries, etc. Ordinarily, we do not think of such phenomena as “objective” occurrences because they are so ephemeral and insubstantial. Also, because they occur within our minds, we tend to view them as part of the “subjective” reality. Strictly speaking, however, the subjective “I,” the witness-Self, is pure, unqualified Consciousness; clear, unblemished Awareness. Thoughts, images, dreams, etc., as they arise, are projected from that pure Consciousness and appear upon that conscious Screen as “objective” phenomena. Thus, on this subtle, mind-level, the witness-Self, which is the true subject, experiences mental phenomena as the “objects” of perception.

The pure Consciousness, or witness-Self, is the only subject; and all that is perceived, both on the subtle and on the gross sensual level, is the object. This apparent duality of subject and object constitutes all experience. Without this apparent separation between the two, no experience would be possible. However, we must never lose sight of the fact that this duality is *apparent* only; and that God and the world, the experiencing Self and the experienced phenomena, is a Unity still. This is the ever-recurring theme of the mystical philosophy of *Advaita*, or “Nondualism.” For, while it admits to an apparent duality existing between the immortal Self and the world-appearance, as between the individual awareness and the activity of the mind, it does not acknowledge an actual duality. There is nothing that is not God: this is the watchword of Nondualism. From this, it clearly follows that *tat tuam asi*, “That thou art.”

However, even though we may know with certainty that this is true, we may continue to identify with our own unique perspective from the standpoint of our own embodied soul. To explain what the soul is, we may compare it with a wave on the ocean, which identifies with its wave-form and not with the entire ocean. From its isolated perspective, it is, of course, a unique wave, separate from all other waves; but when that wave comes to know its own nature, it will realize that it is only a manifestation of the ocean, which has never really divided its identity into separate waves. We too, like waves on the ocean, continue to identify with our separate make-believe identity as the “soul.” When true realization comes, we will know that we were never anything but God, and that no *permanent* “soul” ever existed. Nonetheless, while it has the semblance of existence, the soul cries out in

longing for God, and seeks Him as though, instead of being the subject, He were an object to be attained.

The truth is that, whether we seek Him as the ever-present subject, “I,” or as the ever-present object, “Thou,” we must seek Him beyond the puny ego of individual personality, in the silence of a keen and clear intelligence. For it is only in the upper reaches of concentrated intelligence, in the rarefied atmosphere reached only by a soaring mind, uplifted on the draft of Grace, that He is found. In truth, He is *both* subject and object; it is He who plays *both* of these parts. It is He who calls out to Himself, and it is He who answers, “See, I have always been here as the greater you!”

The man of knowledge, identifying with the One, speaks of being aware of the Self; and the man of devotion, identifying with the soul, speaks of remembering God. But the pure sky of Consciousness whom the man of knowledge calls the Self is the same eternal Consciousness whom the devotee calls God. One identifies himself with that pure Consciousness and calls it “I”; the other regards It as other than himself and calls It “Thou.” But both are setting their eyes toward the same eternal One.

And though the man of knowledge may speak of being aware of the Self, there is no awareness of the Self, for the Self *is* awareness. And the devotee who speaks of remembering God is likewise defeated, for God is quite beyond the comprehension of the intellect or the conception of the imagination or the vision of memory. And to love God is also paradoxical, as God is that very love we feel. These are instances of the difficulty of applying a language that requires a subject, verb, and object to a Unity in which these are all the same.

It is possible, however, to lift the individual soul to the awareness of God in the unitive vision through an intense aspiration, which utilizes “reminders” as rungs on the ladder leading to mental clarity and higher consciousness. Such reminders may take the form of prayer, the reading of devotional works, the singing of hymns of love, or the mental repetition of His name, which brings to the mind of the individual the awareness of God. These lift the consciousness from its limited individual perspective to a Divine perspective from which all is seen as it truly is, as God.

## **The Ascent of The Soul**

The levels of human reality, from the gross physical body inward, have been variously named and described; and in all true metaphysical systems the primary teaching has been that one is able to reach to and experience the divine Self by way of the inner journey only, seeking it by way of self-examination, purification, contemplation and selfless devotion. Self-examination reveals to us that we are more than the physical body with which the immature consciousness identifies. We are more than the effusive mind with which some others identify; more than the intellect which reasons and oversees the mind; more than the individual soul which evolves from lifetime to lifetime. The purification of the soul occurs through the grace of God, causing the soul to desire only God; and the absence of all other desires *is* the soul's purification, leading it naturally to contemplation, selfless devotion, and eventually to the very Bliss of God.

From the perspective of those who have experienced it, the ascent of consciousness occurs quite unexpectedly in a moment of concentrated awareness focused inwardly. The individual soul ascends in Consciousness, drawn on by its inherent thirst to know its Source. When it comes inwardly to a perfect, concentrated stillness, it emerges from its time-bound isolation as an individual creature and awakes to its participation in the consciousness of an all-inclusive Creative Power. And yet above that Creative Power, at a yet subtler stage of consciousness, it knows itself as the eternal One from which the Creative Power takes its origin. It knows this, not as an object is known to a knowing subject, but as the subject's own primary and eternal Identity.

The soul, seeking God, scans the inner darkness, as though to discover another, as though awaiting something external to itself to make its presence known. But as the concentration focuses within, the mind becomes stilled, and suddenly the seeking soul awakes. No external has made its appearance; it is the soul itself, no longer soul, which knows itself to be the All, the One. Like a wave seeking the ocean, the seeker discovers that it is, itself, what it sought. Through contemplation and selfless devotion to that highest Self, we discover that we are the Life in all life, the integrated Whole of which all manifest creatures and things are a part. And, at last we awake to the supremely ultimate Identity, knowing ourselves as the one Light of existence, the Source of all manifestation, the one God who is the true Self of all, and from Whom all else follows.

Those who have experienced the union of their souls with the Divine Mind experience themselves no longer as individual separate identities, but rather as

ideational wave-forms on the one integral ocean of Cosmic Energy. They no longer identify with the composite of body, mind, and soul, but know themselves as having their real identity in the entire undivided ocean of Creative Energy in and on which these temporary forms manifest. The conscious awareness focused on this clear vision of the subtler level of its own reality then moves onward, as one moving through a fog comes to a clearing where the fog is no more, to the ultimate and final level of subtlety, the Divine Source, the Unmanifest. Then, it knows the pure unqualified Consciousness that is the Father, the One, prior even to the Creative Power which acts as Creator; and it knows, "I and the Father are one."

From that vantage point in Eternity one sees one's own Creative Power manifesting all that has manifest existence in a cycle of creation and dissolution. There is a bursting forth, just as the spreading rays of the Sun burst out from their source, and then a returning to that source in a cyclic repetition, much as the cycle of the breath's inhalation and exhalation. One witnesses this from that transcendent vantage point, aware of one's Self as the Eternal One, totally unaffected and unaltered by the expansion and contraction of the out-flowing Creative Force—as a man might watch the play of the breath or the imagination without being at all affected by its rise and fall. That One is the final irreducible Reality, and It is experienced as identity. Nothing could be more certain than the fact that It is who one really is, always was, and always will be.

#### **NOTES:**

1. "From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all." (from Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul", *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Tudor Publishing Co., p. 174).

#### **The Unchanging Testament**

There is a summit of knowledge which has been reached by a few lone souls such as the Buddha, Jesus, Shankara, Ramakrishna, and others. This knowledge came to them by the grace of God, revealing the truth that all existence is forever one. This being so, there are no separate beings such as the Buddha, Jesus, Shankara, etc., but only the One, knowing Himself in all these various forms. Indeed, it is just this knowledge which constitutes the message of every seer of Truth: 'The One exists as you and me. Realize this truth; know that you are that One and be free of the pain of enmity.'

There is but one religion, not many. It is only the childish and the deluded who think otherwise. There is but one substance which is variously named as ‘water’, ‘pani’, ‘jal’, ‘agua’; but no matter what it is called, that same substance quenches the thirst of all. There is but one Life, though it takes various forms, such as tiger, serpent, or man; all breathe one air, all see one light. Understand too that one all-pervading Intelligence fills all minds, gives conscious Light to all that lives. He alone is, and He lives and breathes as us.

In knowing Him, all purposes of life are fulfilled. In shedding darkness from our minds, by rising high above the clouds of ‘me’ and ‘mine’, we come closer to this Light, and merge our souls in Him. This is the tale which all have told who’ve seen the Truth. It is neither old nor new, but it is an unchanging testament that neither time nor place on earth affects. Jesus, Buddha, Ramakrishna—all have reached that same summit, and shown to us the way. Now, we must climb alone and find our way into the Truth which they enjoy and make it finally our own.

### **The Mystic’s Journey**

The person who realizes God in himself, who knows that he and the Father are one, is not a ‘son’ of God; he is not of miraculous birth—those are simply tales for children. Still, the person who realizes God is a distinctly peculiar individual; as a child, he is not drawn to desire the accumulation of wealth or fame. He has no interest in a career in business or politics. He has, from his earliest years, a pervasive interest in broad areas of learning that more conventional people would regard as impractical—such as poetry, literature and the history of philosophical thought. Unlike his peers and other normal young people, he has an overriding interest in the writings and sayings of the philosophers and innovative thinkers of the past. To others, he seems directionless, but he is driven by an inner fire that has its own purpose and its own imperceptible objective.

By the time he reaches his late twenties, the purpose of his searching, the direction of his objective, at last becomes clear: through his learning, he discovers the teachings of the mystics of the various religious traditions, and through them becomes enamored with God. It is then that he procures solitude and begins to spend his quiet wakeful nights in prayer and in the searching of his own heart. As his longing for God grows in intensity, he prays that he may become united with Him so that he may share the truth and glory of God with all his brothers and sisters; and in that moment the Divine within him reveals Itself in a culminating

burst of inner glory, allowing him to see the world through the eyes of God, and know that all is He.

For some time, he experiences incredible heights of ecstasy. Then, in the days left to him, our mystic endeavors to fulfill his commitment to share with all God's children the knowledge God has bestowed upon him, and God enables his sharing by inspiring him with His presence. This story, though rare, occurs again and again through the ages. It is the story of the mystics who've gone before and of those who are to come. This self-concealing and self-revealing of the merciful Lord is simply a regular feature of His unfolding cosmic play. He is the Giver, and He is the receiver. It is He who sees, and He who is seen. He is the sole Reality living in this universe and in the hearts of all beings.

### **How The Enlightened Man Lives**

How does the enlightened man live? He lives free of concern for himself, for he lives only to serve. As he views all the world as his own self, he acts always for the good of all. He is relaxed, asking for nothing; he relies on the universal order, trusting entirely in the perfect benevolence of the One. He is friendly to everyone, knowing all are struggling in the face of death. He gives, unconcerned with receiving, for the One he serves fills his heart with joy, and that is all the reward he needs.

He is wise, but he appears to be a fool. He appears to be poor, but he is the wealthiest of men. He lives and acts in the world like everyone else, finding enjoyment in pleasures, like everyone else. But, to him, it is all a game, quickly put aside. He does not follow the broad pathways of men, but he keeps to his own quiet ways. His is a life of peace, hidden and calm, though he accomplishes a thousand marvelous deeds. He seeks no glory or honor, and so is ignored by the world. He is a roaring fire, shedding light for generations, warming hearts both living and unborn; yet, in his own heart, he never strays from the sweet tranquility of his eternal home.



## **The Retention of Divine Awareness**

I am occasionally asked if I continue to have ‘mystical’ experiences similar to my initial experience in the mountain forests of Santa Cruz which I documented in my book, *The Supreme Self*. The answer is ‘No, I do not continue to have similar experiences.’ But the truth is that there is a kind of ‘accustomization’ that has followed that experience, and which increases or diminishes in clarity at various times. It’s like any other kind of knowledge—say the knowledge of one’s proximate environment; there are times when it becomes more pronounced in your awareness, and times when it is less so. I find it impossible to retain the same level of awareness of God’s presence in a continuous manner, without interruption; but I nonetheless make every effort to retain that awareness as best I can at all times.

My initial mystical experience was truly transformational; I was never the same again. I had been given an enlightening knowledge that affected my vision of myself and the world forever thereafter and instilled in me a lasting certainty that has never been more than the flutter of an eyelid away. For the most part, I hold onto the knowledge that He alone is—in my surroundings, in myself, and in the guidance and movement of all that exists. The intensely clarified awareness of His intimate presence, however, comes only rarely, though I long for it constantly. It’s quite possible that age has some deleterious effect on the refinement and clarity of my intellect and my spiritual perception; I can’t say for certain. But so long as He grants me the capability of remembering Him, I am filled repeatedly with an upsurging of loving gratitude and freedom from care that is invincible. My knowledge remains as strong and certain as ever, and I live consciously, confidently, in His merciful grace.

## **The Life of a Self-Realized Man**

O the life of a Self-realized man! It’s much like yours, my friend;  
 I feel the prick of ennui and suffer the ignorance of men;  
 I know the annoying insistence of passions and the trickery of the brain;  
 I endure the deterioration of the body and its attendant pains,  
 And the requirements of providing bread for my table and a shelter for my head.  
 Like you, I muddle through from day to day, and find a welcome refuge in my bed.  
 I watch with hope this troubled world and see no end to pain.  
 But, O my friends, I’ve shared eternity with God;  
 I’ve seen the infinite, eternal Self of all beyond this bubble of a world;

And deep down know a peace and joy unsullied by this maudlin scene.

I merged into the heart of God and saw the universe explode in form,  
 And then implode again, a breath-like cycle, endlessly repeated.  
 I balanced, poised in mindless vision, in His still domain, at one with Him;  
 And saw no separation or division, nor I or Thou, nor now or then.  
 The pairs of opposites were no more, but canceled out  
 In breathless heights of all-inclusive oneness;  
 And I knew the everlasting Self of God as me, the only I who ever was.  
 Though bound, like you, to worldly life, I'm free; my heart is calm and certain.  
 I know the "I" beyond my role here in this paltry play;  
 And when I exit from the stage, I'll still be I, backstage,  
 The One who plays all roles, who lives to ply His art once more  
 With plots, and lines, and costumes ever new.

And, even now, while taking in the very air you breathe,  
 And walking on the very shores of time you walk,  
 I breathe, as well, the light eternal and walk the hallowed skies.  
 My heart imbibes the sweetest joy time's shadows can't obscure;  
 And, like a man with either foot astride a threshold,  
 I'm here, though I am there.  
 I walk the world on tiptoe, with my head above the clouds;  
 My eyes are fixed undeviatingly on God's perpetual smile.  
 And, though you see me here with you, performing on the boards,  
 I'm there, in God's unbounded bliss, my own eternal Self.

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