

ABOUT MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

A Compilation of Articles from The Mystic's Vision

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A Gift To Be Shared

We all realize that we possess a perspective on the world that is entirely self-centered. Each of us is the center of our own world, the subjective focal point round which everything else turns. My experience is different from your experience; yours is different from mine. And, while we can verbally share our experiences and our perspectives with one another, if those experiences and perspectives are not *personally* acquired, they remain mere hearsay, and do not have the same affect that *personal* experiences do.

Despite this acknowledged incommunicability of personal experiences, I have spent a good portion of my life attempting to convey to others some sense of a mystical experience of my own that I feel has some real importance for everyone, and therefore needs to be communicated.¹ It is an experience that occurred to me more than fifty years ago, and yet it is a timeless one, in that it was an experience of eternity itself. Strangely enough, I had vowed to God to give pronouncement to this experience even before it was given to me: "Let me be one with Thee," I prayed, "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." I can only explain the uncharacteristic selflessness of this prayer as being itself the work of God. And, of course, since God granted my request, you can well understand that I am not only obligated but am resolutely committed to praising God in His glory for your benefit, and for the benefit of everyone.

When Jesus first described the mystical experience that occurred in him during a baptism ceremony on the banks of the Jordan river, the term, "mystical experience" had not yet been coined. Today, it is a commonly recognized term, and yet the experience it connotes is still not yet fully understood. This is because it is an experience not of the body or the mind, but of the soul, and it is described by those who have experience it in various ways, according to the intensity or profundity of each individual's experience.

In the early twentieth century, William James pointed out in his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, that religious or mystical experience occurs in a myriad of ways, as though on a spectrum, from a vague and momentary sense of God's love filling the universe to a complete immersion in the Divine, in which one experiences their separate identity to be merged in and made one with the universal Spirit. Each instance of mystical experience has its own unique characteristics, and each experiencer appears to be absorbed in the Divine Light to a greater or lesser degree. For some, it is but a momentary mood or fleeting awareness, and for some others it is a prolonged period of a life-transforming 'union' with God, and the awareness of "oneness" with the Father of all Creation.

I am well aware that it is as true today as it was in the time of Jesus or Plotinus that the great majority of the people are ignorant of the existence of such mystical experience. Despite the many learned studies and the many available accounts of mystical experience by well-reputed people throughout the ages, the majority of the people remain as ignorant as before. Why is this so? It is so because the people comprising the ignorant majority do not have personal knowledge of mystical experience in their own lives and are therefore extremely reluctant to believe that such experiences have occurred to others or that they are relevant to their own lives. I understand this well, as I was once a member of that ignorant majority. And yet, today, I would say to that majority: the very fact that a few souls have experienced divine revelations *does* have a major relevance to your own lives. Mystical experience is a revelation of the nature of the reality in which all of us live. It is as relevant to you as it is to those who are the direct recipients of that experience.

God's gracious gift to me of mystical vision was undoubtedly meant for all of us. It was a rare gift of the knowledge that this world is His own, that you are His own, that nothing in the universe is outside of His divine domain; that if we can fully comprehend this truth, we will be able to see His love, and His wisdom in all that is created and know His blissful presence in our own lives. For He is the air that fills our lungs; He is the awareness that allows us to experience and to know; He is the kindness that overflows in our hearts. Open your mind to Him, and know the unlimited wonder and joy of being, for your being is *His* being; your being is the expression of His infinite love.

This God-given vision was my own personal experience, to be sure, but it is His wish, and therefore it is my wish as well, that you come to know Him in yourself. Look to Him for all that you wish for in this life, and you will be fulfilled beyond your wildest dreams. And, if you are very fortunate, He may also grant to you, as He did to me, the vision of your timeless divinity

in Him. So, may it be.²

NOTES:

1. If you would like to read a detailed account of my experience of God, please see my book, *The Supreme Self*, available on my website as a free download.

2. *Belief* in God is ultimately unsatisfactory; one must come to *know* Him. Even if we *believe* something with all our heart and soul, it is not the same as *knowing*. *Knowing* is a personal first-hand experience of that which is known. *Knowing* is not a surety based on someone else's say so, regardless of however reliable that person may be, regardless of what religious bigots may say. And so, you may *believe* what I say, or what Jesus or Moses or Muhammed or any other revered spiritual seer may say, but neither you nor I may truly say, "I know," until we have *personally* experienced that truth first-hand in our own being.

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 know the Spirit supreme,” said Svetasvatara, “whose grace moves the hearts of men.”¹ “He is the Eternal whom the sages see as the source of all creation,” said the author of the Mundaka Upanishad.² “[There] a man has all, for he is one with the ONE.”³ About five hundred years later, another, a young prince named Siddhartha, who became 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; “MyMe 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 eternal 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!”

NOTES:

1. *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 3; Juan Mascaro (trans.), *The Upanishads*, London, Penguin Books, 1965; pp. 89-90.
2. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1:1; Juan Mascaro, *Ibid.*
3. *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 1; Juan Mascaro, *Ibid.*
4. *Sadadhama Sundarika*, 15:21; Radhakrishnan, S., *Indian Philosophy* (Vol. 1), London, Geo. Allen & Unwin, 1962, p. 600.
5. New Testament, Gospel of John, 10:30.

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, and many others. 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 phenomenon!

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 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 beings, permeating and constituting 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 unfailing 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, only He can unite your awareness with His. 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, the intellect, 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 the aperture is narrowed, only a little pinpoint of light is able to enter 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 fifteenth-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 God's 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. Vidhyaranya, *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 frequently occurs to those who are members 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 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 not talking about the common preliminary experience of divine Love which many report having known during a brief opening of their consciousness; 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.

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 that is experienced in a way 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 becomes 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 of consciousness, 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.

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 has 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 as a limited self, 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: for 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 beautiful 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!

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