

Science of Mysticism

(Compiled by Sri. Ulpiano Manlangit)

The word mysticism comes down to us from the Greeks and is derived from a root meaning, “to close”. The mystic was one who had been initiated into the esoteric knowledge of Divine things, and upon whom was laid the necessity of keeping silence concerning his sacred knowledge. The term “mystical” then might be applied to any secret cult revealed only to the initiated. The mystic was the initiate who in an oath of secrecy swore to be silent or to keep his mouth shut about the inner working of the his new-found sacred knowledge.

Mysticism has been described as a mode of life that can bring us closer to God without using long and verbal praises. It is a view of life, which transcends the images of God created by human intellect or imagination. It is a psychological technique, which seeks to establish direct communication with the Spirit through the channel of interior contemplation. Mysticism, is an immediate, direct, intuitive knowledge of God or of ultimate reality attained through personal religious experience. Wide variations are found in both the form and the intensity of mystical experience. The authenticity of any such experience, however, is not dependent on the form, but solely on the quality of life that follows the experience. The mystical life is characterised by enhanced vitality, productivity, serenity, and joy as the inner and outward aspects harmonise in union with God.

The main inspiration and source of mysticism is the Bible for the Christians, the Sutras for the Buddhist, Hindu Scriptures for the Hindus, the Holy Quran for the Islam and the Sufis, and the Kabala & the Torah for the Jewish mystics. The next source of mysticism or mystical experience is the results of profound meditation and contemplation, which have been the common practice of mystics and yogis.

The aim of the mysticism however is to establish a conscious relation with the Absolute and find the personal object of love. It is an innate tendency of the human soul to be united with Ultimate Reality, when God ceases to be an object and becomes an experience. Union with God is therefore the ultimate aim of mysticism and the purpose of man or the attainment of Cosmic Consciousness.

Research in mysticism differs from that of contemporary scientist in that it includes a profoundly religious dimension. Here is a whole dimension of mystery that scientific investigation cannot touch. For the traditional mystic, the very centre of his practice is purity of motivation in such wise that he seeks the Ultimate with what was called “pure and chaste love”. There is no way of measuring and programming any love, much less divine love, however the measure of loving God is to love without measure.

Something like **grace** has to be taken into account in the lives of all great mystics whether they are Jewish, Christian, Hindu or Buddhist. *One of the old and high esteemed master compared enlightenment to the chicken emerging from the shell. Push as it may, the tiny chick cannot break out to freedom unless the mother pecks the shell from the outside.* The futility of human effort and the necessity of a call are a note that is sounded in the mysticism of all the great religions. It is strikingly presented in the Upanishad’s where the Ultimate, called the Self (Brahman and Atman), is the one who chose the calls: That Self can not be attained by the study of the Scriptures, nor by the intellect, or by learning. Assiduous study of the Scripture, practice in breathing, sitting and awareness-these things has value; but in the last analysis what matter is grace.

Mysticism, the new science

Mysticism can be a unifying factor in a world searching for wholeness. Already it has done much towards bringing together the great religions. We now see that Hindus and Christians, Buddhists and Jews can dialogue and understand one another better at the level of mystical experience than at the level of philosophy. But mysticism can be meeting ground not only for believers in the various

religions but also for scientists and religionists. These latter approach the problem at the level of mystery, of ultimate concern, of transcendence; and they can dialogue with those who approach the same problem as psychologists, psychiatrists, neurologists, physicists, biologists and the rest. Who doubts that we have great need of some unifying science? And mysticism may well be the answer.

Mysticism of most well known religions

Elaborate philosophical theories have been developed in an attempt to explain the phenomena of mysticism. Thus, in Hindu philosophy and particularly in the metaphysical system known as the Vedanta, the self or atman in man is identified with the supreme self, or Brahman, of the universe. The apparent separateness and individuality of beings and events are held to be an illusion (Sanskrit Maya), or convention of thought and feeling. This illusion can be dispelled through the realisation of the essential oneness of Atman and Brahman. When the religious initiate has overcome the beginningless ignorance (Sanskrit avidya) upon which depends the apparent separability of subject and object, of Self and not self, a mystical state of liberation, or muksha, is attained.

In Christianity, as we have already seen, mysticism begins and ends with the experience of being loved. 'We love, because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19). The secret of the energy and fire of Paul and Bernard and Teresa was not so much that they loved (this was secondary) as their conviction of being loved. So also the prophets. They are called from their mother's womb- that is to say, that they are called without merit on their part. 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.' (Jeremiah 1:5). This call is gratuitous. It does not come because Jeremiah is good but because God is good. And so the principal thing in the mystical life is not to love but to receive love, not to love God and man but to let yourself be love by God and man. Don't put barrier in the way; don't put a defence mechanism; let love come in- because human love is a response to divine love. This is the key to mysticism.

Reflection; Union with God:

Once upon a time, the story begins, some seekers (disciples) from the city ask the local monk a question:

"How does one seek union with God?"

And the Wise One said, "The harder you seek, the more distance you create between God and you."

"So what does one do about the distance?" the seekers asked.

And the elder said simply, "Just understand that it isn't there."

"Does that mean that God and I are one?" the disciples said.

And the monk said, "Not one. Not two."

"But how is that possible?" the disciples insisted.

And the monk answered, "Just as the sun and its light, the ocean and the wave, the singer and the song. Not one, But not two."