

Mysticism for the Modern Mind

Mystical experience has been widely regarded as the peak in devotional experience. It is often described as including the following characteristic components:

- * A feeling of unity, a sense that ultimately all is one. Within the individual it is “getting one’s self together” in a profound way. For the interpersonal it is a deep awareness that no person is an island. Even more deeply it is a vivid awareness of the unity of all things in God.
- * A sense of transcendence of time and space. Mystics are often unaware of the passage of time or of their physical location, so intense is their concentration on the universal and eternal.
- * Ineffability or defying definition in available language. Mystics cannot fully describe their experience to another person any more than one can clearly describe deep love, or an ecstatic response to beauty.
- * A noetic quality or an overwhelming experience of understanding. There is a greater transparency to truth, as though the intervening veils had been dropped. With amazing clarity one sees what is really important. By cleansing of the windows of perception, everything appears as it is – related, infinite, and purposive.
- * A mood of joy, assurance, and power that is deeply felt. Fear, guilt, and anxiety are replaced by courage, acceptance, and security. Doubt and inner conflict become certainty and harmony. Bathed in love, the mystic becomes utterly alive.
- * Continuing changes in attitude and behavior which persist after the peaks of intensity.

Christian mystics at their best have emphasized not so much the ecstasy of the experience as the profound inner transformation which brought their wills into alignment with God’s purposes.

Mysticism has also taken forms which run counter to commendable contemporary emphases: world-denying, person-denying, anti-rational, bizarre fantasies.

The mystical experience does not necessarily stumble into these traps. Instead of being world-denying, the mystic can be world-affirming. Mysticism can enhance rather than stifle the individual person. Rather than becoming anti-rational, mysticism can preserve a harmonious blend of the rational and the intuitional, the cognitive and the emotional.