

Journey 26 - MYSTICAL STATES

The common usage of the term “mystical” is “everything unseen and unreal.” It was the late 19th Century American philosopher William James who gave us a usable definition of “mystical” in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. A mystic is not someone who has read about mysticism, or believes in it, or pursues it, or practices it. Mystics are those who have actually had mystical experience.

Among religious experiences, only the mystical experiences are the same whatever the religion. They are reproducible in the sense required by scientific method. William James lists a number of characteristics of mystical experiences:

- (1) They are ineffable. That is, one cannot talk about them.
- (2) They are Noetic. That is, each conveys some deep and profound truth.
- (3) They are transient.
- (4) They are ecstatic.
- (5) The mystic is passive.
- (6) There is a sense of union with everything.

He has left off the best indicator, the numinous feeling of light. Illuminated, in other words. That is why we are the illuminati. Item (6) is not quite right. All mystical states are unitary, in that one sees seemingly contradictory things, like good and evil, as part of one whole, but that is not the same as a sense of union with everything. It is not so much that mystics are unable to talk about their experience as that they are unwilling to do so. Saint Thomas Aquinas experienced illumination in his old age, and he would say nothing about it, except that it made nonsense of all his writing. If a person is young when they have their illumination, and they live long, there may come a time when they decide it would be better for mankind to talk about it. It still feels like casting pearls before swine, in other words, revealing something ultimately precious, timidly, in hopes that others will not trample it in the mud. As far as passivity is concerned, that may be true of the accidental mystic, people like me, but it would not be true of someone who achieved a mystical state by deliberate spiritual exercises of some sort. Mystical states are not all transient. I can spend hours at-one with the wind, the prairie, the moon, and this is the experience of the nature mystic. I can also spend hours in the luminous world of genius, the ecstatic world of the advanced day-dreamer, “bathing in the waters.”

I make a new and shorter list that distinguishes the mystical state. The requirements are (1) Illumination, (2) Noesis, (3) Ecstasy, and (4) Unitary insights.

When I was 31, I experienced the illumination of fire, also known as Cosmic Consciousness. Fire filled and surrounded me. There are five to seven illuminations with specific colors of light, as well as three other mystical states that are numinous and ecstatic, but not filled with any particular color. Each has its own Noesis.

The word “en-light-enment” has “light” as its root, so one would expect it to refer to Illumination. Buddhists translate the desired state “enlightenment,” but I have it on good authority that this is a mistranslation, and the term really means “awakening.” The style of meditation practiced in

Buddhism does not lead to Illumination, but it may well lead to other kinds of epiphanies, such as "awakening."