

Who Is A Mystic?

In Evelyn Underhill's massive book (1990) entitled *The Preeminent Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual consciousness* she describes a mystical experience as "the will is united with the emotions in an impassioned desire to transcend the sense-world, in order that the self may be joined by love to the one eternal and ultimate Object of love; whose existence is intuitively perceived by that which we used to call the soul, but now find it easier to refer to as the 'cosmic' or 'transcendental' sense (p. 71).

She further defines the mystic type as "a curious and definite type of personality...their one passion appears to be the prosecution of a certain spiritual and intangible quest; the finding of a 'way out' or a 'way back' to some desirable state in which alone they can satisfy their craving for absolute truth" (p. 3). She continues on to say that "mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else, and that the mystic is the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it. Not to *know about*, but to *Be*, is the mark of the real initiate" (p.72).

When Freud severed his ties with Carl Jung it was because Jung had been labeled a mystic. This was then known as someone *who knew God*. William James (1902/1985, p. 380), noted that...anyone who lived in his time who simply believed in telepathy or in reincarnation could be called "a mystic!" Maslow (1972, p. 359) stated "people who have these experiences value it very highly, often above all other experiences."

Psychologists Who Understood God

Carl Jung seems to agree with William James when he stated, "God, therefore, is unchangeable, and is called one for the reason that he changes not" (1968, CW, Vol. 9, I, p. 354). Whereas, James says in *Reflex Action and Theism*, "What kind of a being would God be, if he did exist? (James 1956/1897, p. 120). First, it is essential that God be conceived as the deepest power in the universe and second; he must be conceived under the form of a mental personality. And God must be concerned in holding of certain things dear and those things must be all good and righteous things. God's personality is to be regarded, like any other personality, as something lying outside of my own and other than me, and whose existence I simply come up on and find...hearkening to our cry, can come...the essence remains unchanged" (p. 112).

Abraham Maslow gave a definition of God in his book, *Religions, Values and Peak-Experiences* (1970): "Even the word 'God' is being defined by many theologians today in such a way as to exclude the conception of a person with a form, a voice, a beard, etc. If God gets to be defined as 'Being itself,' or as 'the integrating principle in the universe,' or as 'the whole of everything,' or as 'the meaningfulness of the cosmos,' or in some other non-personal way, then what

will atheists be fighting against? They may very well agree with the ‘integrating principles’ or ‘the principle of harmony’” (p. 45).

I, for one, would have loved to have learned in graduate school that the men who are my psychological ancestors not only wrote about God but apparently believed in Him (and, hopefully, Her). And they knew clients were having mystical experiences! I’d love to know if any other therapists were ever taught this at their school of higher learning. The reason therapists should know this is so they can understand clients who are having such experiences and then they will not label them as “psychotic,” which could be described as the hearing of something that is invisible. (Because most people who are having a psychotic experience/s usually hear things. It’s unusual that they “see” anything).

Differences in those clients who have a mystical or a psychotic experience are:

- A psychotic hallucination usually has no basis in fact.
- Someone with psychosis cannot tell you the same story over and over again.
- A psychotic experience is usually negative to the patient.
- A mystical or spiritual experience can be repeated over and over again by the person having it and the story does not change. This shows the therapist that the client has a good functioning ego.
- It is usually positive.
- The person having the spiritual or mystical experience can move in or out of this state. With psychosis, this is not the case.
- A psychotic is grandiose or inflated in his or her delusion.
- A mystic is humbled by his or her experience.

Underhill (1990) again seems to sum it up brilliantly when she stated, “Now and again something stings it (the Soul) into consciousness, and man is caught up to the spiritual level, catches a glimpse of the ‘secret plan.’ Then hints of a marvelous truth, a unity whose note is ineffable peace, shine in created things; awakening in the self a sentiment of love, adoration and awe. Its life is enhanced, the barrier of personality is broken, man escapes the sense-world, ascends to the apex of his spirit and enters for a brief period into the more extended life of the All” (p. 74). This, I believe, to be a classic explanation of a mystical experience and anyone who has experienced this would be considered a mystic. People who have experienced these felt they were extraordinary phenomena that affected them spiritually, physically and emotionally in a very positive way. An intense mystical experience has a temporary duration and they are universal.

Other features of a classic mystical experience are:

- Suddenness of onset

- A sense of external or internal light
- A feeling of profound joy
- Difficulty in verbalizing the experience
- A sense of perceiving “the” goal or purpose of existence
- Sometimes one may also feel unconditionally loved
- There seems to be a larger plan for the individual
- A transcending of the usual ego-boundaries (where one fears they are “crazy”)
- An utter conviction of immortality
- A sense of authoritativeness

Mystical experiences may be deliberately induced by:

- Restrictions on diet and sexual activity
- Breathing and postural exercises (yoga)
- Sensory deprivation in caves or monastic cells
- Drugs – psychedelic and otherwise
- Breathing techniques

In 1994, the American Psychiatric Association officially recognized the “Religious or Spiritual” V-Code 62.89 as a normal dimension of human life. The proper clinical attitude is to accept this V-Code and a client’s story as positive and true even though most clinicians have not received training on this code or on mystical or near-death experiences.

In 1993-1994 I trained under Robert Turner, PhD, of San Francisco, California on this V-Code. In August of 2005, I interviewed him. Dr Turner was one of the writers and creators of the V-Code that was placed by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in the *DSM-IV* in 1994.

Dr. Turner told me that his group “presented a thirty-five page paper in our proposal. We gave them (the APA) all the literature reviews and statistics for Mystical Experiences and Near-Death Experiences, but they decimated the definition. They allowed the word spiritual to be used and were uncomfortable enough having to accept this category, but they completely deluded the whole mean of the V-Code by dropping the words ‘mystical and near-death experiences.’”

(Please Note: It was the statistics of 30-40% of the population, in 1994, having mystical and near-death experiences that got the V-Code into the *DSM-IV* in the first place. Statistics now show that 30-50% of the populations in the United States and Great Britain report having had at least one experience that minimally qualifies as mystical (Cardena, Lynn & Krippner, 2000, p. 429).

The purpose of the ASCSI is to discern, develop and disseminate knowledge of how consciousness studies and paranormal phenomena may relate to and enhance development of the human spirit. Many of our members have had mystical experiences. Many people write me in an attempt to ascertain what has happened to them because they now have more purpose in life and feel more connected to others; however, their culture (in other countries), like ours, has no place at the moment for mystical experiences. That is our goal with our organization. We want to help all those who come to us develop spiritually no matter what type of mystical or spiritual experience they have had. They are all mystics!

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