

A SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

Study shows that the message of mystics of all times and places is in essence the same, irrespective of language, culture or religion. A mystic is someone who finds answers to the big questions of life by research within his or her consciousness. Through their research mystics have discovered that there is a 'spiritual' world that lies behind and animates the 'mental' and 'physical' worlds. While for most of us things spiritual are no more than concepts, for the mystic they are facts of life, constantly experienced.

It is as if mystics are telling us that the human being is highly sophisticated hardware that comes with three software programs, the senses, mind and spirit. Most of us know of and use only two programs, the senses and the mind. The mystic shows us how to activate the spiritual program and make human life complete. To follow mysticism is therefore not like adopting a new religion or philosophy, which is a re-programming of our mental and physical software. Mysticism activates our spiritual software, our innate spiritual capacity, which benefits us regardless of what teaching we follow. Every human being has equal potential in this respect.

When we try to answer ultimate questions about our existence using only two of our natural software programs, we become confused and, due to our differing cultures and backgrounds, come into conflict. If anyone, whether a mystic or a priest, tells us profound truths about who or what we are, those words alone do not make us understand or feel those truths. We need, by developing the third software program through spiritual practice, to experience these truths for ourselves, to make them a lived reality. When we see the spiritual reality, our conflicts over religious dogmas evaporate. On the platform of spiritual life human beings can come together as one.

The Mystic Cosmology

In recent centuries we have developed many complex material sciences generating impressive bodies of knowledge about the world and human beings. But this research has been confined to the mental and physical realms. How far along is our research and knowledge about spirituality? For example, particle physics now recognizes the intricate interconnectedness of the entire universe. Mystics share this understanding, teaching that there is one divine wellspring of life, a vibrant and positive energy, a single source of all being, namely spirit. Scientists, in their search for the theory of everything, may have already reached the limits of the power of the mind to capture and describe reality using words, concepts, symbols and images. Mystics explain that for us to know about spirit we must go beyond mind and physical senses. One must use the method, the software, that is compatible with discovering spiritual truth, which is by developing our spiritual capacity within.

The Spiritual Journey

Mystics describe the quest for spiritual truth as a journey we make within our own bodies, within our consciousness. To understand this journey we need first to understand where we start from, our present spiritual condition. The life of each of us, mystics teach, is projected in its perfect whole from a single source beyond time. But on planes of mind and matter, we

live our lives under the illusion of time and the law of cause and effect or action and reaction. Everything we do we have to pay for. The soul, coupled to mind and body, must reap the harvests of these sowings, and moves from life to life, form to form, living and dying over and over again. We are now caught in this cycle, called the wheel of life, the cycle of reincarnation, or the law of karma, which many of the world's peoples have long understood as a basic fact of life.

Given this situation, how should we choose to act? Mystics urge us to wake up, ask ourselves what it is that makes us suffer and where our real happiness lies, and then make the appropriate choices. They advise us to turn our consciousness away from the pain-filled material life of ceaseless change, the spinning rim of the wheel of life, and toward the stability of life's unmoving centre.

They explain that at the centre of life is spirit, one and indivisible. Spirit is perfection, imperturbable, the origin of all. From the one emerges all diversity, all forms from the most subtle to the most gross, all activity and complexity, the entire creation. Spirit is love. Spirit is energy. Spirit is life. Mind, matter and senses have no life of their own—they are the means by which spirit expresses and manages itself in material dimensions. Spirit comes from a source beyond mind and matter, and beyond the law of cause and effect. Soul, a drop of spirit that allows a being to be defined apart from the ocean of spirit, is the energy or power that sustains individualized life. When soul, the life force, leaves a body or living being, that body dies, disintegrates, and reverts to its original matter, dust to dust. If spirit leaves the creation, the creation disintegrates and reverts to an earlier, less-formed reality. The mystic journey of enlightenment, then, is the expansion and deepening of consciousness from life's most transient material manifestations to the permanence of its spirit-filled heart.

Making the Journey

For the practice of mysticism to be successful, a person works both on the inside and on the outside to create conditions favorable to the expansion of consciousness. On the outside, he or she minimizes the binding force of cause and effect through compassionate and mindful living: a vegetarian diet, no intoxicating or mind-altering substances, and a code of conduct that shapes positive and spiritually supportive relations with others. On the inside, time is given daily to the practice of meditation to re-orient the mind inwards. Meditation techniques engage the dominant faculties of speech, sight and hearing to focus the attention and shift it away from the senses and towards the spirit—and from this arises a state of concentration, heightened awareness and perfect stillness. When concentration becomes perfect, dedication absolute, and yearning so intense it can no longer be supported, consciousness passes naturally into another dimension. Wisdom literature from all traditions describes this experience as blissful beyond imagination, filled with the experience of spirit as captivating sound and radiant light. Look to the writings of any mystic to learn about this ecstatic state of being!

Meditation is thus the path leading to the depths, breadths and heights of spiritual experience. Meditation enables contact with spirit, the one continuum that holds creation together, the thread of life on which creation's pearls are strung. Spirit has been referred to in the writings of religions by many names—Logos, Word, Nam, Shabd, Holy Spirit, Tao, Kalima, Akash

Bani, and many other names. Once contacted consciously within, this spirit draws our consciousness, our soul, upward through ever more subtle realms to the luminous tranquility of ultimate reality. Meditation is the journey of attuning oneself with the spiritual ocean of pure being.

Only as human beings can we make this journey. Only a human being has the ability to direct consciousness to its advantage. To meditate is to install the complete human software, to awaken the spiritual capacity. Through this practice we embark on the path, the ‘middle way’ of balanced living, that takes us to our ultimate destination.

Mystics down through the ages have left teachings that make us aware, inform us, about this path. But living mystics, if we can find them, perform a still more fundamental role. Because they have walked the path themselves, they can guide us personally along the way, just as they were themselves guided by their own teacher. And, because they have realized the spiritual dimension, living mystics manifest its reality even on our plane of existence, giving us immense inspiration and a powerful example to follow. Mystics explain to us that it is part of the natural order that true masters are always living on earth to guide spiritual seekers. In the Sufi tradition of Islam these teachers are called *murshid* or *pir*, in the *bhakti* traditions of India *guru* or *satguru*, in the hasidic tradition of Judaism, the *zaddik*.

To travel the path back to our divine source is the true purpose of life in the human form. Whether this divine source is referred to as spirit, God, Lord, Allah, Wahiguru, Adonai, Buddha, the One, any other name, or no name at all, is a matter of individual preference. How to describe one’s spiritual life, what outward practices to follow in support of one’s inner life, whether to belong to any religion and which one, are all equally individual choices. What is of importance is to cultivate the experience of spirit.

Claiming Our Inheritance

Mystics say that each one of us is the rightful heir to a treasure of inestimable value. We are all of one lineage and one family. But, because we have lost sight of who we are, we feel that something is missing in our lives and we suffer from confusion and conflict. The infinite wealth of spirituality is our birthright, and will be ours when we develop our spiritual capacity as human beings, awaken to our true identity and return to our spiritual source. To achieve this we need only right conduct and right spiritual practice under the guidance of a living mystic teacher.