



Mysticism—True and False

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THE great seer-philosopher, Shankara, once sketched a pen-and-ink drawing of a *guru* seated under a tree with his disciples surrounding him. The master was young and the disciples were old, and they were seated in silence. The disciples were old because our doubts, superstitions, and *karmas* are also old, as are the deeds and the effects of them which we carry from birth to death. The master is young because the truth of God, though ancient, is at the same time ever youthful and ageless.

Sri Ramakrishna tells a parable concerning a disciple who came to a teacher to study and learn about God. The disciple said, "Sir, teach me about God." The guru remained silent. Again the disciple asked the same question, and again the master said nothing. But when he asked the question the third time, the guru replied, "But I am teaching you, can't you see? His name is silence."

This truth — that in silence God becomes revealed in the hearts of the disciples and all doubts disappear — many of us witnessed for ourselves as we sat in the presence of our own Master, Swami Brahma-

nanda, who was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. On occasion he would remain completely silent in the company of others, or talk about very casual things. But when these people left his presence, their problems were solved. And when we, his disciples, sat near him we felt that it was so very easy to find God; as though he were like a fruit in the palm of the hand.

This is what we call mysticism. The means by which that Reality, the ultimate truth of God, can be revealed in the hearts of each and every individual. And what is that ultimate Reality? It can best be defined in the words of the Upanishads: "The eternal amongst the noneternals of life; the highest abiding joy in the midst of the fleeting pleasures of life." And when this eternal truth becomes revealed within your own heart, then fulfillment comes into your life. Scriptures and gospels exist; you may read, study, and memorize them, even quote them glibly. But within your own heart, darkness and ignorance will still remain. God *is*. What is the proof? Proof is not the authority of the scriptures merely or words of the teacher. Proof lies in the fact that it is possible for you to *experience* God. For until you experience him for yourself, the truth of his existence will always be uncertain; doubts will continue to remain.

Unfortunately, in the West a great many ministers say that no one can see God. They tell us only to have faith. (Many of them are even denying the existence of God!) But to really have faith in God, I must know him. I must see him. Let me give you an illustration. There was once a young man by the name of Naren —

later to become known as Swami Vivekananda—who doubted the existence of God. He said to himself that in order for me to believe in God's existence I must see him; the truth of his Being must be revealed to me. He went to various priests and holy men and asked them all the same question: "Sir, have you seen God?" None of them could give him a satisfactory answer. Then he came, at long last, to Sri Ramakrishna and asked him: "Sir, have you seen God?"

And for the first time he was told: "Yes, I have seen him. I have seen him more directly, more distinctly than I now see you before me."

"Can you show him to me?"

"Yes, I can," Ramakrishna answered. For it was possible for him to grant that vision by only a touch. And not only a touch. I have, myself, heard from one of the disciples of Ramakrishna how this person was once seated under a tree trying to meditate. But his mind was distracted. Then, all at once, he saw Ramakrishna standing before him, gazing at him, and the disciple went into *samadhi*.

Did not Christ say: "Be thou whole!" They say Christ healed people, that he performed miracles. But did he come only to heal or perform miracles? No. (I am reminded of a statement by the French philosopher Rousseau: "Get rid of the miracles and the whole world will fall at the feet of Jesus Christ." And it is certain that a Hindu India would appreciate Christ more if miracles were not attributed to him.) Christ came to give eternal life, to give perfection, wholeness. But we cannot understand the scriptures or the teachings of these great ones unless and until we

struggle for ourselves to find God. We must strive to realize the truth of God for ourselves. Then a new meaning comes to us. Whenever Sri Ramakrishna was asked how to find God, his answer would invariably be: "Yearn for him with a longing heart." This desire for God, this realization that he is the treasure of life is arrived at through discrimination. We begin to see that in the midst of all the fleeting pleasures of life there is an abiding truth, an abiding joy. And even if a little desire arises for God, that desire can be intensified through spiritual disciplines and struggle. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "There is fire in the fuel. But just to believe that fire has this potential is not enough. One must first light the fire and cook a meal over it! Then, and only then, will your hunger be satisfied."

WE MUST be convinced that no human being will ever be lost. Each man, woman, and child will, in some life or other, attain to that Reality. We read in one of the Upanishads: "Blessed is he who attains the truth of God in this life; otherwise, it is his greatest calamity." Why? Because he will be born again. He will have to be born once more and endure all this suffering — pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow — until God is known. We should remember this one principle of spiritual discipline, expressed by Christ in his Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (And yet today they teach, in the name of Christ, that no man can see God!) What did Christ mean by this — that the pure in heart shall see God? Did he mean that man will see God only after death?

But is not the kingdom of heaven within you, here and now? Can you not enter that kingdom of God now, in this very life?

It is very easy to use this term, "purity of heart." Yet, what does it mean? Yearning for God. You see, you try to think of God, but because you are not interested in him your mind is distracted. There is a quotation which goes: "When the food^o is pure, the heart becomes pure. When the heart becomes pure, then there is constant recollectedness of God. That is the sign of a pure heart — constant recollectedness! And when that comes, the next is *prajna*: illumined knowledge of God." That is the simple truth. And *prajna* is the same as *samadhi*, *nirvana*, or *turiya*; all are names to describe Transcendental Consciousness. When you meditate, there is still duality; but in Transcendental Consciousness, there is no meditation. It is an experience.

This experience is indefinable and inexpressible. Though it is not communicable in so many words, it can be transmitted. Sri Ramakrishna and Christ could transmit this power by touch; others of us do not have that power. We transmit spirituality in a different way by pointing out to you the methods and means — the ways. One of these ways is through the power of the word given to you at initiation. Thus, the power is transmitted in seed-form, and it is you who must nurture it through the practice of disciplines. Only then will this power grow into a tree and bear fruit.

^o In this context, food means whatever we gather through the doors of the senses. In other words, we have to learn to cover everything with the presence of God. AUTHOR

Why are we unable to communicate the transcendental experience? Because it is absolute. There is nothing in it that can be related and understood. Sri Ramakrishna gave the illustration of a little girl who asked her elder sister what it was like to be married. "Wait until you grow up," answered the sister, "then when you are married yourself you will understand what it is like." Nothing can really be explained, she tells her sister, until you have a husband for yourself. Only then will you know.

We also hear of mystics who have described their experiences. They may say, "I see a blissful light. The world has disappeared. Waves of bliss are striking me." Or they may have a vision of their Chosen Ideal. But these are still not the highest experiences. If you stop there, progress ceases. My Master, Swami Brahmananda, once told us: "Light, more light, more light. Is there any end to it?"

This reminds me of an incident. A friend of mine once went to practice austerities and meditation in the Himalayas. After a period of three months he wrote me that he had attained samadhi. I happened to be with my Master at the time, so I told him about my friend's letter, and the fact that he claimed to have attained samadhi. Maharaj said: "What? I saw him some ten days ago and happened to notice his eyes. He has not attained samadhi. He may have experienced some light, perhaps, and thought that to be samadhi." Then Maharaj added: "Do you know what it means to have samadhi? All the knots of the heart become loosened; all ignorance vanishes, all doubts cease, all the effects of past deeds are erased. No

longer is there desire for anything else. One becomes completely desireless, because he finds fulfillment in the eternal Reality.”

It is through the mystic experience alone that true fulfillment comes. Otherwise, there will always be a lack within us. You may have all the wealth of the world at your command, and all the enjoyments which it can purchase — still within your heart there will be a sense of emptiness. In truth, God dwells within each and every heart, and until we discover him there, until he becomes revealed to us, there will always be this feeling of a lack.

Still, one may say: is it not enough to be good, to be a moral, ethical humanist? Why bother finding God? In fact, Matthew Arnold once defined religion as “morality touched by emotion.” But is this so easy? Is it so simple to become moral without the ideal of finding God, without loving God? What is morality? It is to become selfless, totally selfless; to become egoless. And how can that be possible unless we find fulfillment in God?

Recently I read an article by a Christian minister who compared the relative contributions of an atheist and a Christian to the Viet Nam war. He said that the Christian went to war because he loved mankind as Christ did; but the atheist only loved him as man. It sounds wonderful to have such love for mankind, to love man as Christ loved us. But those who believe they love man in this way are only fooling themselves. Is it possible to love mankind as Christ loved us until we become absorbed in the love of Christ? Until we

know and realize and experience how Christ loved? Have we any real idea how much Christ loved us? Have we ever seen him or felt his love?

In order for us to experience the real love of Christ we must become Christ-intoxicated. I hesitate to use the word God, for it appears that his name is no longer popular! God is dead, they say. But it is only in this Christ-intoxicated state that you will be able to know how Christ loved us. And only after that experience will you possess that love for others. Others talk about the way Christ loved us, but we do not love God that way. And these people themselves cannot live in harmony with one another. Husband and wife are unable to live in peace together, and yet they want to do good to mankind! "Man, no doubt, is the measure of all things; only his nature contains and reflects every level of reality from matter to spirit." Man is a physical being, a mental being, and a spiritual being. He can be any of them depending on whether he regards life from a physical, mental, or spiritual standpoint. The truth, however, is that although man has a body and mind, he is basically Spirit. This often is learned only after much experience in life, but learn it we must. We must tell ourselves: "I am God-divine. Mind and body are given me in order that I may use them as a means to unfold the Godhead within."

LET us say something further about mystic visions and the ultimate experience. Just as man consists of body, mind, and spirit, similarly there is the physical universe, the subtle universe, and the causal universe. Beyond that is what we call *Brahman*. Now, as in the

physical universe we experience sight, hearing, taste, and so on, the psychic universe as well contains these sensory qualities. There one will hear sounds and see light. But mark! There is a difference between this light and the vision of spiritual light. The great *yogi*, Patanjali, the father of Indian Yoga philosophy, wrote about these psychic phenomena. He said that such powers and visions may be obtained by birth, by drugs, through the power of words, by the practice of austerity, or concentration. It is possible, therefore, to have visions through the use of drugs, but *only psychic, never spiritual visions*. India has known about such things for centuries; and there are those who do use such drugs there. But we generally consider them degenerates.

What is the test of spirituality? "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Therefore, we find that after the effects of these drugs have worn off, the user is the same man — if not worse. Their use can be extremely dangerous. Most important, they have caused no spiritual transformation. True, the senses become intensified under the influence of psychedelics, the world "lights up," as it were; inanimate objects, pictures, and so forth, appear living. And there is an appearance, an awareness, that this is an experience of God. But it is not God. Because when God is realized, your life is changed. You are no longer the same person. As Swami Vivekananda once said: "If a fool goes into samadhi, he comes out a wise man; but if a fool goes to sleep a fool, he still wakes up a fool." We can compare this sleep to the drug experience. Furthermore, though the users of such drugs think their ego is lost,

in reality it has increased. Therefore, we see that psychic visions and powers, rather than assisting in spiritual growth, only serve to obstruct it.

It is important to remember that one of the great dangers which can arise from the use of drugs is that control over them can easily be lost. Should psychic powers come, there is always the temptation to use them, and through surrendering to such powers, all spiritual progress is stopped. It takes great strength, sometimes, to give up these powers. Let me tell you an incident from my own experience.

Once, when I was a young boy, our neighbor had a so-called holy man as his guest. This man had the rather unusual power of being able to create, upon your touching his toe, whatever fragrance you might wish. You only had to think of jasmine, rose, the smell of a lotus, or even a disagreeable smell, and the odor would invade your nostrils! I was quite excited about this. However, there was an old man present who watched me for a time and then said to me: "My boy, obtain a copy of Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga*, and on page such-and-such you will find a description of these powers. You will also find that all spiritual progress is blocked for those who use them."

WHAT, then, is true mysticism? True mysticism is the conviction that God can be seen; that he can be directly known and realized; and that to have this realization is the only purpose in life. If we go to the very source of any religion, leaving aside theological dogma, we will find this same insistence on personal experience. Christ said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Mysticism has no creed, no theory, no dogmas. It says that you can see God, talk with him, have a unitive knowledge of the Godhead. There have been mystics in all ages, and there will be mystics in ages to come. For it is the mystic, the saint to whom God has revealed himself, who keeps the truth of the scriptures alive.

But is the mystic experience, samadhi, so easy to attain? My Master said: "No, it is not a simple matter to experience God. One must practice, practice, practice." Samadhi is of two kinds: lower and higher. In the lower samadhi a sense of ego is still retained. You remain as the witness, though passive. In the higher kind of samadhi, ego totally disappears. There is no feeling, no emotion, in that highest union. It is beyond all states of consciousness. But as one returns from the samadhi, one may live in two "states," as it were. (Although strictly speaking, samadhi is not a *state* of consciousness; it is Pure Consciousness itself, all-pervasive and unlimited by space and time.) That is, one can live in and experience this world, but at the same time be fully aware that it is not a real world, but only an appearance behind which he sees that there is only one Reality — Brahman. To know and experience that Reality is the goal of the true mystic.