

Contemplation

His advance in contemplation will be accompanied step by step by those exalted feeling-states called the Degrees of Ardent Love. Without their presence, all the drill in the world will not bring him to the contemplative state.



The measure of the mystic's real progress is and must always be his progress in love; for his apprehension is an apprehension of the heart.

Contemplation at this stage is a free and mutual act of love; a supernatural intercourse between the soul and the divine, or some aspect of the divine, sometimes full of light and joy, sometimes dark and bare.

“When love has carried us above all things...we receive in peace the Incomprehensible Light, enfolding us and penetrating us. What is this Light, if it be not a contemplation of the Infinite, and an intuition of Eternity?”
(Ruysbroeck)

In contemplation thought, love, and will become a unity: and feeling and perception are fused, as they are in all our apprehensions of beauty, our best contacts with life. It is an act, not of the reason, but of the whole personality working under the stimulus of mystic love. Its results feed every aspect of the personality: minister to its instinct for the Good, the Beautiful, and the True.

Psychologically it is an induced state, in which the field of consciousness is greatly contracted: the whole of the self being sharply focused, concentrated upon one thing. We pour ourselves out or, as it sometimes seems to us, in towards this over-powering interest: seem to ourselves to reach it and be merged with it. Whatever the thing may be, in this act it is given to us and we know it, as we cannot know it by the ordinary devices of thought.

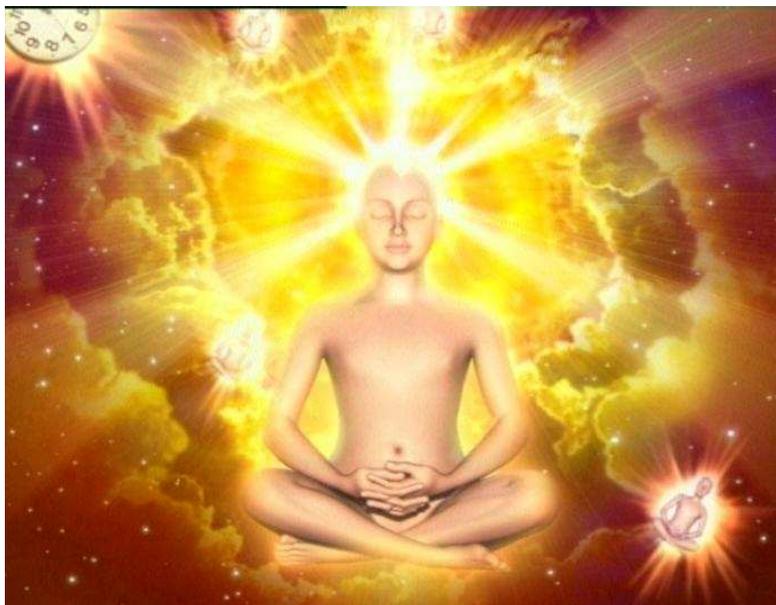


The turning of our attention from that crisp and definite world of multiplicity, with which intelligence is accustomed and able to deal, has loosed new powers of perception which we never knew that we possessed. Instead of sharply perceiving the fragment, we apprehend, yet how we know not, the solemn presence of the Whole.

Deeper levels of personality are opened up, and go gladly to the encounter of the Universe. That Universe, or some Reality hid between it and ourselves, responds to "the true lovely will of our heart." Our ingoing concentration is balanced by a great outgoing sense of expansion, of new worlds made ours, as we receive the inflow of its life.

So complete is the self's absorption that it is for the time unconscious of any acts of mind or will; in technical language, its "faculties are suspended."

When contemplation appears it produces a general condition of indifference, liberty, and peace, an elevation above the world, a sense of beatitude. The subject ceases to perceive himself in the multiplicity and division of his general consciousness. He is raised above himself. A deeper and a purer soul substitutes itself for the normal self. In this state, in which consciousness of I-hood and consciousness of the world disappear, the mystic is conscious of being in immediate relation with God Himself; of participating in Divinity.



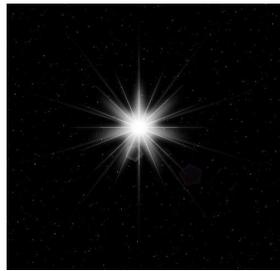
Contemplation installs a method of being and of knowing. Moreover, these two things tend at bottom to become one. The mystic has more and more the impression of being that which he knows, and of knowing that which he is.

In the contemplative act, his whole personality, directed by love and will, transcends the sense-world, casts off its fetters, and rises to freedom: becoming operative on those high levels where reason cannot come. There it apprehends the supra-sensible by immediate contact, and knows itself to be in the presence of the "Supplier of true Life."

It is a brief act. The greatest of the contemplatives have been unable to sustain the brilliance of this vision for more than a little while. "A flash," "an instant," "the space of an Ave Maria," they say.

"My mind withdrew its thoughts from experience, extracting itself from the contradictory throng of sensuous images, that it might find out what that Light was wherein it was bathed...And thus with the flash of one hurried glance, it attained to the vision of That Which Is. But I could not sustain my gaze: my weakness was dashed back, and I was relegated to my ordinary experience, bearing with me only a loving memory, and as it were the fragrance of those desirable meats on the which as yet I was not able to feed."

(Saint Augustine)



The fragrance, as Saint Augustine calls it, of the indescribable memory of their communion with That Which Is, remains for ever with those who have thus been initiated, if only for a moment, into the atmosphere of the Real.

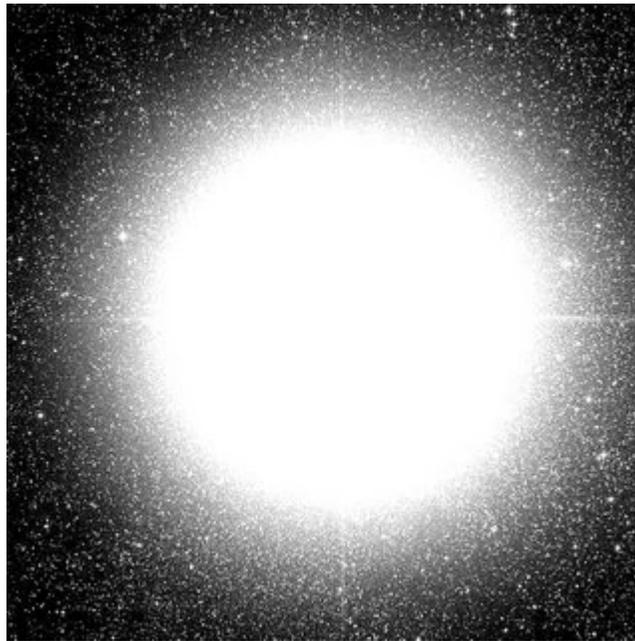
"That Which Is," says St. Augustine; "The One," "the Supplier of true Life," says Plotinus; "the energetic Word," says St. Bernard; "Eternal Light," says Dante; "the Abyss," says Ruysbroeck; "Pure Love," says St. Catherine of Genoa--poor symbols of Perfection at the best. But, through and by these oblique utterances, they give us the assurance that the Object of their discovery is one with the object of our quest.

Those who have seen are quite convinced:
those who have not seen, can never be told.

Sometimes the contemplative tells us that he passes through this darkness to the Light: sometimes it seems to him that he stays for ever in the "beneficent dark."

*"Behold, if you desire to see God's Light in your Soul, and be divinely illuminated and conducted, this is the short way that you are to take; not to let the Eye of your Spirit enter into Matter or fill itself with any Thing whatever, either in Heaven or Earth, but to let it enter by a naked faith into the Light of the Majesty."
(Boehme)*

*"Contemplation places us in a purity and a radiance which is far above our understanding...and none can attain to it by knowledge, by subtlety, or by any exercise whatsoever: but he whom God chooses to unite to Himself, and to illuminate by Himself, he and no other can contemplate God."
(Ruysbroeck)*



An exceeding joy, a Beatific Vision, an intense communion, and a loving sight: and of an exceeding emptiness, a barren desert, an unfathomable Abyss, a Divine Dark. Again and again these pairs of opposites occur in all first-hand descriptions of pure contemplation: Remoteness and Intimacy, Darkness and Light.

*"Contemplative sweetness not without full great labor is gotten, and with joy untold it is possessed. It is not man's merit but God's gift; and yet from the beginning to this day never might man be ravished in contemplation of Love Everlasting, but if he before all the world's vanity had forsaken."
(Richard Rolle)*

Awe and self-abasement, and the paradoxical passion for self-loss in the All, here govern his emotional state.

In their withdrawal from the busy, fretful sense-world they have sunk down to the "ground" of the soul and of the apparent universe: Being, the Substance of all that Is. Multiplicity is resolved into Unity: a unity with which the perceiving self is merged.



Love has led him into that timeless, spaceless world of Being which is the peaceful ground, not only of the individual striving spirit, but also of the striving universe.

Here we stand suddenly at the confines of human thought, and far beyond the polar circle of the mind. It is intensely dark, and yet you will find nothing but Flames and Light.

“My vision, becoming purified, entered deeper and deeper into the ray of that Supernal Light which in itself is true. Thenceforth my vision was greater than our language, which fails such a sight; and memory too fails before such excess.

As he who sees in a dream, and after the dream is gone the impression or emotion remains, but the rest returns not to the mind, such am I for nearly the whole of my vision fades, and yet there still wells within my heart the sweetness born there-from.

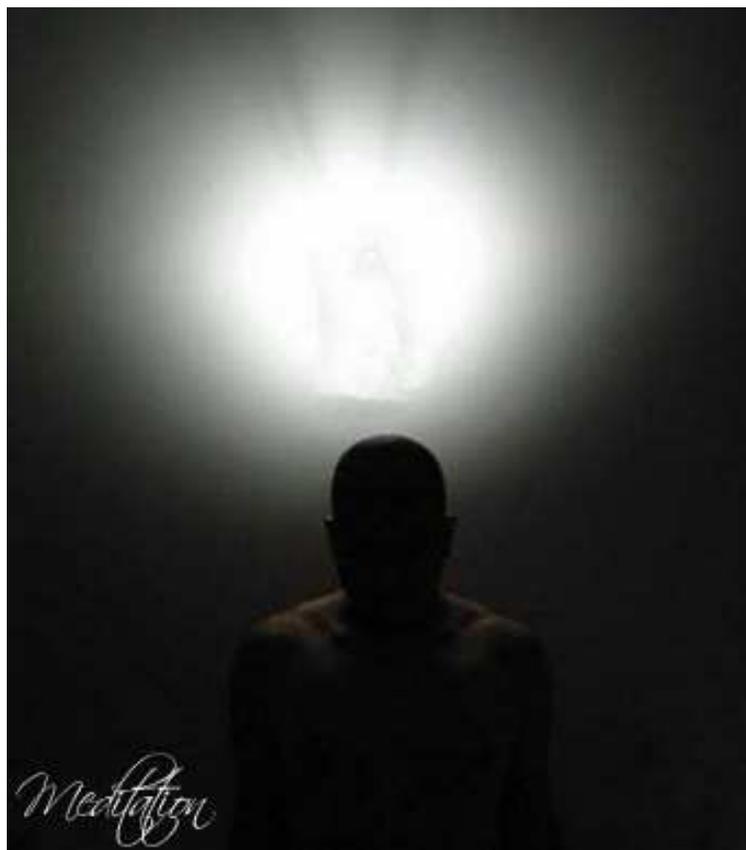


Thus did my mind, wholly in suspense, gaze fixedly, immovable and intent, ever enkindled by its gazing. In the presence of that Light one becomes such, that never could one consent to turn from it to any other sight. Because the Good, which is the object of the will, is therein wholly gathered; and outside of this, that is defective which therein is perfect.”

(Dante)

“It was as though it were in heaven: a beauty so great that I can say nothing concerning it, save that it was supreme Beauty and sovereign Good. I beheld the ineffable fullness of God.”
(Saint Angela of Foligno)

All the feelings which flow from joy, confidence, and affection, rather than those which are grouped about rapture and awe--though awe is always present in some measure, as it is always present in all perfect love--here contribute towards a description of the Truth.



These contemplatives tell us of their attainment of That which Is, as the closest and most joyous of all communions; a coming of the Bridegroom; a rapturous immersion in the Uncreated Light.

Utter peace and wild delight, every pleasure-state known to man's normal consciousness, are inadequate to the description of her joy. She has participated for an instant in the Divine Life; knows all, and knows nothing. She has learnt the world's secret, not by knowing, but by being: the only way of really knowing anything.

*"Orison draws the great God down into the small heart: it drives the hungry soul out to the full God. It brings together the two lovers, God and the soul, into a joyful room where they speak much of love."
(Mechthild of Magdeburg)*



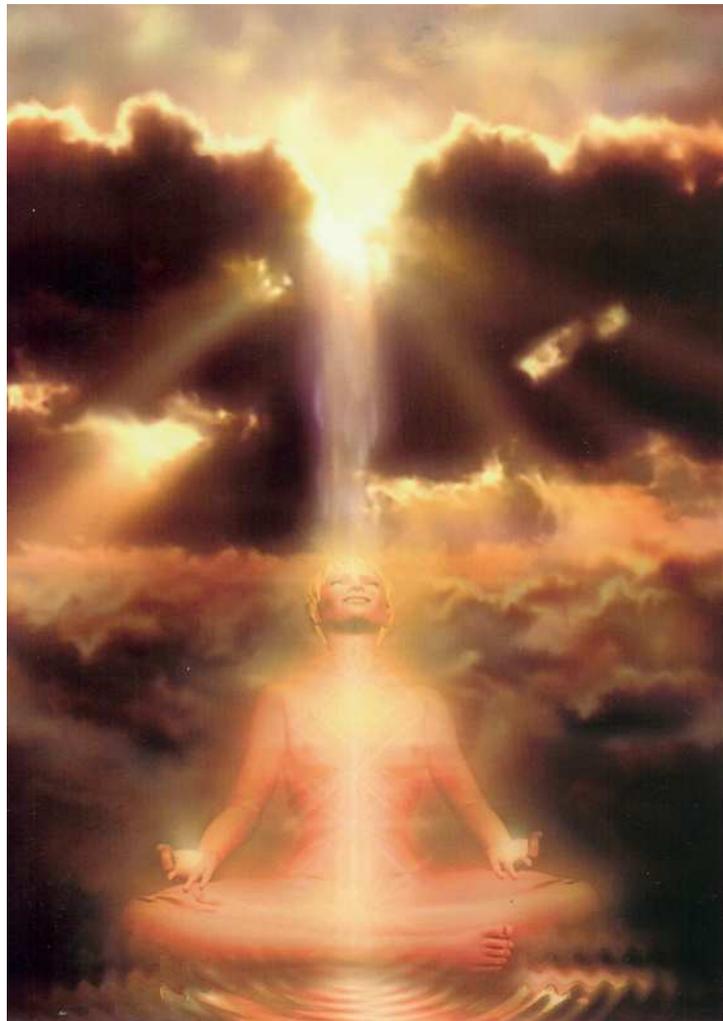
"When we have become seeing, we are able to contemplate in joy the eternal coming of the Bridegroom. What, then, is this eternal coming of our Bridegroom? It is a perpetual new birth and a perpetual new illumination: for the ground whence the Light shines and which is Itself the Light, is life-giving and fruitful: and hence the manifestation of the Eternal Light is renewed without interruption in the hiddenness of the spirit."



*Behold! Here all human works and active virtues must cease; for here God works alone at the apex of the soul. Here there is nothing else but an eternal seeing and staring at that Light, by the Light and in the Light. And the coming of the Bridegroom is so swift, that He comes perpetually, and He dwells within us with His abysmal riches, and He returns to us anew in His Person without interruption; with such new radiance, that He seems never to have come to us before. For His coming consists, outside all Time, in an Eternal Now, always welcomed with new longing and new joy. Behold! The delights and the joys which this Bridegroom brings in His coming are fathomless and limitless, for they are Himself: and this is why the eyes by which the spirit contemplates the Bridegroom, are opened so widely that they can never close again..."
(Ruysbroeck)*

There is nothing else here but an eternal rest in the embrace of an outpouring love: and this is the wayless Being that all interior souls have chosen above all other things. This is the dim silence where all lovers lose themselves.

“The Divine Dark is nothing else but that inaccessible Light wherein the Lord is said to dwell. Although it is invisible because of its dazzling splendors and unsearchable because of the abundance of its supernatural brightness, nevertheless, whosoever deserves to see and know God rests therein; and is truly in that which surpasses all truth and all knowledge.”
(Dionysius the Areopagite)



When, under the spur of mystic love, the whole personality of man comes into contact with that Reality, it enters a plane of experience to which none of the categories of the intellect apply.

The contemplative act, which is an act of loving and self-forgetting concentration upon the Divine--the outpouring of man's little and finite personality towards the Absolute Personality of God--will, in so far as it transcends thought, mean darkness for the intellect; but it may mean radiance for the heart. Psychologically, it will mean the necessary depletion of the surface-consciousness, the stilling of the mechanism of thought, in the interests of another center of consciousness. Since this new center makes enormous demands on the self's stock of vitality its establishment must involve, for the time that it is active, the withdrawal of energy from other centers. Thus the "night of thought" becomes the strictly logical corollary of the Light of perception.



*God appears, and God is Light
To those poor souls who dwell in night:
But doth a human form display
To those who dwell in realms of day.
(William Blake)*

Our work is the love of God. Our satisfaction lies in submission to the Divine Embrace. This utter and abrupt submission to the Divine Embrace is the essence of that form of contemplation which is called the Orison of Union. Surrender is its secret: a personal surrender, not only of finite to Infinite, but of bride to Bridegroom, heart to Heart.

True contemplation must always be judged by its fruits. If it be genuine, work has been done during the period of apparent passivity. The deeper self has escaped, has risen to freedom, and returns other than it was before.



The soul neither sees, hears, nor understands anything while this state lasts; but this is usually a very short time, and seems to the soul even shorter than it really is. God visits the soul in a way that prevents it doubting when it comes to itself that it has been in God and God in it; and so firmly is it convinced of this truth that, though years may pass before this state recurs, the soul can never forget it nor doubt its reality.

The Dark Night of the Soul



Impotence, blankness, and solitude are the epithets by which those immersed in this dark fire of purification describe their pains.

The Dark Night of the Soul

The most intense period of that great swing-back into darkness which usually divides the first mystic life, or Illuminative Way, from the second mystic life, or Unitive Way, is generally a period of utter blankness and stagnation, so far as mystical activity is concerned. The "Dark Night of the Soul," once fully established, is seldom lit by visions or made homely by voices.

It is of the essence of its miseries that the once-possessed power of contemplation now seems wholly lost. The self is tossed back from its hard-won point of vantage. Impotence, blankness, and solitude are the epithets by which those immersed in this dark fire of purification describe their pains.

We have already noticed the chief psychological characteristics of all normal mystical development. We have seen that its essence consists in the effort to establish a new equilibrium, to get, as it were, a firm foothold upon transcendent levels of reality; and that in its path towards this consummation the self experiences a series of oscillations between states of pleasure and states of pain.

Put in another way, it is an orderly movement of the whole consciousness towards higher centers, in which each intense and progressive affirmation fatigues the immature transcendental powers, and is paid for by a negation; a swing-back of the whole consciousness, a stagnation of intellect, a reaction of the emotions, or an inhibition of the will.

Thus the exalted consciousness of Divine Perfection which the self acquired in its mystical awakening was balanced by a depressed and bitter consciousness of its own inherent imperfection, and the clash of these two perceptions spurred it to that laborious effort of accommodation which constitutes the "Purgative Way."

The renewed and ecstatic awareness of the Absolute which resulted, and which was the governing characteristic of Illumination, brought its own proper negation: the awareness of the self's continued separation from and incompatibility with that Absolute which it has perceived.

During the time in which the illuminated consciousness is fully established, the self, as a rule, is perfectly content: believing that in its vision of Eternity, its intense and loving consciousness of God, it has reached the goal of its quest.

Sooner or later, however, psychic fatigue sets in; the state of illumination begins to break up, the complementary negative consciousness appears, and shows itself as an overwhelming sense of darkness and deprivation. This sense is so deep and strong that it inhibits all consciousness of the Transcendent; and plunges the self into the state of negation and misery which is called the Dark Night.

Psychologically considered, the Dark Night is an example of the operation of the law of reaction from stress. It is a period of fatigue and lassitude following a period of sustained mystical activity.



Each great step forward will entail lassitude and exhaustion for that mental machinery which he has pressed unto service and probably overworked. When the higher centers have been submitted to the continuous strain of a developed illuminated life, with its accompanying periods of intense fervor, lucidity, deep contemplation - the swing-back into the negative state occurs almost of necessity.

This is the psychological explanation of those strange and painful episodes in the lives of great saints--indeed, of many spiritual persons hardly to be classed as saints--when, perhaps after a long life passed in faithful correspondence with the transcendental order, growing consciousness of the presence of God, the whole inner experience is suddenly swept away, and only a blind reliance on past convictions saves them from unbelief.

The great contemplatives, those destined to attain the full stature of the mystic, emerge from this period of destitution, however long and drastic it may be, as from a new purification. It is for them the gateway to a higher state. But persons of a less heroic spirituality, if they enter the Night at all may succumb to its dangers and pains. This "great negation" is the sorting-house of the spiritual life. Those who go on are the great and strong spirits, who do not seek to know, but are driven to be.

Rapid oscillations between a joyous and a painful consciousness seem to occur most often at the beginning of a new period of the MysticWay: between Purgation and Illumination, and again between Illumination and the Dark Night: for these mental states are, as a rule, gradually not abruptly established. Mystics call such oscillations the "Game of Love" in which God plays, as it were, "hide and seek" with the questing soul.

The self loses all interest in and affection for those divine realities which had previously filled its life.



The theory here advanced that the Dark Night is, on its psychic side, partly a condition of fatigue, partly a state of transition, is borne out by the mental and moral disorder which seems, in many subjects, to be its dominant character. When they are in it everything seems to go wrong with them. They are tormented by evil thoughts and abrupt temptations, lose grasp not only of their spiritual but also of their worldly affairs.

Psychologically, then, the Dark Night of the Soul is due to the double fact of the exhaustion of an old state, and the growth towards a new state of consciousness. It is a growing pain in the organic process of the self's attainment of the Absolute.

Such an interval of chaos and misery may last for months, or even for years, before the consciousness again unifies itself and a new center is formed.

The Dark Night is really a deeply human process, in which the self which thought itself so spiritual, so firmly established upon the super-sensual plane, is forced to turn back, to leave the Light, and pick up those qualities which it had left behind.

The self in its first purgation has cleansed the mirror of perception; hence, in its illuminated life, has seen Reality. In so doing it has transcended the normal perceptive powers of natural man, immersed in the illusions of sense. Now, it has got to be reality: a very different thing. For this a new and more drastic purgation is needed--not of the organs of perception, but of the very shrine of self: that "heart" which is the seat of personality, the source of its love and will.

In the stress and anguish of the Night, when it turns back from the vision of the Infinite to feel again the limitations of the finite the self loses the power to Do; and learns to surrender its will to the operation of a larger Life, that it may Be.

"At the end of such a long and cruel transition, how much more supple the soul feels itself to be in the Hand of God, how much more detached from all that is not God! She sees clearly in herself the fruits of humility and patience, and feels her love ascending more purely and directly to God in proportion as she has realized the Nothingness of herself and all things."

(Lucie Christine)

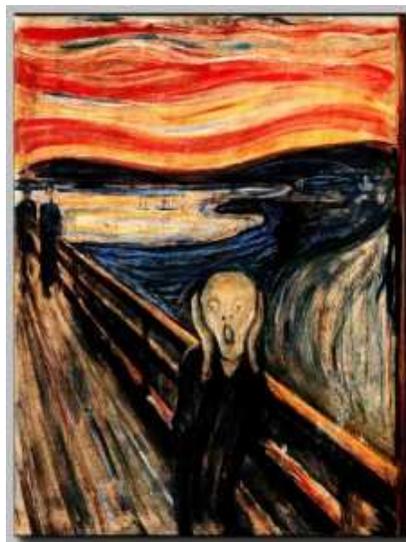
We must remember in the midst of our analysis, that the mystic life is a life of love: that the Object of the mystic's final quest and of his constant intuition is an object of adoration and supreme desire.

Hence for the mystic who has once known the Beatific Vision there can be no greater grief than the withdrawal of this Object from his field of consciousness; the loss of this companionship, the extinction of this Light. Therefore, whatever form the "Dark Night" assumes, it must entail bitter suffering: far worse than that endured in the Purgative Way. Then the self was forcibly detached from the imperfect. Now the Perfect is withdrawn, leaving behind an overwhelming yet impotent conviction of something supremely wrong, some final Treasure lost.

To those temperaments in which consciousness of the Absolute took the form of a sense of divine companionship, and for whom the objective idea "God" had become the central fact of life, it seems as though that God, having shown Himself, has now deliberately withdrawn His Presence, never perhaps to manifest Himself again.

“He acts as if there were a wall erected between Him and us. The eye which looked upon Eternity has closed, the old dear sense of intimacy and mutual love has given place to a terrible blank.”

(Eckhart)



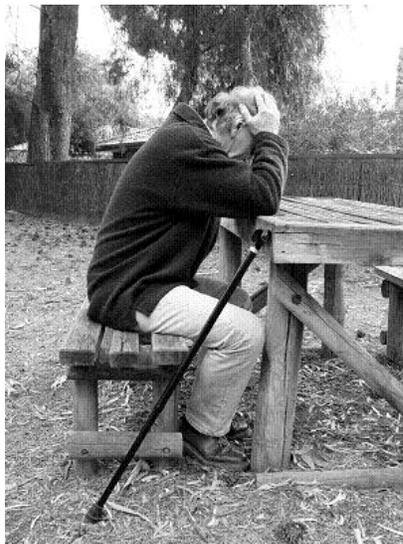
“That which this anguished soul feels most deeply is the conviction that God has abandoned it, of which it has no doubt; that He has cast it away into darkness as an abominable thing...The shadow of death and the pains and torments of hell are most acutely felt, and this comes from the sense of being abandoned by God, being chastised and cast out by His wrath and heavy displeasure. All this and even more the soul feels now, for a terrible apprehension has come upon it that thus it will be with it for ever.”

(Saint John of the Cross)

In those selves for whom the subjective idea "Sanctity"--the need of conformity between the individual character and the Transcendent--has been central, the pain of the Night is less a deprivation than a new and dreadful kind of lucidity. The vision of the Good brings to the self an abrupt sense of her own hopeless and helpless imperfection: a black conviction of sin, far more bitter than that endured in the Way of Purgation, which swamps everything else.

*"That which makes her pain so terrible is that she is, as it were, overwhelmed by the purity of God, and this purity makes her see the least atoms of her imperfections as if they were enormous sins, because of the infinite distance there is between the purity of God and the creature."
(Madame Guyon)*

Often combined with the sense of sin and the absence of God is another negation, not the least distressing part of the sufferings of the self suddenly plunged into the Night. This is a complete emotional lassitude: the disappearance of all the old ardors, now replaced by a callousness, a boredom, which the self detests but cannot overcome. It is the dismal condition of spiritual ennui which ascetic writers know so well under the name of "aridity," and which psychologists look upon as the result of emotional fatigue.



It seems incredible that the eager love of a Divine Companion, so long the focus of the self's whole being should have vanished: that not only the transcendent vision should be withdrawn, but her very desire for, and interest in, that vision should grow cold. Yet the mystics are unanimous in declaring that this is a necessary stage in the growth of the spiritual consciousness.

This stagnation of the emotions has its counterpart in the stagnation of the will and intelligence, which has been experienced by some contemplatives as a part of their negative state. As regards the will, there is a sort of moral dereliction: the self cannot control its inclinations and thoughts. In the general psychic turmoil, all the unpurified part of man's inheritance, the lower impulses and unworthy ideas which have long been imprisoned below the threshold, force their way into the field of consciousness. "Every vice was re-awakened within me," says Angela of Foligno, "I would have chosen rather to be roasted than to endure such pains."



All these types of darkness, with their accompanying and overwhelming sensations of impotence and distress, are common in the lives of the mystics.

The function of this episode of the Mystic Way is to cure the soul of the innate tendency to seek and rest in spiritual joys; to confuse Reality with the joy given by the contemplation of Reality. It is the completion of that ordering of disordered loves which the Way of Purgation began. The ascending self must leave these childish satisfactions; make its love absolutely disinterested, strong, and courageous, abolish all taint of spiritual gluttony. A total abandonment of the individualistic standpoint, of that trivial and egotistic quest of personal satisfaction which thwarts the great movement of the Flowing Light, is the supreme condition of man's participation in Reality.

In Illumination, the soul, basking in the Uncreated Light, identified the Divine Nature with the Divine Light and sweetness which it then enjoyed. Its consciousness of the transcendent was chiefly felt as an increase of personal vision and personal joy. Thus, in that apparently selfless state, the "I, the Me, the Mine," though spiritualized, still remained intact. The mortification of the senses was more than repaid by the rich and happy life which this mortification conferred upon the soul.

But before real and permanent union with the Absolute can take place: before the whole self can learn to live on those high levels where--its being utterly surrendered to the Infinite Will--it can be wholly transmuted in God, merged in the great life of the All, this dependence on personal joys must be done away. The spark of the soul, the fast-growing germ of divine humanity, must so invade every corner of character that the self can only say with St. Catherine of Genoa, "My me is God: nor do I know my selfhood except in God."

The various torments and desolations of the Dark Night constitute this last and drastic purgation of the spirit; the doing away of separateness, the annihilation of selfhood, even though all that self now claims for its own be the Love of God.

The self, then, has got to learn to cease to be its own center and circumference: to make that final surrender which is the price of final peace.

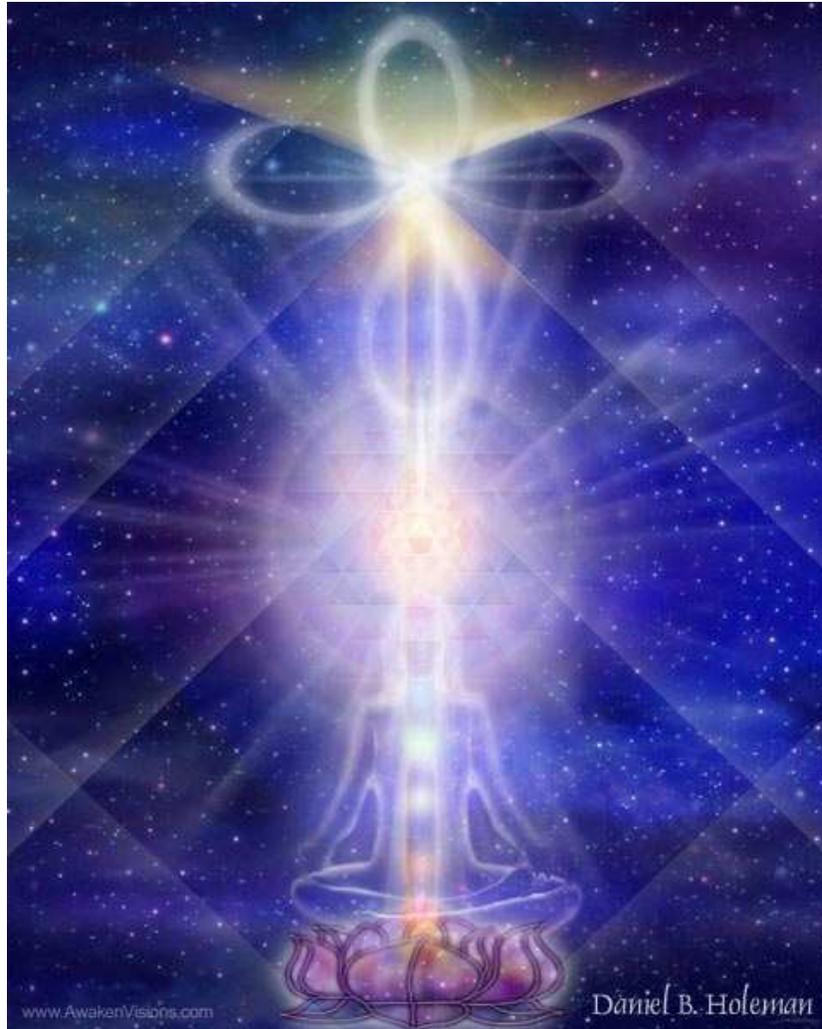
The Dark Night tends to establish itself gradually; the powers and intuitions of the self being withdrawn one after another, the intervals of lucidity becoming rarer, until the "mystic death" or state of total deprivation is reached. So, too, when the night begins to break down before the advance of the new or Unitive Life, the process is generally slow.

One after another, the miseries and disharmonies of the Dark Night give way: affirmation takes the place of negation: the Cloud of Unknowing is pierced by rays of Light.

The act of complete surrender then, which is the term of the Dark Night, has given the self its footing in Eternity: its abandonment of the old centers of consciousness has permitted movement towards the new.

The self which comes forth from the night is no separated self, conscious of the illumination of the Uncreated Light, but the New Man, the transmuted humanity, whose life is one with the Absolute Life of God.

The Unitive Life



Artwork by [Daniel B. Holeman](http://www.AwakenVisions.com)

Done is what needed to be done,
there is no more coming into being.

The Unitive Life

The metaphysical mystic, for whom the Absolute is impersonal and transcendent, describes his final attainment of that Absolute as deification, or the utter transmutation of the self in God.

The mystic for whom intimate and personal communion has been the mode under which he best apprehended Reality speaks of the consummation of this communion, its perfect and permanent form, as the Spiritual Marriage of his soul with God.

The chief, in fact the one essential, preliminary is that pure surrender of selfhood, or "self-naughting," which the trials of the Dark Night tended to produce.



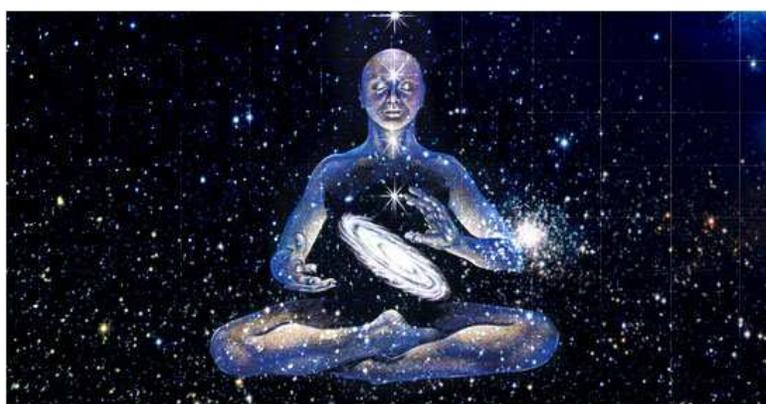
Artwork by [Daniel B. Holeman](#)

The capital marks of the state itself are (1) a complete absorption in the interests of the Infinite, under whatever mode It is apprehended by the self; (2) a consciousness of sharing Its strength, acting by Its authority, which results in a complete sense of freedom, an invulnerable serenity, and usually urges the self to some form of heroic effort or creative activity; (3) the establishment of the self as a power for life, a center of energy, an actual parent of spiritual vitality in other men.

From the point of view of the pure psychologist, what do the varied phenomena of the Unitive Life, taken together, seem to represent? He would probably say that they indicate the final and successful establishment of that higher form of consciousness which has been struggling for supremacy during the whole of the Mystic Way. The deepest, richest levels of human personality have now attained to light and freedom. The self is remade, transformed, has at last unified itself; and with the cessation of stress, power has been liberated for new purposes.

*"The beginning of the mystic life introduced into the personal life of the subject a group of states which are distinguished by certain characteristics, and which form, so to speak, a special psychological system. At its term, it has, as it were, suppressed the ordinary self, and by the development of this system has established a new personality with a new method of feeling and of action. Its growth results in the transformation of personality: it abolishes the primitive consciousness of selfhood, and substitutes for it a wider consciousness, the total disappearance of selfhood in the divine, the substitution of a Divine Self for the primitive self."
(Delacroix)*

The mystic has opened up new paths for the inflow of that Triumphant Power which is the very substance of the Real; has remade his consciousness, and in virtue of this total regeneration is transplanted into that Universal Life, which is yet not alien but our own.



From contact set up with this Universal Life, this Energetic Word of God, which nothing can contain--from those deep levels of Being to which his shifting, growing personality is fully adapted at last--he draws that amazing strength, that immovable peace, that power of dealing with circumstance, which is one of the most marked characteristics of the Unitive Life.

The mystic would say that his long-sought correspondence with Transcendental Reality, his union with God, has now been finally established: that his self, though intact, is wholly penetrated--as a sponge by the sea--by the Ocean of Life and Love to which he has attained. "I live, yet not I but God in me." He is conscious that he is now at length cleansed of the last stains of separation, and has become, in a mysterious manner, that which he beholds.

He has entered the Eternal Order, attained here and now the state to which the Magnet of the Universe draws every living thing.

Moving through periods of alternate joy and anguish, as his spiritual self woke, stretched, and was tested in the complementary fires of love and pain, he was inwardly conscious that he moved towards a definite objective. In so far as he was a great mystic, he was also conscious that this objective was no mere act of knowing, however intense, exultant, and sublime, but a condition of being, fulfillment of that love which impelled him, steadily and inexorably, to his own place.



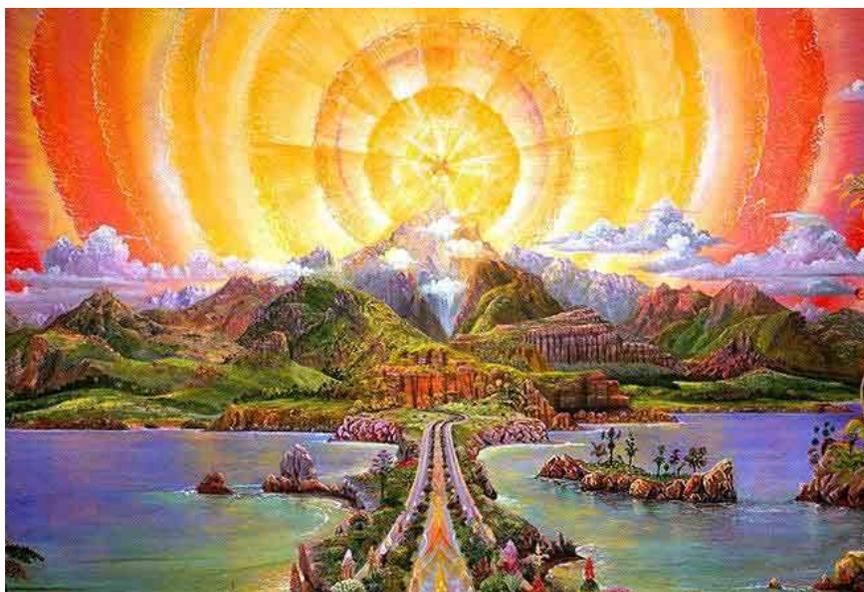
*"Some may ask 'what is it to be a partaker of the Divine Nature, or a Godlike man?' Answer: he who is imbued with or illuminated by the Eternal or Divine Light and inflamed or consumed with Eternal or Divine Love, he is a deified man and a partaker of the Divine Nature."
(Theologia Germanica)*

The great mystics are anxious to establish and force on us the truth that by deification they intend no arrogant claim to identification with God, but as it were a transfusion of their selves by His Self: an entrance upon a new order of life, so high and so harmonious with Reality that it can only be called divine.

*"When love has carried us above and beyond all things, above the Light, into the Divine Dark, there we are wrought and transformed by the Eternal Word Who is the image of the Father; and as the air is penetrated by the sun, thus we receive in idleness of spirit the Incomprehensible Light, enfolding us and penetrating us. And this Light is nothing else but an infinite gazing and seeing. We behold that which we are, and we are that which we behold; because our thought, life and being are uplifted in simplicity and made one with the Truth which is God."
(Ruysbroeck)*

All the mystics agree that the stripping off of the I, the Me, the Mine, utter renouncement, or "self-naughting"--self-abandonment to the direction of a larger Will--is an imperative condition of the attainment of the Unitive Life.

The temporary stripping and laying bare of the mind, whereby the contemplative made space for the vision of God, must now be applied to the whole life. Here, they say, there is a final swallowing up of that willful I-hood, that surface individuality which we ordinarily recognize as ourselves. It goes for ever, and something new is established in its room; the self is made part of the mystical Body of God.



That strange hunger and thirst of God for the soul of which the mystics speak in their profoundest passages, here makes its final demand and receives its satisfaction. "All that He has, all that He is He gives: all that we have, all that we are, He takes." The self, they declare, is devoured, immersed in the Abyss; "sinks into God, Who is the deep of deeps."

Even the most transcendental mystic is constantly compelled to fall back on the language of love in the endeavor to express the content of his metaphysical raptures: and forced in the end to acknowledge that the perfect union of Lover and Beloved cannot be suggested in the precise and arid terms of religious philosophy.

The simplest expression of the Unitive Life, the simplest interpretation which we can put on its declarations, is that it is the complete and conscious fulfillment here and now of this Perfect Love.

The Mystic Way has been a progress, a growth in love: a deliberate fostering of the inward tendency of the soul towards its source, an eradication of its disorderly tendencies to temporal goods. But the only proper end of love is union: a perfect uniting and coupling together of the lover and the loved into one.



The fruition of joy constituting the interior life of mystic souls immersed in the Absolute is often realized as the perennial possession of a childlike gaiety, an inextinguishable gladness of heart. The transfigured souls move to the measures of a love dance which persists in mirth without comparison, through every outward hardship and tribulation. They enjoy the high spirits peculiar to high spirituality: and shock the world by a delicate playfulness, instead of exhibiting the morose resignation which it feels to be proper to the spiritual life.

The most clear-sighted amongst the mystics declare such joy to be an implicit of Reality. Thus Dante, initiated into Paradise, sees the whole Universe laugh with delight as it glorifies God. The countenance of Perfect Love, the mystics tell us, is adorned with smiles.

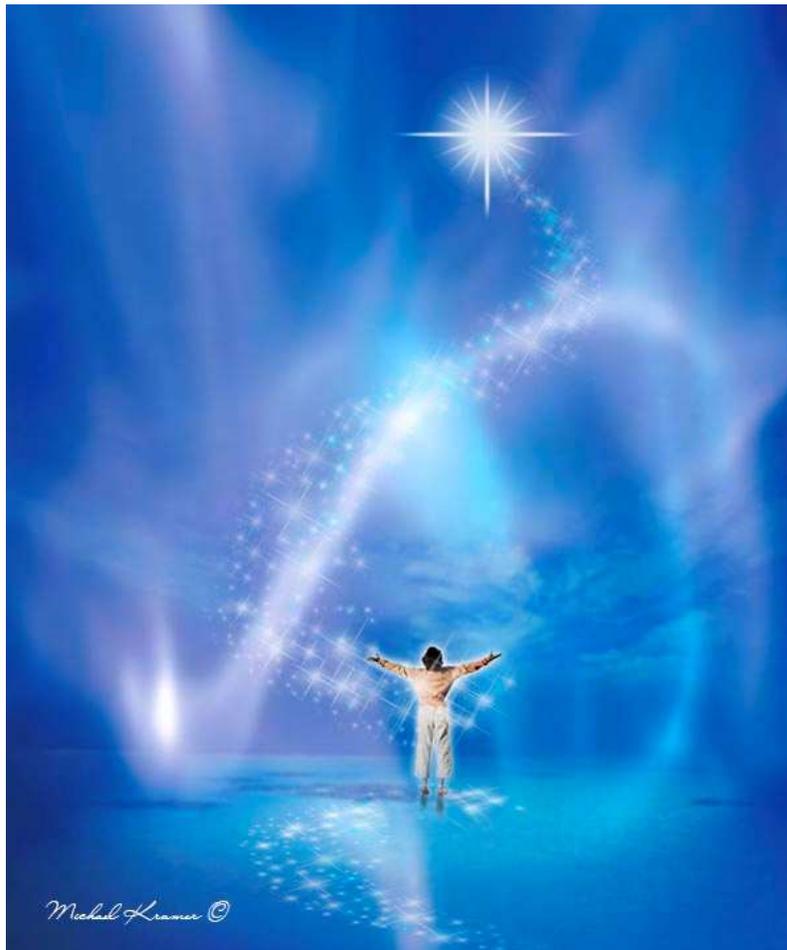
The great mystics dance to music and laughter in the Heaven of the sun, as the Divine Essence is at last revealed to them, and they perceive love and joy as the final attributes of God.

The Music of the Spheres is all about them: they are a part of the great melody of the Divine.



*"Sweetest indeed is the rest which the spirit takes while sweet Godly sound comes down, in which it is delighted: and in this most sweet song the mind is ravished, to sing of love everlasting."
(Richard Rolle)*

"When the loving kindness of God calls a soul from the world, He finds it full of vices and sins; and first He gives it an instinct for virtue, and then urges it to perfection, and then by infused grace leads it to true self-naughting, and at last to true transformation. And this noteworthy order serves God to lead the soul along the Way: but when the soul is naughted and transformed, then of herself she neither works nor speaks nor wills, nor feels nor hears nor understands, neither has she of herself the feeling of outward or inward, where she may move. And in all things it is God Who rules and guides her, without the mediation of any creature. And the state of this soul is then a feeling of such utter peace and tranquility that it seems to her that her heart, and her bodily being, and all both within and without is immersed in an ocean of utmost peace; from when she shall never come forth for anything that can befall her in this life. And she stays immovable, imperturbable, impassible. So much so, that it seems to her in her human and her spiritual nature, both within and without, she can feel no other thing than sweetest peace. And she is so full of peace that though she press her flesh, her nerves, her bones, no other thing comes forth from them than peace."
(Saint Catherine of Genoa)



The wheel of life has made its circle. Here, at the last point of its revolution, the extremes of sublimity and simplicity are seen to meet. It has swept the soul of the mystic through periods of alternate stress and glory; tending ever to greater transcendence, greater freedom, closer contact with the Supplier of true life.

He emerges from that long and wondrous journey to find himself in rest and in work, a little child upon the bosom of the Father. In that most dear relation all feeling, will, and thought attain their end. Here all the teasing complications of our separated selfhood are transcended. Hence the eager striving, the sharp vision, are not wanted any more. In that mysterious death of selfhood on the summits which is the medium of Eternal Life, heights meet the deeps: supreme achievement and complete humility are one.



Initiated into the atmosphere of Eternity, united with the Absolute, possessed at last of the fullness of Its life, the soul becomes as a little child: for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Conclusion

The study of mysticism is vital for the deeper understanding of the history of humanity. It shows us, upon high levels, the psychological process to which every self which desires to rise to the perception of Reality must submit: the formula under which man's spiritual consciousness, be it strong or weak, must necessarily unfold.

In the great mystics we see the highest and widest development of that consciousness to which the human race has yet attained. We see its growth exhibited to us on a grand scale, perceptible of all men: the stages of its slow transcendence of the sense-world marked by episodes of splendor and of terror which are hard for common men to accept or understand as a part of the organic process of life.

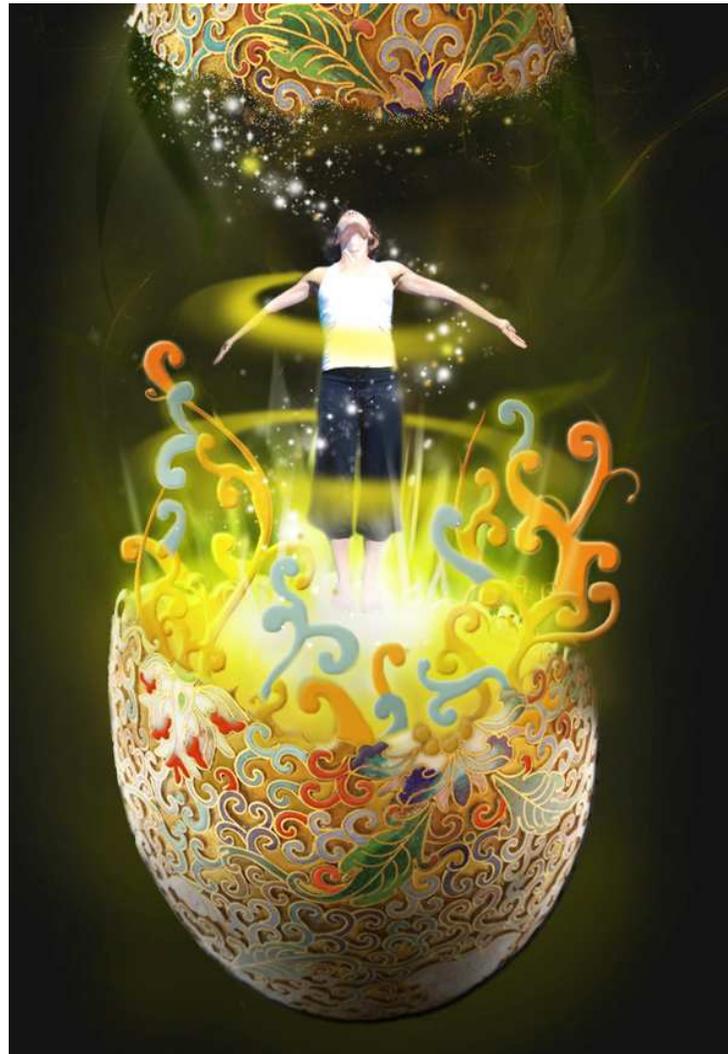
But the germ of that same transcendent life, the spring of the amazing energy which enables the great mystic to rise to freedom and dominate his world, is latent in all of us, an integral part of our humanity. Where the mystic has a genius for the Absolute, we have each a little buried talent, some greater, some less; and the growth of this talent, this spark of the soul, once we permit its emergence, will conform to those laws of organic growth, those inexorable conditions of transcendence which we found to govern the Mystic Way.

Every person who awakens to consciousness of a Reality which transcends the normal world of sense--however small, weak, imperfect that consciousness may be--is put upon a road which follows at low levels the path which the mystic treads at high levels.

The success with which he follows this way to freedom and full life will depend on the intensity of his love and will, his capacity for self-discipline, his steadfastness and courage. It will depend on the generosity and completeness of his outgoing passion for absolute beauty, absolute goodness, or absolute truth.

But if he move at all, he will move through a series of states which are, in their own small way, analogous to those experienced by the greatest contemplative on his journey towards that union with God which is the term of the spirit's ascent towards its home.

According to the measure of their strength and of their passion, these, the true lovers of the Absolute, have conformed here and now to the utmost tests of divine son-ship, the final demands of life. They have not shrunk from the sufferings of the cross. They have faced the darkness of the tomb. Beauty and agony alike have called them: alike have awakened a heroic response. For them the winter is over: the time of the singing of birds is come. From the deeps of the dewy garden, Life--new, unquenchable, and ever lovely--comes to meet them with the dawn.





May your soul be happy;
journey joyfully.
(Rumi)

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