

THE MYSTIC HEART: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions

Wayne Teasdale (New World Library 1999)

We need a new approach to spirituality that transcends past religious cultures of fragmentation and isolation. Our understanding is only a dot on a blackboard; by openness to others we enlarge our awareness ~ we are not of one mind but can be of one heart.

Being '**religious**' connotes belonging & practice within a tradition.

Being '**spiritual**' suggests personal commitment to process of inner engagement to our totality. A disposition to a life of depth, searching for meaning and belonging.

Can be rooted in ones tradition, but not stuck in it: Sufis, Xn

"Mysticism .. is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the absolute, and nothing else .. not to know about it but to *Be* is the mark of the real initiate." Evelyn Underhill.

Elements of Mystical Experience:

Practical (never abstract), Experiential, Ineffable, Nonconceptual, Unitive (nonduality), Noetic (actual awareness, actually tasting knowledge of God), Integrative psychologically, Sapiential, confers Certainty, glimpses Transcendent.

For some the goal is the personal God or great Spirit, for others (eg Vedic) it is impersonal subject; for Buddhist, transpersonal awakening to awareness – everything is god so it makes no sense to talk of god 'out there' since we are all Buddha nature.

Interspirituality = sharing ultimate experience across traditions. Exponents incl. BEDE GRIFFITHS: b 1906. English Benedictine. Ashram at Shantivanam. Quantum mechanics too. "I find myself in the Void, but the Void is totally saturated with Love."

RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR: Christian, Hindu, Buddhist. Looked at Meister Eckhart.

THOMAS MERTON: Sri Lankan Buddha arousal. 1966 RC acknowledged eastern religions of worth.

THOMAS KEATING (Centering Prayer) From the Cloud of Unknowing. Saw his style as answer to Hindu and Buddhist meditation. Trappist. [Ratzinger abhorred Buddhism] Others said Buddhism and Christianity in dialectical historical process.

Chapter 3: Consciousness as Root of Identity

Hindu Atman – spirit itself; the absolute is **Brahman** and the Atman is the presence of Brahman within all beings. So the deepest centre of ourselves is one with the deepest centre of the universe. Between individual and divine reality is a subtle distinction and yet are one – ‘one and yet not one’. Persons pass through life slowly awakening from self-ignorance, finally returning to the Brahman. Atman uses the body.

Buddhism: Siddhartha became the enlightened one. The enlightenment (*Bodhi*) is the awakening to intrinsic unity. Everything here is impermanent & empty (*Shunya*) Leave our empty desires – this letting go is *nirvana* which is the road to bliss itself. Desire holds us to *Samsara* cycle. The self does not exist. We come back to our ‘Buddha nature’.

Christianity: Augustine adopted Plato, Aquinas Aristotle ~ soul’s vocation is intimacy with God, which is eternal life (*theosis, deification*) Love unites love and knowing: love vivified by intellect, reason expanded by love. Soul is not immortal but eternal (as gift) so we believe in Resurrection of the body.

Consciousness: Quantum Physics says universe is one system, so everything depends on Consciousness because we experience because we are *aware, conscious*. No meaning in speaking of world independent of **mind. We do not own our consciousness, we inhabit it – we are it.** Ownership of self is a nonsense when bombarded by a virus or volcano and this because consciousness is communal. There are Stages of Awareness. Child is aware but only of self need; adolescent sees deeper self but can be solipsistic, adult awareness is creative other-centred awareness. Enlightenment is partial when not yet including heart, complete when it expands for heart and mind, total when enjoys cosmic consciousness with heart or sensitivity. Our identity is vaster than local awareness. Nature and art can help in this.

QUANTUM PHYSICS:

The search for unified field theory of the four forces of gravity, electromagnetism, the strong and weak nuclear forces, is not to be found outside them but within –

Consciousness! Light is photons which are energy quanta acting in wavelike fashion and more subtle than mere matter able to be in two places at once until observed. Intentionality appears to be at work in particles, waves and atomic structures. Perhaps they are conscious in some way? They achieve non-local communication: Seattle and Chicago can be linked by them, and this is also demonstrated in accelerators. Matter and energy are therefore not the only 'stuff'.

THE MANY PATHS: Contemplation and Action not mutually exclusive.

Inner Path: Liberation from Samsara in Hinduism (*moksha*) done by withdrawing attention (letting go) from senses of the unreal realm (*yoga*) the mind is refreshed in the Atman. Some Hindu mystics are Panentheists: God can also be found in the cosmos, not just within.

Outer Path ~ action Most Christians say their union with God retains clear differentiation ~ we participate, not actual union. Nature may be conduit. Social action can presuppose communal union.

1. West sees unification as that of wills, with God initiating & communicating .
2. East sees enlightenment as goal (but allows abuse of the other if not careful)

Actually need both together.

The Asramas: The Four Stages of life.

1. *Brahmacarya*: Studenthood. Memorising scripture, assisted by chanting Slokas or passages, the meaning of which texts may come much later.
2. *Grihastha*: (around 24yrs) Householder. Family, career, social responsibilities. Fulfilling religious obligations at temple etc.
3. *Vanaprastha*: Forest Hermit. (when hair is grey and first grandchild born) retires from world. Learning to let go by contemplation. Wife may accompany.
4. *Sannyasa*: renunciation. Absolutely no ties to world. Free to wander as a sign to others of ultimate reality of Brahman. Is provided with food as the *sannyasa* wanders.

The Magras: The Four Paths of Awareness.

Each related to personality type, an individual maybe having all four over course of life. Called *yogas* because they are ways of integrating with divine.

1. *Jnana Yoga*: Intellectual approach to inner life. Abiding knower who observes.
2. *Bakthi Yoga*: Pure devotion. Long devotional practices, perhaps chanting the *bhajans* (devotional songs), pilgrimage to sites of Shiva, Krishna or Parvati. It is the way of love and devotion.
3. *Karma Yoga*: Selfless work or service to God and others. Never counting cost.
4. *Raha Yoga*: following path of intensified meditational practice and other psychospiritual exercises to produce ecstatic interior states of consciousness or absorption in God.

CHAPTERS FIVE-SEVEN: The Mystic character. 9 elements of mature spirituality.

Life a journey from hypocrisy to sincerity ~ from entertainment to the real. Simply own what our ego is up to then move on to maturity. Mother Teresa, “I realised long ago that I had a Hitler within me.”

1. Actual Moral Capacity: we *must* be compassionate. Dharmic *ahimsa*, non-harming. Abrahamic Decalogue is further refined by Jesus in love-in-action
2. Solidarity with all living beings: Body of Christ, Ummah. Normally fleeting experience being in team or family. Again quantum physics tells us we are in complicated web of interdependent relationships. When a hologram is fragmented, each fragment carries the whole. The whole present in each of us.
3. Deep non-violence: Jains have never fought a war. True self is relationship to others.
4. Humility: Ego-lessness is incomprehensible to our cultures. To be who we are created to be and no other.
5. Spiritual Practice: Devotions but also Contemplation. e.g. Lectio Divina = reading *lectio* for inspiration, inner musing *reflection* or pondering in our heart, then God-directed prayer *oratio* of the heart, finally *contemplation* resting in God.

Some contemplation is our inspiration other is God's alone. (active and passive)

Many types of meditation *Centering Prayer* ~ Thomas Keating. Taking a sacred word into oneself. *Christian Zen* ~ a riddle meant to trip us; Transcendental Meditation ~ a relaxing mantra; *Yoga & Martial arts* ~ integration of body and mind through

movement; *Mass & conventional prayer; Devotions ~ rosary, Stations, chanting, singing.*

6. Mature Self-Knowledge: we lie to ourselves but self-knowledge brings inner change, joy, the bliss of wisdom, Humour transcending our seriousness. The transformation affects Consciousness, Will, Emotions, Character, Imagination, Memory, Action.
7. Simplicity of Life: uncluttered by property and money. Not squandering or degrading precious resources. Discards our crutches.
8. Selfless Service & Compassionate Action: Abrahamic faiths are teaching dharmic faiths. Bhagavad Gita shows service does not seek a result but simply respond to need. Shifts from ego-centricity.
9. Prophetic Voice: Leadership in Justice. Many witnesses seeking to be present to issues of need. The Moment is sacramentally filled with presence of Trinity's openness.

CHAPTER EIGHT: READING THE BOOK OF CREATION

Cosmos is sacramental system. The Atman is the immanent manifestation of the transcendent Brahman. Dancing Shiva is God dancing in heart of creation and every human heart (B Griffiths). Book of Wisdom and Romans 'God's nature perceived in things he has made'. Francis of Assisi; Wordsworth; Emerson; Indigenous cultures; Thomas Berry shows numinous in nature without moral connotations added by Religion. Utter wildness. Wm Blake sees totality of all that is in one instant 'infinity in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour'. We behold but do not comprehend. Pilgrimage acknowledges place or journey as sacred. The Body: Yoga, Martial arts refuses to reject body as Christian mysticism has done – Francis' poor body was victim of his piety!

CHAPTER NINE: INTERSPIRITUAL

Ultimate reality beyond name or concept and at heart of all religions, faith being the opening of self to this reality. It communicates itself everywhere so must not isolate but engage in disciplined way.

HINDU TRADITION: *Moksha* liberation from bondage of duality is through knowledge of identity of Brahman and Self (*Atman*)

BUDDHIST TRADITION *Bodhi* enlightenment to interrelatedness of all beings by awareness of emptiness of everything. Only interbeing is real. Ego ignores wellbeing of whole and so ignores reality. All is emptiness and compassion. Immanent not transcendent reality.

CHRISTIAN, SUFI & KABBALAH HASIDICS TRADITION Transcendence of God, but Xn and Sufi add nearness. Jewish find intimacy with God from a distance (never seeing the face of God). This nearness is bought through purification, even suffering dark night and death of the false self (Sufis particularly are aware of this). God's will is that our will is transformed into his perfect love, so we have to recognise obstacles within us and let them go. For Christians it is a transformation for love, for Hindus and Buddhists it is a transformation of consciousness.

CHAPTER TEN ~ UNIVERSAL MYSTICISM:

Contemplative: beyond need for thought; *Interpersonal*: open to wisdom from all quarters; *Socially Engaged*: including all who suffer; *Environmentally responsible*: ; *Holistic*: integrating body and mind, consciousness and spirit; *Engaging with other media*: music, art etc.; *Cosmically open*: community of consciousness more than only human; *Aiming for integration*: trusting others' experience.

“Spirituality, finally, is awareness and sensitivity, and sensitivity is itself awareness-in-action... risks all for the sake of others.”