

Beyond Reason: The Certitude of the Mystics from Al-Hallaj to David R. Hawkins

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the teachings of several Christian and Sufi mystics on the position of reason in the spiritual life, from Al-Hallaj (d. 922) to David R. Hawkins (b. 1927). In the plethora of “maps,” “stages,” and “ladders” discussed by mystics, the level of reason is highly regarded as a “rung” of spiritual attainment. However, reason alone is not enough to transport the soul to the most intimate spiritual realms. Love, which emanates from the heart, is the more powerful opener to the Beloved, Reality, or God. The article focuses on the difference between thinking about God or Reality through conceptual reason versus realizing God or Reality as an experiential certitude, as one is dissolved into, or united with, God/ Reality. Such realized beings offer a beneficial impact on the world through the phenomenon of “silent transmission.”

1. Introduction: What is a Mystic?

Sufi mystic Al-Hallaj was executed in Baghdad (d. 922) for declaring his oneness with the Beloved: “I am the Real” (Schimmel, 1975, 72). His love for God was so intense that it burned every barrier: “Between me and You, there is only me. Take away the me, so only You remain” (Lewis, 2001). Marguerite Porete was burned at the stake as a “heretic” in 1310. Catholic authorities ex-communicated her, remanded her to prison, and publicly burned her book, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Yet she refused to deny her subjective experience of God. She stayed silent in prison, passing up opportunities to defend herself, recant her “errors,” or receive absolution. She consented to a pyre rather than deny this inner truth: “I am dissolved in Him” (Porete, 156). Mystics throughout history have described the timeless state of ego dissolution, when all sense of a personal self dissolves into that which is Universal and Eternal—somewhat like sugar melting into warm water, or a rain drop falling into the ocean. What remains is a stunning inner silence, empty of all thoughts or mental talk, and a rock-solid awareness that one is not separate from anything or anyone else. This article explores the certitude of the mystic in the aftermath of such an experience, a certitude that is unshakable even to the point of death.

Now, many people may have personal knowledge of a *temporary* timeless “flow” or “being in the zone,” moments in which the constant self-monitoring of the ego-mind is muted, and the ordinary orientation in time and space is lost. This happens when people are engaged in creative work, love-making, athletic or stage performance, the birth of a child, religious and patriotic ritual, meditation, dying, or other peak experiences. Very few people, however, ever speak of such a state as a *baseline*, and we typically refer to the rare individuals who do as “mystics, sages, and saints.” Because of the rarity of this type of inner condition, there is a tendency among those who have never experienced it at all to dismiss it as hallucination or fakery. While spiritual charlatans and delusional religionists certainly exist, such a dismissive, skeptical position is hard to hold at a universal level if we take into account the global inspiration and uplift that has occurred because of the rare individuals who credit their inner condition of ego-dissolution (i.e., no personal self) for their love toward the world and desire to teach, such as Mohandas K. Gandhi and Mother Teresa. In such cases, certitude and an indefatigable stamina for universal love and selfless service emerge from the experiential realization of the oneness of existence. The mystics remain *certain* of the realm they have experienced, even if secular and ecclesiastical skeptics protest that it cannot be true.

Mystics may be viewed as those intrepid souls who traverse the spiritual realm much as Marco Polo traversed the geographical realm. Whereas many thirteenth-century Europeans were content in their belief that there was “no such thing as China,” Marco Polo pressed on with single-pointed perseverance to discover unknown lands. Reaching the farthest possible destinations, he returned home to Venice to share his maps of the “silk road.” However, upon hearing Polo’s accounts of other lands, skeptics dismissed him as knavish and deluded. So it has been with the mystics. They have ventured into the farthest interior realms and reached the ultimate destination, “*Unio mystica*.” Like Marco Polo, the mystics remain *certain* of the realm they have experienced, even if this territory is largely unknown to the majority of people.

2. Mystic Consciousness and the Transmission of Lived Truth

This article suggests that the mystic's experiential knowledge of Ultimate Reality has the capacity to transmit a powerful and inspirational impact, more so than a "belief system" arrived at through conceptual reason and apodeictic proof. It is the power of the heart. The Sufi scholar-mystic Al-Ghazali joked of the difference when he commented that the academic theologians of his day could go on and on about the forty finer points of divorce law but say nothing about the sincere love for God. _Experiential certitude, in other words, carries with it a powerful transmission of lived truth (Grace, 2011a). "He who tastes, knows" is the well-known Sufi saying. Tasting chocolate is more compelling than studying its chemical components. Whereas the scholar offers well-reasoned knowledge based on cognitive mastery of data and doctrine, the mystic offers another kind of knowledge based on an inner "realization." Experiential truth, in contrast to intellectually acquired information, carries with it a high-frequency radiance that activates a deep transformation in the spiritual seeker.

This radiance of the mystic, saint, or sage is often pictured as a "halo" and described classically as a "silent transmission." Such a transmission has long been intuitively known in the history of religions, noted in the arduous trips undertaken by pilgrims to visit saints and sages, either in person or as relics. In modern times, countless seekers have waited in line to be in an auditorium with, be touched by, or sit in the silent presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Ramana Maharshi, David R. Hawkins, Padre Pio, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, and others. Often the trips are made from across the world, and with great sacrifice. The effect seems to be true even after the body has expired. Hundreds of thousands of devotees, for example, kiss the tombs of Sufi saints around the world.

According to esoteric traditions, first-person experience is more complete than conceptual knowledge. It is one thing to read a book about the Taj Mahal and quite another to go see it, sit in it, walk its grounds, and breathe its air. Sufi poet Rumi makes a parallel to alchemy. The most basic level is to study the theory of alchemy. The next level is to practice its principles. The superior level is experiential: to become transmuted into gold (Chittick, 2005, 21). In *The Book of Certainty*, Abu Bkar Siraj ad-Din explains the three levels of knowledge in Sufism by analogy to the Burning Bush (symbol for Ultimate Reality). Those who *hear about* the Burning Bush from Moses possess the lowest degree of knowledge called the "Lore of Certainty." This is "hearsay," third-person knowledge attained via reportage from another. Interestingly, this is the form of knowledge often deemed as most legitimate in conventional academic learning. Those who possess the next level of knowledge, called the "Eye of Certainty," have *seen* the flames of the Burning Bush, such as Moses when he was approaching the Burning Bush. Finally, the "Truth of Certainty" is the highest level of knowledge and belongs only to those who have *become one with* the Burning Bush, consumed by its flames (1992, 1-2). Al-Ghazali identifies the three levels as: 1) knowledge of God gained through study; 2) faith gained through hearing about the spiritual experiences of others; 3) fruitional experience gained by first-hand intimacies with Divinity/ Reality (2000, 58).

Al-Ghazali is of particular interest to us because he was a supremely accomplished scholar, known as "The Proof of Islam." At a crucial point in his academic career, he came to see himself as a hypocrite because he spoke of sublime truths that were merely the truths of others, not his own. Therefore, he left his academic post to become a wandering dervish and to do continuous Sufi practice for many years, so that the "lore" about spiritual realms might be verified in his heart (2000, 51-52). Beyond studying the theory of alchemy, he sought to be transmuted into gold. Only then, he declared, could he teach with authority. Devotees of such mystics describe a "transmission" of peace and authority when in their presence. Whence this "transmission"? Harold Coward, in his study of Yoga, notes that the authority of verbal transmission issues from the "original experience" which a sage's words report. Without experiential inner knowledge, there is nothing to transmit. "Words contain knowledge if they are true" (2002, 12). The mystic's words about Reality carry power for the hearer because the mystic is that which *knows* Reality, by having become one with It.

Scientists are finding ways to measure the "physics of silent transmission." According to this emerging science, the true mystic, saint, or sage emanates an extraordinary "field" of "energy coherence" so that seekers who enter the mystic's "field" (often called "aura") benefit from the healing capacities intrinsic to that energy coherence (Hawkins, 1995; Grace, 2011b; Hunt, 1996; Targ and Katra, 2003). The "Map of Consciousness" developed by modern mystic and clinical scientist David R. Hawkins breaks new ground in explaining the transmission effect and inspirational power so often noted of saints, sages, and mystics.

Based on an application of “attractor fields” from nonlinear dynamics and chaos theory, the “Map of Consciousness” posits that the higher “energy fields” or “attractor fields” of Love, Peace, and Self-Realization radiate an uplifting effect on the world at the energetic level (Hawkins, 1995). Experiential knowledge is sometimes seen as suspect in academia and certain religious dogmas. However, experiential knowledge tends to be more authoritative than book learning in real life. For example, when hiking an unfamiliar trail, I would rather learn about the conditions of the trail from the hiker who has come down from the top of the mountain than from the one reading a guidebook at the start of the trailhead. In another sphere of life, the person with twenty years of sobriety from alcohol has a testimony that transmits an invisible but deeply felt inspiration to the active alcoholic who wonders if he or she will ever survive a day without booze. A spouse or doctor might use similar words, but their statement will lack the transmission of inspiration and hope because, without lived experience, it is the mere admonishment of “you should quit drinking”—not the authority of an authentic testimony such as: “I *know* it’s possible because I have been sober for twenty years.”

The mystic testifies to the existence of a realm beyond ordinary perception. The mystic has attained, as Annemarie Schimmel writes in her preface to the letters of Sufi mystic Ibn ‘Abbad, the highest state of the spiritual life: “Certitude, the unquestioning trust in God’s wisdom, is the highest state the wayfarer can hope for, and he who has reached it will not need any revelations of hidden mysteries: He *is* the clear vision” (Schimmel, 1986, viii). How does experiential certitude relate to epistemology? The American psychologist of religious experience, William James, distinguished between “knowledge-about” (conceptual) and “knowledge by acquaintance” (through direct contact) (James, 1996, 56ff). More recently, mysticism scholar Robert K.C. Forman has argued for “knowledge-by-identity” to specify the pure awareness that exists as an “innate capacity” within all humans: “I know my consciousness . . . because I *am* it” (1998, 21). David R. Hawkins, a modern mystic, very clearly distinguishes between “identity *with* Reality” versus “description *of* Reality” and declares: “the only way to know a thing is to BE it.” The mystic *knows* Reality by virtue of being it as his or her actual *identity*, whereas the non-mystic can only try to describe Reality: “The mystic has *become* what the religionist would describe” (June 2007, CD Track 3).

This has profound humanitarian significance. In the final analysis, mystic consciousness is not only an interesting subject for intellectual inquiry. Throughout history and across cultures, it has been posited to heal, inspire, and offer ultimate liberation from suffering. One split second of illumination is remembered for a lifetime and may have a worldwide impact. Mother Teresa and Mohandas K. Gandhi each had a life-changing illumination during a train ride, and the effect on the world was staggering. Rumi, the medieval Sufi poet beloved in our own era, communicates a mystic awareness of Beauty that has transmitted joy across many centuries and cultures. We live in a time of great suffering. What can mystics teach us about our untapped inner resources? What exactly is the effect of a person that radiates total peace and universal compassion? Is it really possible that our own consciousness holds the power to uplift not only ourselves but also the world? The mystics say, “Yes.” This article probes their “Yes.”

3. David R. Hawkins: An Example of the Pursuit of Truth Beyond Reason

Since scholars of the mystics are not as familiar with Hawkins (he is the only still-living mystic in this article), here is a brief narrative account (see Grace, 2011b). In 1965, he was a 38-year old psychiatrist. Although highly accomplished in the world, he lay deathly ill and faced agonizing despair. As the final moment approached, “there was emergence in total spiritual darkness and the agony of existential terror and aloneness.” Nearly lost forever in the “timeless depths of hell,” he suddenly consented to “an inner voice” that uttered, “If there is a God, I ask Him for help.” It took him thirty years to recount to others the incomprehensible mystery of what happened after this prayer:

Oblivion. When consciousness returned, a transformation of such enormity had taken place that there was only silence and awe. The ‘person’ that had been no longer existed. There was no personal ‘I’ or self or ego, only an Infinite Presence of unlimited power that had replaced what had been ‘me.’ The body and its actions were controlled solely by the Infinite Will of the Presence. The world was illuminated by the clarity of an Infinite Oneness. All things revealed their infinite beauty and perfection as the expression of Divinity.... Where the world saw ugliness, there was only timeless beauty. This spiritual love suffused all perception and all boundaries between here and there and then and now, and separation disappeared (2003, 365-366).

Although Hawkins was raised Episcopalian and was agnostic at the time of this experience, the intense quest for Ultimate Truth had characterized his whole life: “There was an inner core within consciousness that was desperate to reach some greater truth” (2003, 365). He had mastered the world of reason: he read Socrates and Plato as a boy; studied advanced theology at a Jesuit university; completed medical school, established a successful clinical practice, and authored numerous scientific articles. But all of these studies and investigations only brought deeper despair and failed to integrate his profound spiritual experiences as a youth. At age twelve, for example, Hawkins was biking his paper route in rural Wisconsin during the winter when a storm hit, gusting with twenty-below-zero winds. He found refuge in a hollowed-out snow bank along the road. Instead of fearing death, Hawkins experienced a timeless and gentle “Presence” of overwhelming Love that melted the mind into complete silence:

Soon the shivering stopped and there was a delicious warmth, and then a state of peace beyond all description. This was accompanied by a suffusion of light and a presence of Infinite Love which had no beginning and no end and was undifferentiated from my own essence....The mind grew silent; all thought stopped. An Infinite Presence was all that was or could be, beyond all time and description (2001, 335).

When the state of Infinite Presence and Love returned at age 38, it brought with it the certitude about existence that had been lacking in his pursuit of truth via the efforts of reason. Hawkins’ experience of life was then radically transformed, reminiscent of the descriptions by Teresa of Avila about her experiences in the Seventh Mansions and those by medieval mystic Marguerite Porete of the “annihilated” soul, void of “self.” The sense of a separate self dissolved: “When I look in other people’s eyes, there is only one Self” (Hawkins, 2008). Indeed, to this day, he refers to “Doc Hawkins” in third-person language, not as an “I” or “me.” Hafiz, the Sufi poet, uses the same third-person reference to himself in his poetry. Mystic awareness is universal, not personal.

Hawkins eventually left his clinical practice in New York and drove a pick-up truck to a remote area in the Southwest, where he hoped to “perfect” himself as an instrument and investigate the healing capacity within consciousness itself. He lived somewhat the life of a hermit for several years, sleeping on a thrift store cot, rarely eating, and spending his time in meditation and study of the world’s scriptures and mystics. He was researching the nature of consciousness from the inside out, hoping to find a mechanism by which to alleviate human suffering. In 1995, with the publication of *Power versus Force: The Hidden Determinants of Human Behavior*, he communicated the non-linear inner revelations via a framework that was linear and therefore could be understood by non-mystics. The “Map of Consciousness,” explained in the book, emerged as the primary teaching tool to facilitate spiritual awareness, thereby bringing relief of suffering.

The “Map of Consciousness” offers a roadmap by which to navigate the inner life, no matter the religious particularities. This is the work of all mystics: to reveal the “innermost ground,” as medieval Christian mystic Johannes Tauler called it. The “Map of Consciousness” is a single-page chart that lays out the progression from the lower “levels of consciousness” such as “Shame,” “Guilt,” “Fear,” “Desire,” “Anger,” “Pride,” (i.e., levels dominated by ego drives), to the median levels of “Courage,” “Willingness,” “Acceptance,” “Reason” (i.e., levels dominated by personal integrity), to the higher levels of “Love,” “Unconditional Love/Joy/Healing,” “Ecstasy,” “Peace,” and “Enlightenment.” These higher levels are increasingly free of personal goals and are the domain of saints, mystics, arhats, and avatars. The “Map of Consciousness” has parallels to the stages and levels in Sufi, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian literature, as well as the Western classic “The Great Chain of Being” and the modern “Universal Grammar of Worldviews” outlined by scholar Huston Smith (2009, 189-196). Everything that exists radiates energy. The “Map of Consciousness” suggests that energies can be divided into two basic groups: those which have a negative orientation and drain energy from the world, and those which have a positive orientation and give energy to the world. Within the positively oriented group, we find the rare mystics and saints who have *perfected* their love for all beings. Simply by being what they are, which is a state of joy, unconditional love, and imperturbable peace, such persons emanate an energy field that has a healing effect on those around them and the world itself.

4. The Place of Reason in Spiritual Development

Reason is a powerful energy that accomplishes much in the world, but Love has the capacity to heal without effort. In the soul’s “ascent” to God, mystics usually locate rationality at the highest level of what is possible for humans “by nature.” It is generally placed about half way up the ladder to the Ultimate. Beyond reason, there is the opening of the heart, the “third eye” (spiritual discernment) and the higher levels of illumination.

For the mystics examined here, reason is viewed as a goal for the spiritual beginner, yet a hindrance for advanced contemplatives if they stop there. Having themselves arrived at the spiritual destination traditionally described as the goal of the religious life, “union with God” or “Self-Realization” or “Enlightenment,” the mystics illumine the pathway for others according to their specific religious and historical lenses. They have attained to what Sufi philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr calls “the ultimate goal of human life, the crown of human existence”: personal “knowledge” of the “One Who is the Origin and End of all things, who is Sat (Being), Chit (Consciousness), and Ananda (Bliss),” the “I of all I’s” (2007, 229).

Their conveyance of an inner illumination serves as a lighthouse for other travelers, even if it is impossible for them to put the radiant effulgence of their illumination into language. How to describe the silent, nonverbal, undifferentiated, nonlinear, nonlocal, non-conceptual Infinite Reality? The anonymous medieval Christian author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* concludes, with no small irony, that whatever *can* be said about the experience of God is *not* It:

Do not be surprised, then, if my awkward, human tongue fails to explain its value adequately. And God forbid that the experience itself become so degenerate as to fit in to the narrow confines of human language....Whatever we may say of it is not it, but only about it (1973, Book of Privy Counseling, 169).

The use of paradox and metaphor, therefore, is common. For example, Teresa of Avila of sixteenth-century Spain writes of an “Interior Castle” in which the soul progresses through seven “mansions” of ever-deepening communion with God. The human is “by nature...richly endowed” for the capacity of direct communion with God. Thus, Teresa points to “prayer and meditation” as “the door of entry into this castle.” Since “we ourselves are the castle,” the soul is advised “to enter within itself (2004, 6-7).” She declares: “It is absurd to think that we can enter Heaven without first entering our own souls” (31). Reason governs the soul as it dwells in the first three mansions, but then moral reasoning, discursive study, and virtuous effort give way, through humility, to Love and Grace in the Fourth Mansion. Marguerite Porete speaks of seven “stages” of spiritual life. Progress requires three “deaths” at different points along the way: early on, there is the death to sin when one is born into Christian life; second, there is the death to nature when one sheds the guidance of human Reason to be directed by Divine Love; finally, there is the death of the spiritualized ego (called “spirit” by Porete) when one surrenders the personal will, with all of its desperate striving to reach God, and is thus born to its original eternal Being, at rest in God (1993, 118-119, 189-194).

The brief but luminous text from Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, is unequivocal in its assertion that the Supreme is beyond concepts, beyond form, and beyond any attempt to discuss or categorize it: “That the Supreme Cause of every conceptual thing is not itself conceptual”; “It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding”; “It is beyond assertion and denial” (1987, 141). The soul must venture beyond everything apprehended by senses or perceived by understanding:

My advice to you as you look for a sight of the mysterious things, is to leave behind you everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge (135).

The Cloud of Unknowing describes two basic stages of Christian life, active and contemplative. The “active” Christian life of “doing” and “thinking” is fine, but “inferior” to the contemplative life. Reason attains to salvation through the study of spiritual books and sermons, performance of learned prayers, and submission to the rituals of the church (1973, 85). This is Martha of Luke 10:38-42, who wants to “do” for Jesus. The intermediate soul, in between “active” and “contemplative,” begins to cultivate a meditative orientation that is more “interior, living from the depths of himself.” The advanced contemplative (e.g., Mary who attended solely to the Presence of Jesus in the story from Luke 10) “turns to God with a burning desire for Himself alone and rests in the blind awareness of his naked being” with no thoughts or words, not even about God (1973, 94). This is similar to what David R. Hawkins describes as “surrender of the will at great depth” (Correspondence with the author, 2007). Through this emptying (“self-forgetting”) and “naked intent,” one transcends nature and is lifted by Grace to the “Cloud of Unknowing.” The advanced soul enjoys “intuitive” knowing and “obscure certainty”—“without the intervention of analytical thought” (1973, 94.) While it is “laudable to reflect upon God’s kindness,” according to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, “it is far better to let your mind rest in the awareness of him in his naked existence.” He advises the inner prayer to be a single word, such as “Is-ness” (1973, 54).

Johannes Tauler, medieval Catholic mystic-preacher, refers to progressive stages of spiritual life. In his sermons, he describes “two kinds” of Christians touched by a longing for God: the first “stifles” the desire by trying to “understand” it with the “ideas” and “techniques” of “natural reason”; the second, “unencumbered” of their own ideas, allow themselves “to fall into His loving arms,” having “died to themselves” (1985, 46-47). The “summit” of the soul’s ascent is, paradoxically, the “divine abyss” where God “delights in his own Being” as the “soul forgets its own being” and allows the death of ego-self as the source of one’s existence, uniting “with His nameless, unchartered, wayless Being” (1985, 94). John Climacus, the early desert ascetic so influential in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, put “Love” as the highest “rung” in his *Ladder of Divine Ascent* because “God is Love” and a soul that seeks God must do so by loving (Climacus, 1982).

On the “Map of Consciousness” developed by Dr. David R. Hawkins, the energy of Love is beyond that of Reason. In the field of Love, there is a shift from exterior action to interior surrender as “spiritual intention now shifts to ‘allowing’, similar to floating in the water rather than flailing about or swimming in it” (2006, 61). In Love, the focus moves from the intellectual tasks of data collection and theological speculation to *being* all that is known: “Make a gift of your life and lift all mankind by being kind, considerate, forgiving, and compassionate at all times, in all places, and under all conditions, with everyone as well as yourself” (2001, 257). The level of Unconditional Love describes the person who loves everything and everyone truly without condition, and the love is not personal: “There is a desire to use one’s state of consciousness for the benefit of life itself rather than for particular individuals” (2001, 256). Hawkins uses the word “Ecstasy” to denote the highest level of love, at the cusp of the state of non-duality, Peace, Union, and Enlightenment. In the state of Ecstasy, the soul vibrates with intense longing to unite with the One, the Beloved. The undercurrent of dualism (Lover and Beloved) melts in the moment of union or enlightenment, at which point there is no longer an individual “seeker” or “devotee.” One has become Love itself.

For the levels beyond “Love,” the “Map of Consciousness” outlines the rare advance of the mystic into various levels of non-duality. Hawkins describes the gradations of Enlightenment with a level of detail that leads the scholar to conclude that Hawkins himself has experienced these levels, at least to some degree. In looking at the historic “stages” and “ladders” of the various mystics, it seems clear that one cannot draw a map to a place where one has not been. According to the Hawkins’ “Map of Consciousness,” the levels of non-duality progress from initial “Enlightenment” which views God/Reality as “Beingness” to the state of “Self-Realization” to the realm of the “Void” (Formlessness) and, finally, to the Allness of Infinite Reality:

The realized Self is the knowingness of God Immanent, which is in accord with Christ’s teachings that heaven is within us. The infinite, timeless Reality has also been historically referred to as the “Buddha Nature,” “Christ Consciousness,” the “Supreme” of Krishna, etc (2003, 23).

To the mystic, according to Hawkins, “it is quite apparent that God is simultaneously both immanent (as Self) and transcendent (The Supreme). The use of the word ‘both’ is a semantic convenience. ‘Both’ implies two different states, whereas in reality, God is total Oneness, and the terms ‘immanent’ or ‘transcendent’ are categories of perception and mentation and not representative of Reality” (2003, 87-88). Concepts such as “immanent” and “transcendent” are attempts to describe qualities of God, while the actual experience of God reveals that all concepts are only partially true. Hawkins writes from his own experience: “Reality obliterates all mental functioning. No concepts are possible in the Infinite Light of the Glory of God” (2003, 294).

5. The Certitude of “God-Realization”

Here is the paradox of the mystic: the acknowledgement that one knows nothing opens the door to know everything, and to know it with a sureness that is timeless. St. Teresa of Avila declares:

[In union, there is] certainty which remains in the soul, which can be put there only by God. ...And if anyone has not that certainty, I should say that what he has experienced is not union of the whole soul with God (2004, 87-88).

Hawkins affirms the truth of Teresa’s declaration, commenting: “The Revelation is one of stunning glory that obliterates all thought” (Correspondence with the author, 2007). Medieval mystic Meister Eckhart says, “one sees as God sees” (Ladinsky, 2002, 120). To the ordinary religious person, such a proclamation may seem dogmatic, elitist, prideful, and authoritarian; but to the mystic, it is an “unconditional” inner truth and illumination that cannot be denied—even in the face of death, as we saw with Marguerite Porete and Al-Hallaj. Hawkins explains:

The state is unconditional and therefore so is its languaging, which is free of doubt and external dependencies. The reason for the above is that the Knowingness originates from the realm of Essence rather than from appearance and is therefore free of conditionalities, such as ‘seems to be’, ‘appears to be’...

Without understanding this state, some statements made by a sage could be misidentified as being dogmatic or authoritarian, which they are not (2006, 176). The mystic’s unquestionability about his or her own state as one with Truth, paradoxically, is accompanied by absolute humility about the lives of others. There is certitude but not dogmatism. Teresa of Avila confirms “there is no reason why we should expect everyone else to travel by our own road, and we should not attempt to point them to the spiritual path...the Lord will take care of his own” (2004, 49-50). Teresa and the author of the *Cloud* warn against “indiscreet zeal” and any efforts, all pride-driven, to apply “God’s law by uprooting sin from the hearts of others.” The *Cloud* author exposes such “supervising” of others for “the love of God” as a “lie,” for it is rather the “fire of hell in his brain and imagination” that incites him to “arrogate to [himself] the right to admonish others.” Such dogmatists lack a “spiritual nostril,” leaving them incapable of true discernment (*Cloud*, 1973, 119-120; Avila, 2004, 19).

The true mystic has no interest in converting others. Such an aim would stem from a belief that others are not where they should be, which is contradictory to the mystic’s knowingness that “the world is perfect as it is,” including its suffering (Hawkins, 2003, 209). Mystics often see suffering as the means for spiritual growth. Marguerite Porete describes “Reason” as being appalled when she reveals her awareness that suffering “is the way by which they (‘neighbors’) will arrive at the gate of their salvation.” The character “Reason” even goes to the point of calling Porete a “sinner” for saying there is a benefit in suffering (1993, 186). The mystic has surrendered all personal opinionation and “will” about changing the world and other people, for such a view would presume that one knows better than God, whereas God sees all creation as already perfect. So, according to Hawkins, there is no claim to exclusivity that would be the basis for seeking to convert or change people: “God does not exhibit favoritism or exclusivity.... Everyone has already been ‘chosen by God’....The love of God is absolute and unconditional” (2003, 107). Mystics often offer themselves as channels of peace in the world, which is a different approach from the activist who works to “change the world.” The mystic is simply a “pencil in God’s hands,” as Mother Teresa often said.

The certitude of the mystics comes from an interior unveiling: “Truth awaits within to be discovered” (Hawkins, 2003, 347). The unveiling happens via experience, not discursive argument. For their declaration that God is within, mystics are often condemned in their own time by theologians and scholars alike. Such hostility is understandable when it is remembered that most doctrine has emphasized God and Reality as transcendent. Hawkins holds a compassionate view of the condemners: “The average person, including religionists, feels so separated from God that the possibility that God can be experientially known seems unbelievable” (2003, 16). Despite doctrinal bias against subjective awareness, Tauler urged his listeners to *experience* God within themselves rather than merely study about God: “So let us leave the learned discourses to the scholars.... You, however, should allow the Holy Trinity to be born in the center of your soul, not by the use of human reason, but in essence and in truth; not in words, but in reality” (1985, 104). Tauler confirms that “natural reason confers such great satisfaction that the pleasures of the world are as nothing compared to it,” even while he cautions: it is not the “true light” and keeps people in “everlasting darkness” (1985, 52). Al-Ghazali differentiates the light of human reason from the “Light, which God Most High cast into my breast” (2000, 23).

The soul that has ascended to the level of Reason has mastered not only the baser, “carnal” drives of the body, but it has also perfected the practice of virtues and transcended what Father Thomas Keating calls the childhood “emotional programs for happiness” that drive less mature souls to seek esteem, security, power, and affection from outside of themselves (2005, Disc 1). Teresa of Avila’s description of the Third Mansion fits well here. In the Third Mansion, people “have lived an upright and carefully ordered life, both in soul and in body” (2004, 38-39). However, the limitation of people in the level of Reason is to presume that their particular vantage point is the whole panorama; it is the presumption of “I know” rather than “I don’t know.” Teresa, for example, complains that it is useless to offer advice to those directed by reason, for “they have been practicing virtue for so long that they think they are capable of teaching others” (2004, 42). Tauler describes “reasonable people” as ignorant of advanced spiritual reality and confounded by the joy and peace of God:

We have become inebriated, a state known as “jubilation.” Sometimes a man in such a state will cry aloud, or sing or laugh. Then comes along “reasonable people” who are ignorant of everything outside the natural order and exclaim, “Why are you carrying on in this ridiculous manner?”... [F]or love is aflame in them, and it glimmers and glows and consumes them with bliss (1985, 58).

Indeed, he says in a later sermon, many Christians suffer “captivity” by their “natural reason,” and “they spoil everything” spiritual “by lowering it to the level of their reasoning powers.” Hardly aware of how banal they seem to the mystic, “they give themselves great airs, because whatever it is, they interpret it rationally and hold forth on it, which greatly increases their self-esteem....There is a great difference between those who live the Scriptures and those who merely study them” (1985, 70-71).

In the same vein, Rumi comments that there are those who have so *become* a living scripture (“the Qur’an has become the essence of his spirit”) that it is just the same to be with them as to study the scripture itself (Rumi, 1998, 36). Rumi’s life perfectly exemplifies the difference between theoretical knowledge and mystic certitude. He was an erudite theology professor and Shams a traveling mystic dervish. Suddenly, Shams appeared in the marketplace and asked Rumi a question that yanked him out of his scholarly sobriety and into a whirling intoxication of heart-stirring poetry. Shams was a living fire, and Rumi’s heart ignited from the contact. Shams told him: “Intellect takes you to the threshold, but it doesn’t take you into the house.” He explained: “Whoever is more learned is further from the goal. The more abstruse is his thinking, the further he is. This is the work of the heart, not the forehead” (Shams-iTabrizi, 2004, 39, 36).

The difference between academic learning and “Mystic Truth” is obvious to Sufi writer Ibn’ Abbad, but he recognizes that seekers frequently and mistakenly project profound inner realization upon a teacher just because he has mastered conceptual and theoretical learning: “Those individuals whom many people currently regard as possessing such intimate knowledge in its most developed form are in fact dealing with hypothetical matters and formal learning, which have nothing to do with the Mystic Truth” (1986, 70). He makes clear the superiority of the mystic’s “certitude” over the “analogic reasoning” of the scholar:

At the heart of the first path is the intellect’s search for evidence and its inability to understand except by a kind of analogical reasoning. . . . The second path, however, rests on the light of certitude, by which only the Clear Truth is manifest. That is the most sublime thing that can descend from the heavens into the hearts of chosen believers, who comprehend thereby the Mystic Truth of the Attributes and Names (1986, 62).

Hawkins notes that, by the time seekers come to theological study, they are already “erudite,” having “accumulated” a lot of information about God “within the intellect.” Yet the “basic structure of the ego still remains intact” and, in fact, has “become refined” due to the “training in our society that to achieve a goal, one merely has to study harder” (2003, 32-34). Advanced theological study can shore up the ego instead of dismantle it, says the *Cloud* author, so he urges: “Go after experience rather than knowledge. On account of pride, knowledge may deceive you, but this gentle, loving affection will not deceive you. Knowledge tends to breed conceit, but love builds. Knowledge is full of labor, but love, full of rest” (1973, Book of Privy Counseling, 88-89). Hawkins agrees that the “illusory self propagates itself” by trying to learn about or understand things; such learning reifies the “me” rather than dissolves it. It is necessary to stop “learning about” Reality and to “become” it.

Ellen Babinsky, translator of Porete’s book, pinpoints the problem for the “sad” soul that knows there are higher realms beyond mental or moral effort:

The more such souls engage in the spiritual practices taught by reason and the virtues, the more they yearn for the better way that they believe to be beyond their reach. The more they practice the presence of God through masses, sermons, fasting, prayers, and all manner of self-denial, the more God seems absent to them....the misery of the sad soul’s spiritual life enlarges the place where Divine Love can bring the soul to the better spiritual life for which she longs (2003, 40).

When the soul realizes that the answer is not “more information” or “spiritual work,” but rather the shedding of them, then it arrives at the necessary ripeness. Al-Ghazali quotes the Prophet Mohammed on the importance of acting diligently within one’s level and more will be given: “Whoever acts according to what he knows, God will make him heir to what he does not know” (Al-Ghazali, 2000, 63).

At this point, Grace (what Porete calls “Divine Love”) is made available through whatever means is appropriate for the seeker, often contact with an enlightened teacher or advanced mystic who, via a catalytic silent transmission, provides the context for the inner experience for which the seeker longs:

A truly enlightened teacher provides, via the aura, a high-energy context that illuminates and activates the student’s content from the mental body into the higher spiritual bodies. The light of the teacher’s illumination provides the necessary activation by the power of Grace to facilitate the transformation from intellectual data to subjective personal experience (Hawkins, 2003, 32-33).

Such “radiance” is often accompanied by a noticeable capacity in the mystic to see into the “soul” or inner self of others, allowable by Divinity/Reality only because the presence of unconditional love in the mystic sees the innocence of others. Paradoxically, the shedding of reason allows an all-pervasive Knowingness to emerge; Universal Mind replaces ego-mind. The *Cloud* author describes the visible radiance of the advanced contemplative who “appears lovely to behold” and has the psychic capacity “to discern the character and temperament of others when necessary” (1973, 117).

6. Conclusion: The Radiance of Love Uplifts the World

References to “radiance,” “aura,” or “transmission” may incite suspicion, but the pilgrims of all religions have, throughout history, intuited the “high energy radiance” of the saints and mystics—even when deceased (relics). Mystics seem aware of such an effect or “transmission,” and this awareness has often led them to consent to be available to others through touching, darshan, public teachings, and writings. They either intuit or know that the energy of unconditional love and imperturbable peace that has replaced their ordinary ego-identity lifts up the rest of the world. One wonders, what would the world be like without the presence of its saints, sages, mystics, and avatars?

It is as if their oneness with the Infinite makes possible the taking on of the suffering and negativity of others. Johannes Tauler paints a dramatic picture of the global and timeless uplift provided by the God-realized being who “wipes away” the “accumulated guilt of mankind since the beginning of the world” and has become a “pillar supporting the world” (1985, 73). Hawkins affirms that the presence of even a small group of people whose inner reality is Unconditional Love and Joy outweighs the negativity of hatred, fear, apathy, greed, and pride operating in the world at large. Everything is connected to everything else, and so the way to alleviate global suffering is to devote oneself to persistent inner work: “We change the world not by what we say or do but as a consequence of what we have become” (2001, 69).

Thus, the path of the mystic serves all of humanity by the dedication to transcend every illusion of separateness and to become one with Infinite Love. The Oneness of Infinite Love dissolves the dualistic separateness inherent in Reason that posits a “this” knowing about a “that.” Certitude radiates when the knower is revealed as the known. Ibn ‘Arabi, a twelfth-century “Great Master” of Sufism often referred to the Quranic teaching that “He who recognizes himself recognizes the Lord.” Truly realized humans, according to him, are those with direct—not theoretical—knowledge of the Real, discoverable *within*:

All [Divine Names] go back to a single Named Object and a Single Entity. That Named Object was what I was witnessing, and that Entity was my own existence. So, my journey had been only in myself. I provided no indications of any but myself. It was from here that I came to know that I am a sheer servant and that there is nothing whatsoever of lordship within me (Chittick, 2005, 25).

St. Teresa of Avila, beloved for her plaguing self-doubts, nonetheless culminates her masterpiece on the spiritual life, *The Interior Castle*, with an unequivocal description of the Seventh Mansion that comes from the certitude of having experienced it: the soul “is made one with God,” dwelling in a state of the “deepest silence,” in which “unwavering certainty” abides (2004, 220, 226, 229). God is known empirically; nothing remains to study “about” God as the pursuit of reason has fulfilled itself in the actual, experiential Realization of God. Similarly, Porete is certain she needs nothing else. Having attained union with God, “Such a lady seeks God no more....Nothing is lacking to her” (1993, 174). She no longer has any use for scholarly treatises, “no longer wants anything which comes by a mediary” (1993, 83). After attaining to the Supreme Peace, dissolved into the Beloved, the search is over and further study is irrelevant. All that may remain is to share oneself with the world – if anyone is listening.

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