

Mysticism East and West

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Abstract:

Although it would be inaccurate to suggest that all religions are identical in their teachings and their world-view, nevertheless, in the area of mysticism we have the greatest degree of unity and similarity of views among the mystics from different religious traditions. Each mystical tradition speaks about the "journey in God," of intense longing for God and devotion of the soul to God, of surrender and purification, of renunciation and abandonment, through union in Love. It has been said that all mystics recognize one another, because they come from the same spiritual country.

At the same time, while there is a great deal of similarity between various mystical traditions, there are some differences of stress about the nature of divinity and man's relationship with it. Some believe in Monism or the Oneness of Being and maintain that man will be ultimately united with God, while others believe in Monotheism and maintain that God is and will always remain transcendent. Therefore, although man may attain God's presence, union with the divine essence will be impossible.

It has been generally acknowledged that Christian mystics and Islamic Sufis have a great deal in common, but it is not so readily admitted that Hindu and Buddhist ideas are also not completely alien to theistic mysticism. The paper will briefly discuss the meaning and nature of mysticism and will then investigate some of the leading ideas in Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, and Bahá'í mysticism, exploring some of their similarities and differences.

The paper will try to show that although, on the surface, different views about God and man's union with Him may differ, yet ultimately these debates will not fundamentally change the essence of mysticism. As God is by definition so far removed from human understanding, different interpretations of His being are ultimately meaningless. What is important is the recognition of divine reality in the world and the desire to achieve union with His manifestations.

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