

Sounds of Love Series

Mysticism and Reason

I am going to talk about mysticism and reason. Sometimes people talk about intuition and reason, about the irrational and the rational, but to put a juxtaposition between mysticism and reason looks odd. But maybe people have associated the word mysticism with something that is very mysterious, or something from the occult, or something not known in ordinary, rational experience and that is why they want to put mysticism in juxtaposition to reason. The truth is that the word mysticism comes from the experience of mystics. The mystics were those who were able to have experiences not normally available through the five senses of the physical body. These mystical experiences received by many mystics in states of trance or in states of meditation they revealed to us, and since they were not acquired in the normal way through the senses, we call them mystical experiences. And so the whole chapter of mysticism began from those experiences.

Mystic experience is not rational or irrational, not reasoned or unreasoned. It is a personal, individual experience. A mystical experience is an experience derived from a state of consciousness not necessarily the one which we are using through our five senses. And, therefore, when we understand mysticism, we understand that it need not be placed in juxtaposition to reason. On the other hand, there are many experiences of mystics which would be described as mystical experiences which are not easily explained by reason and to that extent one can examine where does reason stand in relation to such experiences.

I am going to start by describing a very few commonly acquired experiences of the mystics and see whether reason has any place in those experiences. The most common experience is to go into a state of meditation or trance, alter the state of consciousness so that instead of using the physical body to acquire the input of sensory perceptions, use some other intuitive self, or use some other sensory self within the body to acquire experience. A person in a state of trance describes experiences of walking out of the body, of being able to see one's own physical body, of the experience of dying while living, of near-death experiences, of flying in space. These experiences have been narrated by those who used means of experiencing other than the physical senses in the physical body and these experiences we have clustered together under the term of mystic experiences.

What are these experiences really? They do not amount to much more than the experiences of the senses or the mind or the thought process or imagination severed from physical experience. They are very similar to the experience of dreaming. When we go to sleep and experience a dream world in which we go about walking, doing things, meeting people, creating new people, creating new situations, we have similar experiences to the ones in the physical world, but we are not making any use of the physical body or the physical senses. And, therefore, those dream-like experiences are also, in a way, the same as mystical experiences because they do not utilize the physical body or the physical senses. So, how do these dream-like experiences differ from the mystical experiences?

Because the dreams are explained by reason as arising from various kinds of suppressed memories, as various fears and complexes that are buried in the sub-conscious, and they are coming up as a continuation of day-dreaming, a continuation of the daily activity of the mind, as a rest that the conscious process needs between different wakeful states. So we have many reasoned explanations for the dream sequences. How do these dream sequences differ from the mystical experiences?

It appears that when the mystics described their experiences, they do not call them dreams. They call them more real than the wakeful experiences. So the essential difference between a mystical experience and a dream is that the dream looks less real than the wakeful experience. The mystical experience looks more real than the wakeful experience. The mystical experience seems to suggest that the wakeful experience could be a sort of dream, that there are different levels of dreaming, and we are moving from one dream to another and the wakeful state is only an intermediate part of awaking from one level of a dream to another. And only the mystical states can show that the wakeful state is dream-like, or of the same nature of experience. So the essential difference between the mystical experience and the experience of dreaming in the physical body is the degree of reality that one experiences.

One comes to the basic question of what is reality. There are many definitions of reality. The mystics want to adopt a definition that will withstand the test of time and the test of place. Therefore, the mystics say, "Real reality, the ultimate reality, the reality that cannot change should be that which does not change." Whatever changes could not be real because it is not permanent. If something is real, it should be there all the time and, therefore, reality, according to mystics, is that which does not change. When we look at the world around us, we find everything is changing. Every day we have a changing experience. We ourselves change. Our bodies change. Our daily experiences change. Our nature changes. Our voice changes. Our language changes. Our friends change. Our life changes. And everything that we are aware of, the whole physical cosmos changes. There is nothing that we know of that does not change.

Therefore, according to the definition of the mystics, all that we are experiencing in the wakeful state in this physical world is unreal, because it is subject to change. And reality must be found somewhere other than this physical world. If this physical world is not real it would be appropriate to call it an illusion. Therefore, this world has been considered as Maya, or illusion in the Eastern texts. They consider it as an illusion because it changes. It does not last. On the other hand, is there something that does not change at all?

The mystics, after all their mystical experiences of the highest degree of reality found that even a mystical experience changes, and different mystical experiences of different levels of consciousness also change. So they declared that although those mystical experiences look more real than the wakeful experience of this physical world, they too are unreal and therefore illusions of a higher order; that reality as we are perceiving it here is a relative reality; and one illusion looks more real than the other; and we call it real. When we move to a still better illusion, we call it more real and the earlier illusion becomes illusion. So it is all a question of comparison of different levels of illusions or different levels of reality. But none of them are ultimately real because they all change.

What have the mystics found in ultimate mysticism that never changes? They have found that the self that experiences these illusions - the experiencer of illusion, the experiencer of all forms of reality, the experiencer of the dream - the dreamer - the experiencer of the wakeful state - the self, the experiencer of the highest mystical experience - the super self, this self that becomes the dreamer, the self that becomes the wakeful self, the self that becomes the super self, the same self, that receptacle of conscious experiences, which is the true experiencer - never changes. It is the self alone that is receiving the changing experiences that never changes. Therefore, by mystic definition, it is only the self that is real and everything else is unreal, because everything else is a changing experience which is coming to, or generated by, the self. Then what is the self?

When we look at this world and go about it, we find we have no knowledge of the self except what we have experience of this world. For example, this body which we use to experience the world is also part of the world and therefore it could not be the self. It could not be real. And yet we call this body the physical body as the self. Therefore, we are misrepresenting the physical body to be the self. Whereas, it is a changing experience and could not be the self. So all the notions of the self that we have while in illusion are also an illusion. And, therefore, the mystics say, "It is not possible to find out the truth of the self by merely relying upon the notions of the self through illusion." These experiences in illusion will give us some idea which side, which direction to look for the self, but they do not reveal the self. One thing is certain, that when we are in this physical body and we look around us in this world, we know that consciousness, which is the ultimate experiencer and the receiver of all these experiences is inside this body and not outside. Therefore, it is safe to say that the ultimate self of which we are unaware is located within us and not outside. So the direction is right but the nature of the self is still unknown to us.

As we try to discover our own self within the body, and later on within the senses, still later on within the thoughts and the mind, still later on within our soul and pure consciousness. In this journey towards our own self we find that we are moving towards reality, but we are still trying to locate our own real self in a world of successive layers of illusions; each layer looking more real than the previous one. As we move towards more and more of reality and come to the ultimate self, which means the ultimate source of all conscious experience, which means total consciousness per se, we find that that self is everything that it created also; that the whole world was part of the same self. Therefore the illusion was part of the reality that there is no distinction between the two. This sudden discovery that the conscious self is not only a creator, but also the creation, has led to the greatest mystery in mysticism - that how could the creator and the creation be the same, whereas they are being experienced in duality; that we can find an answer to the dilemma of duality and find that only oneness, only one undivided self is the creator and the creation and leads to duality, which makes them separate. This answer is provided by mysticism and cannot be provided by reason. And that is where the difference starts between the mystic, ultimate experience of the self, and experience of reason.

Reason or logic, by its very nature, depends upon analysis. To discover the truth through reason is to break up the known material before us which we are analyzing; to break it up into different pieces and see how they fit in together. Reason is a logical process in which we must go step by step in

space and time and discover the etiology of cause and effect. Reason cannot comprehend the totality at once. Reason must go in a certain mode in a logical, syllogistic step. And, therefore, reason by its very nature does not lead us to a point where the mystical experience gives us a knowledge of the total self. The total self, in which the creator and the creation becomes one, is beyond the scope of reason and that is why the mystics have shelved reason as a lower function of the mind, which cannot take us to that level where we can discover the reality of the self.

We can, of course, find many attributes of the self at the level of reason or the level of the mind, such as, that the vastness of time and space can be used for using sensory perceptions in lower worlds. We can find that reason can help us to understand the path towards the higher reality up to a certain point; that reason can help us to know what is beyond reason; that reason makes the maximum contribution when through its own talent it can tell us now you are reaching an area which is beyond reason. This itself is a contribution of reason. But, beyond that, the reason cannot give us any direct knowledge, which only comes through a mystical experience above the mind.

The mental experiences can be very subtle, can be very interesting, can be very all-embracing. They can appear to answer all our questions. Because all the questions that we put are created out of reason, therefore, the mental answers appear to satisfy them. But they cannot create the mental processes and the rational process cannot create a set of answers to the basic question, "How can the self at the same time be the creator and the creation and there is no division between them? How can the many and the one be the same at the same time?" These questions are beyond the scope of reason and therefore only a mystical experience can provide an answer to these questions. So the difference between a mystical experience and reason becomes very real when it comes to higher knowledge of one's own self.

The mystics have given many methods through which we can transcend reason and we can have direct access to the answers that lie within the self but beyond reason. But they are not easy to attain. For one reason, the mystic experience is very unknown to the majority of us. Majority of us, who are used to looking at the world through reason and senses, are not even aware of the potential of looking into an area of spiritual truth which goes beyond our mental faculties. When we ask questions, even as a seeker of the truth, we ask those questions from our mind. When we go to a spiritual teacher, even if we go to a perfect mystic, a mystic adept, a Perfect Living Master, we go with our questions arising from our own mind. And our questions are based upon our own reasoning that have led to those questions. So we are asking questions which are really mental and we are expecting replies which should satisfy our mind.

But the mystic knows our limitation and the mystic Master, Who has experienced reality beyond reason, knows that the answer he can give will not satisfy our questions. Therefore, coming to our own level, He explains the rational process that takes us to a stage where we can jump off from the rational limitations. So the mystic, in a way, comes to our level because he realizes that our seeking and our initial stages on the spiritual path are limited by our own reason. And, therefore, it looks very interesting for a seeker who has started on the path to find how rational the mystic path is because the mystic adept has himself started answering our questions in a rational way. But it is for

our comfort and our use that he is confining his answers in the beginning to reason, knowing that at a certain stage will have to jump beyond the rational dimension and go into direct experience.

The scientific mind, which is supposed to be a mind evolved through civilization, likes to get a reasoned or a rational answer to its question. In fact, the scientific mind is likely to condemn an answer as not worthy of scientific scrutiny if it is not rational and if it does not meet its own test of reason. These mystic adepts know that the truth is beyond the possible limits to which mind can go and reason can go. And, therefore, they want to give the answer in stages so that the scientific mind may not be denied the possibility of reaching the truth. So they start off with the scientific explanation of how consciousness has permeated our physical system, has gone into the body, it has gone into the senses and how all these are operating.

This mystic is willing to start by accepting either of the axioms that the material world is real and we have to find this source of this material world or that the material world is an illusion and we have to find out who is creating the illusion. The mystics have no hesitation starting from any premise and going on in the beginning in a rational, reasoned way and eventually through the way of personal experience to show that wherever they started off was only for the purpose of explanation and understanding and not for the purpose of making a statement about the truth. So when a seeker goes to a mystic and says, "I know that my body is made up of so many molecules and atoms and energy particles and these energy particles hold all the clue to my creation," the mystics will say, "Yes." And they will take him into a discovery of his own nucleus, a discovery of each particle of which the physical matter is created and show how the energy has played upon our experiential system so that the same energy looks like matter and becomes a real world of matter. From that point, they can take us to the world of energy and from energy take us to consciousness and show that, but for consciousness, there would have been no experience of matter at all. So, starting from the scientific premise of matter being real, they can take us to the point where they will show the matter is real only because of the nature of our consciousness.

On the other hand, they can meet a person who is already taking a premise that the material world is merely an illusion, and that there is something is consciousness which is more real. And the mystics can start from there and say, "That is true." Don't you have a dream in which you see matter? Don't you see a material world in a dream? They are made of same substance. And when you wake up, where does that matter go? Did that matter really exist? It only existed while the dream was going on and as soon as the dream ended, the material world also ended. And, therefore, they can start by comparing the physical world to a dream world and telling us of the possibility of waking up to higher reality. And then telling us how a succession of waking ups to higher and higher levels of consciousness can take us to the reality of our true self, the ultimate waking up being beyond what reason can understand.

Thus, there is no difficulty for a Perfect Living Master, Who has perfect awareness of all our limitations, Who has perfect awareness of where reason ends and where truth beyond reason starts, to start from any end and bring us to the truth. The ultimate reality, they say, is like the pudding. The proof of the pudding lies in the eating. Therefore, reality must be personally experienced before you

can say you know what is real. All the rest is only a discussion on something that may turn out to be quite different than what we have discussed. Supposing somebody has never tasted anything sweet. Somebody has never tasted sugar, has lived all one's life on salt and pepper. And one says, "There is such a thing as sugar." And you discuss what sugar would taste like. You can discuss for years and never know the taste of sugar. You can say it is different from salt. It is opposite from salt. You can have as much discussion as you like on the nature of sweetness, but when you taste the sugar, then you can say, "Well the discussion did not end up to this experience." So is it with reality; that reality can be discussed and the rational mind likes to discuss it, but whatever discussion and argument we have about reality, the ultimate experience of reality is somewhat different and is more convincing than all the debate we have had.

The debate on reality is very often based upon the fact that we have lot of options to place reality in one category or another. So when we find that we are doubtful to what category reality belongs, we debate on it even more. The debate goes on because we are considering reality to be one of the possibilities, one of the options available to experience. But the fact that experience itself is created from reality and is a part of reality does not come to us unless we know what that reality is and that knowledge comes by mystical experience.

Therefore, there is a line we can draw between reason and the mystical experience. And that is - mystical experience must be personally acquired, personally obtained, and reason can be debated even without that experience. Reason is a good starting point but the personal experience, alone, tells us what mysticism is.

Thank you.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gG8Ycg3Z_yM

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