

THE INSIGHTS AND RAPTURES OF THE MYSTIC

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(Concluded)

IN our previous installment conversation between master and disciple is of abiding interest in the history of religious mysticism, as showing a demarcation of the grades of higher mystical experience which all persons engaged in elevated contemplation must reckon with, irrespective of religion and country. In the fourfold sequel of *Arūpa-jhānas*, only attempted by the adept, and as a final step for complete emancipation of the self, all consciousness of detail or of limitations is done away with.

(a) By passing beyond any conception of matter or idea of sensation, and suppressing the idea of multiformity, a bhikkhu attains the state of mind in which the only idea present is the infinity of space (*ākāsaññāyatana*).

(b) On this follows a stage in which the infinity or unboundness of intellect (*viññānañchayatana*) is alone present.

(c) The next stage is reached when there is nothing at all present to the mind (*akiñcaññāyatana*). Then is achieved the stage when neither the presence of ideas nor the absence of ideas is specifically present (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*).

(d) Finally is attained the state where there is suppression of both sensation and idea (*sannavedayitanirodha*).¹² Only the clarity and equanimity remain. The Buddhist *jhayin* in the above manner through the meditation of unbounded void space, of knowledge without object, of nothingness, passes into the stage where there is neither consciousness nor unconsciousness and finally realises the actual disappearance of feeling and notion. He introduces into the series of his thoughts such a number of blank spaces that the further generation of thought and desire is stopped.¹³ Anuruddha, a disciple of the Buddha describes his final experience as follows:—

¹² Keith: *Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 124, see also Mrs. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Psychology*, pp. 117-119.

“In five-fold concentrated ecstasy (samadhi)
 My heart goes up in peace and unity.
 Serene composure have I made my own;
 My vision as a god’s is clarified.
 I know the destinies of other lives;
 Whence beings come and whither they do go;
 Life here below, or other-where of life—
 Steadfast and rapt, in five-fold Jhana sunk.”¹⁴

Mrs. Rhys Davids remarks: “The *jhayin* seems to be always master of himself and self-possessed, even in ecstasy even to the deliberate falling into and emerging (as by a spiritual alarm-clock) from trance. There is synergy about his Jhana, combined with an absence of any reference whatever to a merging or melting into something greater, that for many may reveal defect, but which is certainly a most interesting and significant difference.”

Quite distinct from the above *jhana exercises*, we have also in Buddhism the cultivation of a positive attitude such as filling the mind with love, with sympathy with sorrow, with sympathy with joy and with equanimity, and “prevading the whole world” with the above four emotions. Such states of emotional as contrasted with intellectual meditation are called Brahma-viharas, and they are sometimes represented as coming after the four *ghanas*, and sometimes as replacing them.¹⁵ If the mind deliberately cultivates charity and harbours no uncharitable thought, charity becomes a psychic force and inundates the world even as the sound of a trumpet spreads in all directions. The ideal is set forth in a most remarkable passage in the Sutta-Nipata:

“Even as a mother watcheth o’er her child
 Her only child, as long as life doth last,
 So let us, for all creatures, great or small,
 Develop such a boundless heart and mind
 Ay, let us practise love for all the world,
 Upward and downward, yonder, thence
 Uncramped, free from ill-will and enmity.”

Along with a profounder sympathy for all fellow creatures and a greater intensity of life and vividness of consciousness, the mystic, as we have seen, attains certain powers of both body and mind which, when they are correlated by ordinary faculties, lead to supreme achievements measuring human greatness. We have rec-

¹³ Poussin: *The Way to Nirvana*, pp. 165-66.

¹⁴ *Psalms of the Brethren*, 916 ff.

¹⁵ Eliot: *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol. I, p. 316.

orders of premonition, pre-cognition, telepathy or clairvoyance, from the mystics of all countries and of all ages. The world's greatest artists have always listened to strange music and rhythm of expression within which emerge with spontaneity in spite of themselves. They have found in their compositions unimagined excellence of technique. They have written at some one else's dictation and when the masterpiece has come out in a flash can hardly attribute it to conscious art or device. The world's finest natures are guided at critical situations by a vision, by a dream, by a mysterious monitory voice within which they revere and for which they embrace suffering and even death. It is thus that out of the raw material of the mystical consciousness genius and inspiration are fashioned. Myers' great work on Human personality and survival of Bodily Death and the Proceedings of the Society of Psychical Research are full of evidence of the communication between minds in the spiritual world which overcomes barriers of time and distance. All this is proving scientifically the intuitional world of the mystic. Para-psychology or physical research is a science now in the cradle though there is a growing recognition that this problematic aspect of psychology is now exceedingly important for the advancement of the science. Telepathy and mind-reading suggest that the individual minds are parts of one super-mind and that under inner discipline and control one individual mind, on the foundation of the one super-mind, knows about the contents of other individual minds, just as in dissociation one ego knows about the other ego's contents. Clairvoyance, lelekinesis, materialization and prophecy are far more difficult to understand. May it be that the mind is a *miroir de l'univers* though in very exceptional persons does the performance of this mirror become conscious in the ego-form? The hypothesis is that when the ego-side of the pure mind becomes, through the process of abstract concentration, free from the disturbance of the sensory and organic processes, the omniscient pure mind operates and apprehends phases or states of reality which are not bound to the spatio-temporal system of relations. The spiritualist hypothesis is also legitimate and the spirit might be a part of this super-mind and might only become individual spirit again under certain conditions and communicate with this world.¹⁶ Patanjali in his Yoga-sutra refers to the following powers which the mystic acquires.—The capacity to enter another's body, to float in water, to walk on thorns,

¹⁶ For a suggestive discussion, see Hans Driesch, *The Crisis in Psychology*, Chap. V.

super-normal hearings, lightness of body, invisibility, etc. It is incontestable that during fervent ecstasy or deep contemplation the sensibility to external impressions diminishes a great deal. This is due to the fact that the motor activity in relation to ordinary sensory objects which gives the sense of life, is suspended, and the incipient responses are all directed to the objects of meditation. Thus when the body is lulled to relative passivity the mind enters upon a new phase of creative activity and working upon the amorphous materials supplied by the organic experiences, fashions a world of symbols, images and transcendental experiences. Such is the origin of the divine vision, the hearing of the divine voice or the healing and soothing touch of the Lord familiar in all religions. As the mystic adapts his behaviour to the constructions of his own imagination, he sees, hears, smells, intuitively, with the senses of the mind, as if they are actually experienced. Severe fasting and deprivation of sleep or isolation, the prolonged maintenance of a characteristic posture, and certain breathing and physical exercises of the chest, diaphragm and abdomen; the rhythm of music; the repetition of rhythmical bodily movement or peculiar dancing, singing or reiteration of a word or formula—all these change or remove the kinaesthetic and visceral feelings, and alter the normal feeling of self. There is thus engendered a different sense of relation between the body and the outside world. Respiration is partially inhibited, and the sensations of pressure and equilibrium may be lost. Thus the mystic may feel that his body has been floating in the air or that he has left the body and ascended the third heaven. A changed visceral sensitivity is the basis of many of the super-normal impressions of mystics, who revel in the separation of the soul or 'the subtle body' from the physical frame. Sweet odour of flowers or incense, characteristic pressure contact shown, for instance, in the laying on of hands and fingers, and in ceremonially holding sacred symbols, deep rhythmical breathing, etc., modify the viscera and organic functions, and induce a feeling of exhilaration, of a successful adjustment within the body and adaptation to its world. The tense nerves throughout the organism bespeak an emotional state in which the mystic feels beside himself. This is the mystic's familiar feeling of ecstasy, which greatly diminishes the sense of fatigue. Unusual physical or intellectual toil may be undertaken at times by the mystic when he is aglow with spiritual fervour. Hunger and thirst may also disappear, and eastern mystics have been known to

shut themselves up underground for months and even years, and to come back to life after a state of suspended animation. Lastly, there may be insensibility to pain altogether. This explains, for instance, the agreeableness of the red hot irons for the Muhammedan darvishes, who stick these in their arms and legs and cool them in their mouth without a complaint, murmur or sign of pain. In fact they call such red hot irons 'roses' because the use of them is as agreeable to them as the perfume of the rose is to the voluptuary.¹⁷ Similarly many of the Christian martyrs suffered torture or died at the stake without a cry or moan of pain. Differences in methods of concentration produce different effects. The fixation of the eyes upon the sun, the moon, or any bright object, or, again, upon the tip of the nose or, again, the prolonged concentration of the pupils towards the forehead produce hyperaesthetic visions. Often, also, there are hyperaesthetic auditions induced by prolonged control of respiration and shutting both the ears by finger tips. Sometimes, again, the normal relation between sense-organs and sensations is changed, and touch, sight and hearing may be the outcome of the stimulation of a different organ. New colours are appreciated, strange music is heard while the familiar sights and sounds take a new brilliance. The modification of breathing, the longer rhythmical spells of inhalation and exhalation as well as cessation of breath influence circulation by acting upon the unstriated muscles and glands—the muscles of the arterial walls (blood pressure). Hence a great variety of new organic sensations emerges, which supplies the physical background of the deeply moving sentiments and experiences of the mystics. The time and space relations are affected. The mystic sees a light that never was on sea and land. He hears a sound which ear has not heard. He conquers space and time. He exists in different places at the same time, according to his sweet will. Strange feelings surge from the unfathomable depths of his heart. The voice of the whole humanity is uttered in his prayer. His body expands into the macrocosm, or shrinks into the electrical sub-atom. There is, as it were, a thorough transformation of his mind and attitudes. Such is the naturalistic explanation of some of the experiences of religious mysticism. But elevated religious meditation delves deeper. Both the sensory phenomena and the ineffable feelings are transcended. The mystic then leaves the wonderful world of rapture. Realising in himself the universal and

¹⁷ *The Awarifu-L-Marif*, p. 167.

permanent conditions of contemplative union with the divine, he arrives at intuitions of a metaphysical import, which reveal a new relation between the Being and things. It is there that he establishes a new relation with an all-inclusive Source of Life and Mind; from here emerge, as a result of fresh efforts, the spiritual infinitudes, which, and not the mystic's efficiency and rapture, are his highest gifts. In Buddhism the following are among the super-ordinary powers mentioned:—the capacity to resist pain and death, the capacity of creating phenomena outside one's body, the capacity of transforming one's body into different personalities, the power of creating one's own double, telepathy of sight or hearing, thought-reading, super-normal insight into the past or the future, improved memory, etc.¹⁸ Such powers are called *kuṛvch i roohe*, among the Moslem Darvishes, and enumerated as follows:—the faculty of foreseeing coming events; of predicting their occurrence; of preserving individuals from harm and evil which would otherwise certainly result for them; of restoring harmony of sentiment between those who would otherwise be relentless enemies.¹⁹ Evidence of superior intellectual and spiritual powers (as distinguished from super-normal physical powers described above) of the mystic and the saint has indeed come and still comes from all countries. Such powers are regarded by Patanjali as obstacles to Samadhi; but they are powers in the worldly state. According to the Sankhya the powers attained by *yoga* are not to be denied like recovery through medicines, etc. Cases have been recorded similarly by Myers in which men by experiment leave their bodies and show themselves to their friends. It is not strange that mystics and saints who discipline their intellect and emotions acquire these and other super-normal faculties and that their whole life becomes an inspiration based as it is on the concentration of the best of man's faculties and joys. No doubt when in the ecstatic state the consciousness or reference of self entirely disappears and yet there survives a lucidity and equanimity by which the highest truth of the intuitional world become accessible. This is the experience of all mystics. The process by which these truths are revealed is not yet analysed but that there is such revelation, and that it can be, deliberately sought, are familiar matters of the mystical world. George Russell says "when our lamp is lit we find the house of our being has many chambers, and we must ask whether they have the right to be in our house; and

¹⁸ *Compendium of Philosophy*, pp. 61-64.

¹⁹ Brown, *Darvishes*, p. 129.

there are corridors there leading into the hearts of others, and windows which open into eternity, and we can hardly tell where our own being ends and another begins or if there is any end to our being. If we brood with love upon this myriad unity, following the meditation ordained by Buddha for the brothers of his order, to let our mind pervade the whole wide world with heart of love, we come more and more to permeate, or to be pervaded by the lives of others." He asks 'Is there a centre within us through which all the threads of the universe are drawn, a spiritual atom which mirrors the spiritual infinitudes even as the eye is the mirror of the external heavens'?

No doubt psychologists like Starbuck, Leuba and Coe who have attempted a naturalistic explanation of mystical states so far have confined themselves to those phases of religious experience which are characterised by the play of the emotions arising out of union with a personal God. The mystic's complete personal history and religious tradition as well as his childish affective life have thrown a flood of light on such states. But even in the study of the emotional situation those deeply moving unvertalised responses, which integrate themselves into this ecstasy and higher apprehensions of the mystics are not adequately understood, while the acquisition of super-normal powers also is not fully explained. In more elevated meditation, the explicit emotions and sentiments which only have been attacked by the naturalists disappear. The mystic mediating upon the infinite modes and attributes of God is led to a true intuition of a metaphysical import, viz., that of absorption of the self or soul into the deity without modes and attributes. Here instead of the raptures the insights, deep and intense, dominate. No doubt the insights into an eternal mode of existence which transcends both time and space depend upon a gradual closing and simplification of the avenues through which these ideas come from the defining senses. It is then that the kinesthetic and organic senses intimate those subtle and indefinable adjustments which assures the mystic perfect fulfilment and harmony and constitute his experience and rapture. Time and space are the special objects of the defining sense. But there are deeper experiences like truth, beauty or goodness, which extend beyond the spatial and temporal existences, and which elude definitions and descriptions. Such profounder insights and attitudes are the outcome of a perfect poise and sensitivity of the entire mechanism of body and mind that becomes finely attuned to

the world of experience. Now the mystic's organic sense-complex enters directly into such vital and mental processes, while cognition can only use the language of symbolism, that merely suggests and cannot define.

Gradually he transcends both definite and indefinite consciousness, sensory processes and indescribable feelings. The complex of organic sense experiences which provides the basis of the sense of personality must disappear before the mystic can rise above the duality of self and the divine. Here he enters upon the stage of pure consciousness, in which he realises a union or identity with the object of his contemplation. The inadequacy of religious psychology consists then in this that it is helpless with regard to this aspect of experience which is, however, a real fact with an objective significance. In philosophical mysticism as well as in higher forms of art or music, mind and object are transcended; and the mystic's spirit in its absorption into the Pure Being or the Absolute rises above form, space and time, above consciousness itself, above all relativities. Psychology so far may accordingly analyse mystical experiences into complex, affective and intellectual states but it cannot decide on the value of the deeper insights and attitudes of a metaphysical significance. Nor is a direct examination of such experiences by experimental psychology possible. For this probably we have to depend solely upon the mystic's own testimonies as regards the nature and process of modification, of their imagination and consciousness, and these have to be clarified and reduced to order through the use of comparative and genetic methods. It is then that we shall understand one most significant way of interpreting the world of experience. Science and philosophy in all their forms express the unity of the Idea but cannot exhaust the reality. It is by contemplative union that the mystic feels the concrete unity of Life, and satisfies the fullness of human aspirations. The mystic intuition which alone can express the ever-receding fullness and harmony of concrete individual experience must represent, therefore, the starting point of philosophy. On the other hand, unless the individual's concrete experience is fashioned into concepts and symbols by philosophy it cannot rise beyond the flash of ecstasy, and be preserved as a universal treasure. Philosophy at each step enriches mystical intuition, helping it onward to seek and find fuller and fuller concords.