

The Mystic Journey of the Soul

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Abstract

This article briefly outlines the journey a soul is required to make if it wants to attain a state of union with the Eternal from the confines of its material life on earth. Some basic concepts of the Christian and Sufi esoteric traditions as well as Bahá'í mysticism are reviewed. The ultimate goal of these spiritual teachings is the same; the need to come as close to the Source or Creator as possible. The paths may differ slightly, but the need to attain to the "Heavenly Homeland", is the central theme that links them together.

Introduction

As there are many esoteric traditions within each religion, it is not possible, in this short article, to describe them all so only some basic concepts of the Christian, Sufic and Bahá'í teachings are reviewed.

One overriding question which has always confronted man is how to undertake this journey, so as to transcend human limitations and to achieve enlightenment, or union with God. Most religions of the world have an exoteric (outer) meaning and an esoteric (inner) meaning. We start with the outer and gradually move to the inner world as and when our spirit longs for a nearness to our creator. This is usually done with short periods of meditation and prayer. The meditation can be based on a word, a sentence, a short prayer or silence. This enables us to reduce and ultimately stop the constant mental dialogue and chatter. This process takes time and effort, and most of all, persistence. As we became more and more proficient with our meditations, our contemplations, our prayers, our solitude, we find our inner growth is accelerated and we get closer and closer to our goal. This inner growth has a flavour and

momentum of its own and takes us into yet deeper levels of meditation and quietude. As the soul moves into higher and more subtle regions it experiences feelings of bliss and selflessness; at the same time one is more aware of the pain and suffering of other human beings. The soul has reached a point where it is less concerned with self and more concerned with helping humanity. More effort and faith is required of the seeker if he is to reach yet higher states. In the final state of growth, self is finally forgotten or transcended. The self is thus consumed and burnt to nothingness in the unity of love; life after this will be completely God centered.

“My servant draws near to me through works of supererogation, until I love him. And when I love him, I am his ear, so he hears by Me, and his eye, so he sees by Me, and his tongue, so he speaks by me, and his hand, so that he takes by Me.”¹

This passing away in God, then, is the goal of the mystic journey of the soul. It is the moksha or liberation of Hinduism, the Nirvana of Buddhism, the Fana of Sufis, the passing away from duality to oneness. There is nothing better, nothing safer, nothing sweeter than this; this is the kingdom of the soul. It has finally found its resting place and can now rest peacefully and eternally in God.

As mentioned earlier, each religion has its esoteric side. The foundation of this journey to God is faith and hope which makes us take the first faltering steps and so the journey starts with courage, fortitude, intense longing, determination and perhaps most important of all, love. As Julian of Norwich a 14th century mystic beautifully and humbly prays:

“God, of your goodness, give me yourself, for you are enough for me and I can ask for nothing else than full worship of you. And if I ask for anything that is less, I shall always want; for only in you have I everything”.²

In the words of the early Church Father, St. Augustine,

¹ Hadith quoted by A.J. Arberry in ‘Sufism’, p. 27

² quoted by Ann Bancroft, *The Luminous Vision*, p 51

“Love and do what you will” Knowing full well that if you truly love you will only do what is right.”³

Let us start with the Christian mystical tradition. One of the central themes of the Christian mystics is the tragedy and suffering of Jesus. The other central theme is service to mankind in the name of God. Some of the well known mystics were St John of the cross, St Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, St Bernard of Clairvaux, St Francis of Assisi, Richard Rolle, Meister Eckhart and the anonymous author of the wonderfully written, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Most of the above mentioned mystics were connected to the church in some way or the other and their practice was coloured by the beliefs of their particular church. However, they all agreed that any real practice demands the purification of oneself at the beginning – and by purification is meant a heightened awareness of the nature of one’s own self and the results of one’s thoughts and actions. As the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* says “When you go apart by yourself in solitude, do not think about what you will be doing afterwards, put away all good thoughts as well as evil ones; and do not pray with words unless you feel you really must. Or if you do have something to say, do not look at how much or how little it is, nor what it means, whether it is orison or psalm, hymn, anthem or any other prayer, general or special, silently formed within or spoken out loud. And look that nothing remains in your conscious mind but a naked intent stretching unto God – what he is like himself or in any of his works, – but only that he is as he is. Let him be so, I pray you, and do not make him other wise”.⁴ Again he stresses, “Although I bid you plainly and boldly to set out in this contemplative work, nevertheless I feel certain, without error or doubt, that the grace of God is always the chief stirrer and worker”.⁵

As the grace of God descends upon the pilgrim he seeks solitude more and more. His need now is to be in communion with God and he moves further and further from the world of illusion and desire. As Evelyn Underhill, a well known writer of Mysticism says, “It is the last painful break with the life of illusion. The tearing away of the self from the

³ quoted by Ann Bancroft, *The Luminous Vision*, p. 56

⁴ quoted by Ann Bancroft, *The Luminous Vision*, p. 165-166

⁵ quoted by Ann Bancroft, *The Luminous Vision* p. 178

world of becoming, in which all its natural affections and desires are rooted, and thrusting it into the world of being".⁶ We are responding to the insistent dimension of God – ground within us and once the awakening process has begun it is almost impossible to close one's eyes again Master Eckhart a 13th century mystic said, "Begin with yourself and abandon yourself! In truth if you do not flee from yourself, wherever else you may flee you will find hindrance and trouble".⁷

Again he says "God expects but one thing from you and that is that you should come out of yourself in so far as you are a created being and let God be God in you".⁸

The contemplation of these mystics revolved around intense prayer, vigil and solitude. A favorite prayer was "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me".⁹ This or any other prayer was repeated over and over for hours on end, sometimes long into the night, accompanied by fasting. This continued for some months or perhaps years and then the grace of God descended upon the seeker and with this grace came bliss and a need to move closer and closer to the God-ground. The closer we get the surer we are that we are on the right path and that God is our guide, our protector and our preserver. So long as we keep travelling towards this unlimited light we will not go astray and will ultimately be united with the source of all light. There is much pleasure and satisfaction in this journey, as St Teresa of Avila has so aptly put it "One feels a great bodily comfort, a great satisfaction of soul: such is the happiness of the soul in seeing herself close to the spring, that even without drinking of the waters she feels herself refreshed".¹⁰

All this time we are or should be, seriously cleansing our bodies, minds and thoughts. Much of spiritual spring cleaning consists of cutting or pruning and discarding all that is unnecessary in our lives. We start by limiting our involvement in activities which are wasteful and frivolous

⁶ quoted by Ann Bancroft, *The Luminous Vision*, p. 180

⁷ quoted by Ann Bancroft, *The Luminous Vision*, p. 159

⁸ quoted by Ann Bancroft, *The Luminous Vision*, p. 159

⁹ quoted by Ann Bancroft, *The Luminous Vision*, p. 171

¹⁰ St. Teresa Avila, quoted by Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* p 32. Unwin Brothers Ltd, UK, 1960

and spend more time on things which are important and necessary for our spiritual growth. As Master Eckhart says "God is not found in the soul by adding anything but by a process of subtraction" This is also one of the approaches to God in Hinduism "Not this, not that" (Brhadaranyaka Upanishad 4:5: 15) and in Buddhism's 'Neti Neti' and the "God who hidest thyself" of Judaism (Isaiah 45: 15).

Similarly according to Tao Te Ching:

To attain knowledge
Add things every day,
To attain wisdom
Remove things everyday.

Eckhart also says "That man is free who clings to nothing and to whom nothing clings".¹¹

Knowing or sensing what to remove – this is courage, knowing when to remove – this is wisdom; gradually, we must make use of wisdom, faith and courage to clarify our minds and simplify our lives. Our goal is God and how soon we reach our goal depends on whether we take a short cut or whether we take a long lingering scenic route.

The Christian mystic's code also demanded utmost sacrifice in serving mankind as his saviour Jesus Christ had done. Service had to be rendered with utmost humility and life had to be lived in utter simplicity; giving ungrudgingly of one's time and of one's possessions was of supreme importance. True kindness is rooted in a deep sense of abundance out of which flows the conviction that even as we give, it is being given back to us. As we give – so shall we receive; we will always be given enough and we will always have enough to give. We must give with a conviction that there is enough for all and more. This need to give becomes more and more profound until we sense the need to give ourselves up totally to God. This journey which starts with an outer giving to God of our energy, our attention, our time, our effort and of our possessions, ends with our final offering to God; an offering of ourselves – to be burnt in the fire of love and to rejoice in this burning; for when all traces of our

¹¹ quoted by Ann Bancroft, *The Luminous Vision*, p. 149

self-ness and our ego are finally stripped away from us, then and only then – we step into the state of unity and into the bliss beyond description – The source of all, as Evelyn Underhill puts it, “That immaterial and final Being, which some philosophers call the Absolute, and most theologians call God”.¹²

Finally the stage is reached when, according to Eckhart,

“The eye by which I see God is the same eye by which he sees me. My eye and the eye of God are one eye, one vision, one knowledge and one love”¹³

Let us now turn to the mystical traditions of the Sufis. One of the best descriptions of Sufism is,

“Be in the world, but not of it”¹⁴

This would describe the Sufi way of life and teachings perfectly. Why were they called Sufis? It seems that at some point the early Muslim seekers of God had taken a liking to wearing an outer garment or cloak of wool. The Arabic name for wool is ‘Suf’ and so it was only a matter of time before they came to be known as Sufis i.e. ‘the wearers of wool’. There is, however, another school of thought. They hold the belief that the word Sufi was derived from ‘tassuwuf’ which means meditation or contemplation.

The goal of the Sufi is to attain to the presence of God through meditation and prayer. He must follow a regimen of strict discipline and watch his every thought and action with vigilance. The journey generally starts when all the outer requirements of religion have been completed. Then and only then does he embark on the inner journey to meet the Supreme Reality.

The doctrine that the Sufis practice and preach is of evolution; however, it is not Darwinian evolution. This evolution is from the materially

¹² Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 4

¹³ quoted by Ann Bancroft, *The Luminous Vision*, p. 159

¹⁴ Stuart Litvak, *Sufism*, p. 59

inclined man to a spiritually refined one and then on and on until finally he can be called 'the man of God'. A seeker must crawl before he can walk, and walk, before he can run, and later, much, much later, he may be able to fly. Five centuries before Darwin, the Sufi Saint Jalaludin Rumi wrote:

I have again and again grown like grass; I have experienced seven hundred and seventy moulds. I died from minerality and became vegetable; And from vegetativeness I died and became animal. I died from animality and became man. Then why fear disappearance through death? Next time I shall die bringing forth wings and feathers like angels; After that, soaring higher than angels-what you cannot imagine, I shall be that.¹⁵

Stuart Litvak also states

"So evolution was known to Sufis centuries ago, and the transformative process was familiar to them because of direct experience, not speculative theory".¹⁶

Again he emphasizes,

"Sufis contend that evolution continues in infinite stages after clinical death and that it is a universal phenomena".¹⁷

The Sufi seeker is therefore taught only when he is ready to imbibe spiritual teachings and is taught in several stages. After he has mastered a particular teaching he is taught what comes next and so on and so forth. The appropriate growth must be one that matches the current stage of development. According to Sufis, only a teacher can achieve this because he has traversed this path himself and so is in a position to guide the seeker in his quest for truth. A great deal of importance is attached to the teacher in the Sufic tradition and, once accepted into pupilship, the aspirant comes into the spiritual guardianship of his Pir. Sufic knowledge

¹⁵ quoted by Idries Shah, *The way of the Sufi*, p. 107

¹⁶ Stuart Litvak, *Sufism*, p. 88

¹⁷ Stuart Litvak, *Sufism*, p. 61

is non-verbal and is essentially intuitive or innate wisdom which can be released by certain practices.

“The premises that one can directly experience God while alive on this earth and can survive one’s bodily death are central if not over-verbalized”.¹⁸

One of the ways of coming closer to God and creating a state of ecstasy is the practice of Ziker. “Remember God often” is a phrase, which constantly recurs in the Koran: The Sufis interpret this in a special way, and the word ‘remembrance’ (Ziker) has acquired in time a very particular connotation.¹⁹

“Everything on earth passeth away, save His face” (Koran 55: 26). This is taken by the Sufis as the peg upon which to hang their characteristic doctrine of the passing away (Fana) of human attributes through union with God, whereby the mystic achieves the eternal continuance (Baqa) of spiritual life in Him.²⁰

The goal of these mystics is the same as the Christian mystics and union with God is of paramount importance. It is the *raison d’être* for which the seeker of any mystic tradition enters the path. It is the ‘Pearl of all wisdom’ for which he is willing to sacrifice all, including his life, if need be.

The search for God is his passion and he sees his life as a vehicle only for this purpose, this search for him is his sole reason for living: As Rabia Basri, an outstanding woman Sufi saint has so eloquently put it “O God, if I worship Thee in fear of Hell, burn me in Hell; and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, withhold not Thine everlasting Beauty”.²¹

Such was the zeal of the seeker of God, and in many of the Sufic writings examples of this are given in allegoric form; the moth that

¹⁸ Stuart Litvak, *Sufism*, p. 63

¹⁹ A.J. Arberry, *Sufism*, p. 22

²⁰ A.J. Arberry, *Sufism*, p. 22

²¹ A.J. Arberry, *Sufism*, p. 42

immolates itself joyously in the flame, the shining dew drop that slides silently into the sea; the river that in ecstasy joins with and merges with the oceans. As we can see, love of the Divine or 'mahabba' is the driving force and great emphasis is placed on this love "He loveth them and they love him". (Koran 2:152). An aspect of great importance in the Sufi tradition is the nearness of God. You do not have to search anywhere outside of yourself – God resides in your heart. The seeker has to cleanse his heart and mind, his body and soul and then he will discover his Beloved in the deepest recesses of his being. 'He is nearer to him than his own jugular vein (Koran 50:16) and again 'wither so ever ye turn, there is the Face of God' (Koran 2:115).

What the Sufi is trying to achieve is to leave this dimension of the physical world and its imperfections, its sorrows, its trials and tribulations, and reach a spiritual dimension. The Sufis claim that reality as we know it is shaped by our expectations, coloured by our culture and designed to keep us earth-bound and barely aware of our spiritual heritage.

Rumi says in his short poem, called "Another Dimension"

The hidden world has its clouds and rain,
But of a different kind
Its sky and sunshine are of a different kind,
This is made apparent to the refined ones-
Those not deceived by the seeming completeness of the ordinary world.²²

The Sufi then, is searching precisely for this dimension; to escape from the boundaries of this earth-plane and to free ourselves once and for all from the shackles that bind us to this world of space time.

How we long to somehow transcend this limited existence and live in the freedom of an unlimited and unfettered existence, 'Love becomes perfect only when it transcends itself, becomes one with its object; producing Unity of Being'.²³

²² quoted by Idries Shah, *The way of the Sufi*, p. 104

²³ Stuart Litvak, *Sufism*, p. 45

The perfected man or woman is capable of functioning at several levels simultaneously, and is in direct contact with Cosmic Reality.²⁴

The Sufi idea of evolution is on two levels, one at a subconscious level, which is a natural process involving all forms of life – the other is a conscious level which is dependent on one's own efforts. The first thing a would-be *murid* (aspirant) is advised to do is look for a *Pir* (Teacher) who will initiate him into the order that the *Pir* belongs to. There are many orders i.e. Chistia, Nakshbandi, Shadilia, Suhrawardia, Qadiryia etc. Different schools have their own rules and rituals – some schools are quite secretive and will not divulge any information unless you are initiated into their order. "The essence of Sufism is the Teacher, the teaching and the Taught"²⁵

An interesting facet of Sufism is the concept of Nafs or ego. This egoistic state has to be transcended or negated at some stage along the way if the aspirant is to reach the goal he desires. Another interesting aspect to Sufism is the concept of 'Baraka' or grace; this is a quality which probably is not present in the aspirant until he is well into the path. It is a gift, and is given when the aspirant is deemed ready to receive it. However, there are recorded instances where this 'grace' is bestowed freely to a person who has not yet embarked on this journey. Once this grace is received the person is so enamoured by the sense of the new dimension which is presented to his senses that it is only a matter of time before he starts his search to look for the Higher Reality, and begins to look for a Teacher to guide him towards the correct path to salvation. "Every part of your development as a human being needs correct time, right place, a suitable company. Without these you will be as complete as anything else which lacks three desirable elements in due concert, like a plant, say, without water, sun and earth."²⁶

Here Idries Shah again stresses the need for a *Pir*. The need for a spiritual guide is stressed again and again in almost all Sufi literature as being of primary importance. Without a guide the seeker is always warned of losing his way and going astray.

²⁴ Stuart Litvak, *Sufism*, p. 88

²⁵ Stuart Litvak, *Sufism*, p. 24.

²⁶ Idries Shah, *Caravan of Dreams*, p. 201.

Once a *Pir* is found and the *murid* has been initiated he is required to prepare himself to receive the Sufic teachings. Each order has its different exercises. The following are the Sufic preparatory exercises (Adab) according to the Naqshbandi Order.²⁷

1. Ritual Purification
2. Prayer
3. Face Qibla (Mecca) in a deserted place
4. Squat with folded legs, as at prayer
5. Ask forgiveness for all sins
6. Recite the Fatiha (Dedication) and offer them to Prophet Mohammad P.B.U.H. and the spirits of the Nakshbandi Shaikhs.
7. Close eyes and keep lips sealed tightly. Press tongue against the roof of your mouth.
8. Perform grave exercise i.e. imagine you are dead, washed and wrapped in white and laid in your tomb and all the mourners have departed, leaving you alone to face the judgement.
9. Perform guide exercise i.e. seeker's heart confronts the heart of the sheikh and seeks the sheikh's blessings.
10. Concentrate all your bodily senses, expel all preoccupations and wayward impulses of the heart, and direct all your perception towards God. Then say " O God, Thou art my Quest, and Thy pleasure is my desire". Then commemorate the name of the Essence within the heart, recalling that God is present, watching and encompassing you.
11. Await the "Visitation" (Warid) i.e. spiritual epiphenomenon .

These were the recommended exercises for the benefit of the aspirant to prepare him for the next stage of development. Let us now look at the qualities needed for salvation according to Al-Ghazali²⁸

1. Tauba - Repentance or forgiveness
2. Sabr - Fortitude
3. Shukr - Gratitude
4. Khauf - Fear
5. Raja - Hope

²⁷ A.J. Arberry, *Sufism*, p. 130

²⁸ A.J. Arberry, *Sufism*, p. 130

6. Faqr - Poverty
7. Zuhd - Self denial
8. Tauhid - Belief
9. Tawakkul - Trust in God
10. Mahabba - Love
11. Shauk - Yearning
12. Uns - Intimacy
13. Rida - Satisfaction
14. Niya - Resolve
15. Sidq - Truthfulness
16. Ikhlas - Sincerity
17. Muraqaba - Contemplation
18. Muhasaba - Self Examination
19. Tafakkhur - Meditation
20. The recollection of Death

These are some of the stages that a *murid* must traverse before he passes on to higher and higher realms until finally he reaches the stages of *fana* and *baqa* which defy description as they belong to a dimension beyond time and space.

“To summarize, the way of the Sufi is a direct path to illumination and intuitive knowledge; it is a path that is hidden from view of the conventional eye. In order to see the path, we must be willing to break with conventionality, that is, our conditioning, our familiar pattern of thinking and open our minds to the unfamiliar, the unexpected and the unknown”.²⁹

Let us now turn to the Bahá'í teachings. Bahá'u'lláh the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, has presented this teaching in a beautifully written book called, “The Seven Valleys”, which may be regarded as a very important writing in the realm of mystical composition. This was written in response to the question of Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din, by profession a judge and a keen student of Sufi philosophy. Bahá'u'lláh used a pattern similar to, though not identical, to the one previously used by Faridu'd-Din Attar in his most famous work ‘Language of the Birds’.

²⁹ Stuart Litvak, *Sufism*, p. 65

The theme followed is of Progressive revelation, the doctrine that Prophets reveal teachings according to the needs and capacity of the people'.³⁰

Before the seeker starts on this mystical quest he is expected to follow very strictly the Bahá'í virtues of spotless cleanliness, chastity, trustworthiness, hospitality, courtesy and justice. Once he has mastered these he may then proceed on his journey to God, who is "the First and the Last, the Seen and the Hidden, and He knoweth all things" (Koran 57: 3).

The seeker must pass through various states or levels; each level prepares him and fortifies his faith to step into the next level.

"The stages that mark the way-farer's journey from the abode of dust to the heavenly homeland are said to be seven. Some have called these seven valleys, and others, Seven Cities. And they say that until the way-farer taketh leave of self, and traverseth these stages, he shall never reach to the ocean of nearness and union, nor drink of the peerless wine".³¹

The first stage is,

The Valley of Search

In this valley, the aspirant is advised to cleanse the heart from all forms of imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers. He must further cleanse his heart from enmity against all people of the earth. He must also have patience and not be downhearted if the journey seems tedious and long. He must remember, "whoso seeketh out a thing with zeal shall find it"³²

"The true seeker hunteth naught but the object of his quest, and the lover hath no desire save union with the Beloved. Nor shall the seeker reach his goal unless he sacrifice all things. That is, whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must be set at naught, that he may enter the

³⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. x

³¹ Bahá'u'lláh. *The Seven Valleys*, p. 4

³² Arabian proverb, quoted in *The Seven Valleys*, p. 7

realm of the spirit, which is the City of God. Labor is needed, if we are to seek Him; order is needed, if we are to drink of the honey of reunion with Him; and if we taste of this cup, we shall cast away the world".³³

The seeker then asks for the grace and guidance of God to step into

The Valley of Love

In this valley he is dissolved in the fire of love. Here he seeks neither ignorance, nor knowledge, neither doubt nor certitude. He flees from both unbelief and faith. He searches only for his Beloved for whom at every moment he is ready to offer a hundred lives. Here all the traces of ego and self must "Be burned away at the fire of love, that the spirit may be purified and cleansed and thus may know the station of the Lord of the Worlds".³⁴

Kindle the fire of love and burn away all things,
Then set thy foot into the land of the lovers.³⁵

The seeker must now enter into

The Valley of Knowledge

"And come out of doubt into certitude, and from the darkness of illusion to the guiding light of the fear of God. His inner eyes will open and he will privily converse with his Beloved".³⁶

In this valley he is content to be with God and delight in the nearness of his Beloved. He witnesses the mysteries of life, death and resurrection; he sees the realms of creation and with a pure heart is able to look into the souls of man and sees the divine wisdom in the endless Manifestations of God.

³³ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 7

³⁴ Bahá'u'lláh *The Seven Valleys*, p. 11

³⁵ An ode by Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 11

³⁶ Bahá'u'lláh *The Seven Valleys*, p. 11

“In the ocean he findeth a drop in a drop he beholdeth the secrets of the sea”³⁷

In this valley he meets injustice with patience and anger with love; his only concern is with the ripening of his heart which is heavy with the repeated remembering of the Lord.

‘He breaks the cage of the body and the passions and consorts with the people of the immortal realm. He climbs on the ladders of inner truth and hastens to the heaven of inner significance’.³⁸

After passing through this valley, which is the last plane of limitation, the wayfarer has passed beyond the worlds of names, of forms and the worlds of attributes.

There is a saying attributed to Ali
“Absolute Unity excludeth all attributes”³⁹

He now steps into

The Valley of Unity

Here, he “Drinketh from the cup of the Absolute, and gazeth on the Manifestations of Oneness. In this station he pierceth the veils of plurality, fleeth from the worlds of the flesh, and ascendeth into the heaven of singleness. With the ear of God he heareth, with the eye of God he beholdeth the mysteries of divine creation. He steppeth into the sanctuary of the Friend and shareth as an intimate the pavilion of the Loved One.”⁴⁰

At this stage the seeker has lost all sense of ‘me’ and ‘I’ and seeks for himself neither name nor fame nor rank. He sees everything as God ‘Say, all is from God’. (Koran 4:80.)

³⁷ Bahá'u'lláh *The Seven Valleys*, p. 12

³⁸ Bahá'u'lláh *The Seven Valleys*, p. 12

³⁹ quoted in *The Seven Valleys*, p. 15

⁴⁰ Bahá'u'lláh *The Seven Valleys*, p. 17

And again,

“There is no power or might other than God”. (Koran 18:37.)⁴¹

Certain souls have strayed far from God and clouded themselves with ignorance and blindness and confined themselves in walls of self and passion. They dwell in the realm of limitation and so are completely veiled and have no portion of the Divine Beauty. But some advanced souls have drunk of the wine of oneness and so see nothing but the glory and splendour of the One and dwell on the plane of Oneness. Those souls who have passed the relative and the limited spheres and dwell on the plane of the Absolute, have burned away all relativities.

“In thy soul of love build then a fire. And burn all thoughts and words entire.”⁴²

The seeker is now ready to enter

The Valley of Contentment

Here he feels the gentle breeze of divine contentment. His sadness and grief is turned into delight and rapture.

“This is the realm of full awareness, of utter self-effacement. Even love is no pathway to this region, and longing hath no dwelling here; wherefore it is said, ‘Love is a veil betwixt the lover and the beloved.’ Here love becometh an obstruction and a barrier and all else save Him is but a curtain.”⁴³

Here the mystic dwells in inner peace and drinks the delicate wines of the spirit. Here one sees only the Divine.

“There was God and there was naught beside Him”.⁴⁴

⁴¹ quoted in *The Seven Valleys*, p. 18

⁴² Jalal'u'din Rumi's *Masnawi*, quoted by Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 28

⁴³ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 60

⁴⁴ Hadith quoted in *The Seven Valleys*, p. 31.

In this valley the traveller will witness the beauty of the Friend in everything. After journeying through the planes of pure contentment the traveller comes to

The Valley of Wonderment

Here he is stunned by the beauty of the All-glorious. Every moment his wonder grows and every moment he witnesses a new creation and is lost in awe at the works of the Lord, "O friend, the heart is the dwelling of eternal mysteries, make it not the home of fleeting fancies; waste not the treasure of thy precious life in employment with this swiftly passing world. Thou comest from the world of holiness – bind not thine heart to the earth; thou art a dweller in the court of nearness – choose not the homeland of the dust."⁴⁵

No words can accurately describe this state – As Jalal'u'din Rumi says in his Masnavi,

"If I speak forth many a mind will shatter;
And if I write many a pen will break."⁴⁶

Also Hafiz of Shiraz, one of the greatest of Persian poets, writes

"Only heart to heart can speak the bliss of mystic knowers
No messenger can tell it and no missive bear it."⁴⁷

In this valley words cannot convey the majesty and the magnitude and poet after poet and mystic after mystic have fallen silent. Jalal'u'din Rumi in his Masnavi says

"The tale is still unfinished and I have no heart for it – then pray forgive me."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 35

⁴⁶ quoted in *The Seven Valleys*, p. 29

⁴⁷ quoted in *The Seven Valleys*, p. 30

⁴⁸ quoted in *The Seven Valleys*, p. 35

The greatest of Persian Sufi poets fell silent as he could not find words to describe the magnificence and the grandeur of this awesome dimension. The wayfarer now reaches, the valley of

True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness

Here is experienced the dying from self and the living in God. Here all worldly attachments are burned away and nothing whatsoever remains of the limited things of this perishable world. More than this cannot be revealed as there are no adequate words to describe this state. The ardent seeker is urged to reach this stage and not let opportunities go to waste. He must make haste to attain this station no matter what the personal cost may be,

“Radiant as the sun, bright hath He shined,
But Alas, He hath come to the town of the blind.”⁴⁹

So be not like the blind but open your eyes and see the splendour which is your birthright. Make this light and this knowledge your goal and your destiny.

As Sa’adi says,

“I seek thy nearness,
 Dearer than sweet heaven
I see thy visage,
 Fairer than Paradise bowers.”⁵⁰

Ecstasy alone can encompass this theme, not utterance nor argument; only those who have reached this stage know, and when this highest plane is reached, then shall you gaze on the Beloved, and forget all else – for you have reached the court of the Life-Bestower. This is the realm of Absolute Command – it is beyond what any tongue can utter and any mind comprehend.

The Koran says,

⁴⁹ Jalal’u’din Rumi’s Masnavi quoted in *The Seven Valleys*, p. 39

⁵⁰ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 64

“Far be the glory of thy lord, the Lord of all greatness, from what they affirm of Him”. (Koran 37: 180 quoted in *The Seven Valleys*, p. 65)

Finally, the stage is reached when God promises the seeker who has given up everything for him “O my servant, Obey me and I will make thee like unto myself. I say ‘BE’ and it is and thou shalt say ‘Be’ and it shall be”⁵¹.

This, then is the fruit, the goal, of this wondrous mystical journey of the soul – a journey which began from the abode of dust to the heavenly homeland; a journey where self is transcended and only the Omniscient One remains.

Conclusion

In summation, love of God, love of human-kind and love of nature is taught by all mystics and these are the universal threads that link the mystics of the world together in a web. At the centre is the Divine Reality and the different religions have woven a beautiful tapestry of poetry, prose and love around it. All ardent seekers have arrived at the centre of this divine mystery, no matter from which point they started and all have poured out their very best; all the praise they were capable of, with words and feelings that at times reached sublime heights of beauty and tenderness for this unfathomable source of love so gently and silently hidden in the deepest recesses of one’s heart.

⁵¹ Hadith quoted by Bahá’u’lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 63

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