CHAPTER 3

Multidimensional Mysticism

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The subject of mysticism has reentered contemporary discourse through a number of channels—the re-discovery of the poetry of such luminaries as the incomparable Sufi poet Jelaluddin Rumi, the North Indian troubadour Kabir, and the outpourings of the saints of the *bhakti* tradition, through new thinking about the role of art, dance, performance, and perhaps surprisingly, sport, and the reentry of "fantasy" into literature in a major way (the "Narnia" stories of C. S. Lewis being a case in point, and certainly the "Harry Potter" phenomenon). This trend has been reinforced through comparative religion, through the profound re-discovery of nature as a result of our growing ecological crisis, and through the widespread perception that conventional political, economic, and social policies and approaches do not touch the deep levels of human existence, but may in fact contribute to the alienation from nature and from one another so symptomatic of our planetary crisis. Interest in mysticism is not then purely scholarly: it increasingly manifests itself as what we might call "practical mysticism"—hence its immediate connection to pragmatism in its various forms. This essay will

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A. K. Giri (ed.), *Practical Spirituality and Human Development*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3687-4_3

explore some important facets of this practical mysticism, particularly as it may be seen as an initially unlikely approach to social transformation and as a tool for the renewing of politics.

Mysticism here is understood as unmediated experience of or identification with whatever form of ultimate reality the experiencing individual identifies with or which frames their everyday life whether or not they "believe" in it in some more conventional religious sense. As such it is intimately related to, but not identical with, the notion of the "spiritual". It might be best thought of as a methodology for accessing the spiritual and as a set of insights and perceptions not intrinsically directed toward instrumental ends, but which, because of its qualities, in fact deeply influences such ends, be they political, cultural, or economic. This paradox lies at the heart of mysticism—it almost always transcends or dissolves the self, while at another level providing deep insight into the nature of the self. For while mystical traditions naturally vary, being mostly associated with a "parent" religion, very many commentators have also noted the fundamental continuities between them, manifesting as a greatly heightened sense of awareness of things and a deepening of attention to the mundane as well as to the supernal, a profoundly expanded sense of connection with nature and the universe, a phenomenon that some have dubbed the "cosmic self" (Macy 1990), and feelings of immense joy and security. Such feelings are by no means as uncommon as some would suggest, and may be triggered by religious observances such as fasting, meditation, or prayer, by contact with nature (and indeed, "nature mysticism" seems to be empirically one of the commonest forms), by exposure to great art and particularly music, by a deep relationship with an animal, or by the experience of human love.

For these reasons, mysticism appears to be a "cultural universal" since it speaks to the profound human need for meaning, and for understanding the unavoidable existential dimensions of human life—birth, death, love, illness, happiness, and the recognition that certain forms of experience seem so much more profound or authentic than others, and, as such, seem to be portals either to another world or to the transformation or perhaps transfiguration of this one. All of the ancient religions have extensive mystical strands within them, often opposed by the orthodox, but yet somehow irrepressible—the Sufi tradition in Islam, Kabbalah in Judaism, the many forms and expressions of Christian mysticism that flourished in the Middle Ages, the plethora of Hindu mystics, and the experience of deep cosmic connectedness reported by many practitioners of Buddhist meditation in its various forms that constitute the heart of

some of these, such as in the Chinese Chan or Japanese Zen schools. But in talking about mysticism, we are not only talking about the distant past, for such experimental forms of religion, or of religionless connection with nature and the cosmos, continue down to the present day, and these new manifestations are of great interest since in very many cases they are concerned not so much with the supernatural, as with the transformation of consciousness as it relates to the lived world, and to the consequent transformation of that world into one of greater harmony, peace, and beauty (for a good anthology, see Andrew Harvey 1997).

Modern and contemporary examples abound—the great Indian sage Sri Aurobindo and his evolutionary view of human development toward higher levels of consciousness culminating in what might be thought of as "full humanization" or the Austrian mystic, thinker and very practical educationist Rudolf Steiner in the relatively recent past, or today with such figures as the former Catholic priest Matthew Fox, the originator of a whole new strand of thinking known as "Creation Spirituality" in which mysticism plays an absolutely central role (Fox 1984, 1991). Other exemplars certainly include the major Jewish thinker and activist Michael Lerner (Lerner 1996), to say nothing of the plethora of Hindu gurus, contemporary Sufi practitioners, Buddhist leaders such as the Dalai Lama and a host of thinkers and writers now relating ecology and religion (Gottlieb 2004). Most of these (Steiner being perhaps a partial exception, although he too situated himself in relation to mystical strands in Christianity and gave rise to a church) are located within a religious tradition. Others, particularly in the arts, operate from a "secular" yet mystical framework (for example, Mark Rothko, the famous painter or the artists discussed in Wuthnow's extended study of art and spirituality (Wuthnow 2001) or from a quasi-religious context such as Theosophy, the major Indian dancer Rukmini Devi, who very much saw her art as a spiritual activity and art as a source of the renewal of the spiritual life (Samson 2010)). Ecology in particular has provided a common and ecumenical ground on which different religions can dialogue, and a new space for mysticism to emerge once again as a "legitimate" expression of the search for meaning and right action (Cupitt 1998). The result has been not only the renewal of mysticism, but its expanding relationship to areas traditionally thought to be outside of its purview, including such issues as work, gender, economy, new structures of society, art, and the search for new ontologies and new visions of life and creativity on a planet threatened not by external forces, but by our own behavior.

Mysticism and Pragmatism

The scholarly study of mysticism is a fascinating subject in its own right. The emphasis in this essay however will be on the relationship between mysticism and pragmatism, as expressed particularly in politics, art, and sport. The assumption that mysticism is essentially an "inner" phenomenon has long since proved to be false, as an examination of the sources shows. For example, the Biblical book of Isaiah, shared by both the Jewish and the Christian traditions, is a remarkable blend of the mystical and the political, expressed through its teachings about the absolute relationship between spirituality and social justice (Isaiah 1: 16–17, 27; 10: 1–2; 28, 17, etc.). Fred Polak has argued that the book is one of the most radical political statements in existence, and is in a sense the origin of Utopianism—the search for the ideal society, a search which has had a long life, particularly in the West, much of it arising from mystical and religious sources (Polak 1973; Jacoby 1999). The Medieval Christian mystics who inherited this teaching (Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, Francis of Assisi, and many others) were far from the quietists that some interpretations have supposed. They were almost without exception deeply engaged with society and with the political and economic wrongs of their times. While couched in a "mystical" language or set of symbols, the implicit teachings are radical, for they imply the radical equality mentioned above, a unity of the human species before God which fundamentally undermines the hierarchies of Medieval political culture and the feudal social system which was its economic base. As Hildegard succinctly put it: "We shall awaken from our dullness and arise vigorously toward justice".

Much the same can be said of the Islamic Sufi movements, most of which likewise preached a radical equality before God, inter-religious harmony (Sikand 2003), and a transformative vision of society that embodied the values of the French Revolution—liberty, equality, and fraternity, to say nothing of charity and compassion—long before France as a political entity existed. Scholars of the work of Rumi have found in his mysticism a "liberation theology" and set of social teachings far in advance of the most revolutionary teachings of the West (Harvey 1994). A similar recognition has been given to the bhakti poet-saints of India whose egalitarian and anti-caste thinking and practice has led the scholar and public intellectual Shiv Visvanathan to argue: "Let us face it, the great reform movements of India were not the modernist,

communist, socialist, or liberal democratic ones. The great reform movement was the bhakti tradition. Nanak, Kabir, Mirabai, did more to dent caste than *The Communist Manifesto*" (Visvanathan 2016: 31; see also Hess 2015; Omvedt 2008). Matthew Fox has argued at length for the dialectical relationship between what he calls "gifts of awe" and "gifts of liberation", or put slightly differently, between mysticism and prophecy, and that awe (a mystical response to the world) leads to liberation: the paradox of the path of non-action leading to action (Fox 1991: x). One major reason for this is that almost all mystical "systems" are non-dualistic: they seek or report a holism that transcends and dissolves the common oppositions: mind/body, action/inaction, inner/outer, meditation/social action.

But how can this be? Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2015) has persuasively argued for the need for "epistemologies from the South" to counter the hegemonic epistemologies of the politically and economically dominant North. While his argument is entirely valid, it still confines knowledge to a conventional political and social framework. It is radical, but not radical enough. For emerging from mysticism one can argue for a fundamentally radical epistemology, one that transcends secular models of knowledge and proposes a new (or rather very old) form of knowing, a form that is paradoxically not (only) cognitive, but involves a direct apprehension of the nature of reality—a kind of transcendent knowledge. That knowledge in turn implies a new ontology—a way (or ways) of being in the world thus apprehended and transfigured by that new knowledge, which is not primarily a knowledge of facts, but of the context of facts and the forces that bind them into a comprehensible universe that cannot be accessed by positivist or conventional scientific methodologies. Mysticism, as was suggested earlier, can then be thought of as a kind of "methodology" that seeks not surface facts, but the deep grammar of being that underlies those facts. Indeed "facts" themselves can be transformed in the process. The early sociologist Emile Durkheim argued that "social facts" are those forces that constrain us, forces that empirically exist and which can be to a great extent *measured*. But there are radically different ways of conceiving of "facts", ones in which mysticism and art are profoundly parallel. The Russian Formalist art critic and writer Victor Shklovsky, for example, wrote: "Art exists so that one may recover the sensation of life: it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art

is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important*" (Shklovsky 1965: 12). Mysticism, like art, may perhaps be defined as a way of seeing rather than of knowing, a heightening of everyday awareness such that the doors of perception are opened, and the profound reality behind the mundane revealed.

We will return to the question of art in more detail shortly, but the immediate question is the relationship between mysticism and politics. John Holloway in an influential book (Holloway 2002) has argued for the possibility of, as he puts it, "changing the world without taking power". In it, he raises the profound possibility of a politics beyond power (Clammer 2009). At first sight this seems absurd: politics is usually defined *in terms of power*, not against it. But it is here that the unlikely question of mysticism may be of great help, for we are not speaking of a "mystical politics" (one beyond reason and with very dangerous manifestations, Nazism being certainly one of the most malignant), but of the re-framing of politics from a mystical perspective. Here we must necessarily speak in general terms, for the scope, historically, geographically, and theologically, of mysticism is broad and deep. But nevertheless, some important insights can be gleaned into how a transformed politics might appear if infused with the insights of mystical thinking.

Matthew Fox, as noted above, has argued for the intimate link between mysticism and social action, and there are at least two good reasons other than those explored by him why this is so. The first is that mysticism inevitably conceals or expresses a system of *ethics*—of the modes of behavior necessary to sustain the world and to maintain the best kinds of human relationships. This resonates well with many current debates about sustainability, since the basis of *unsustainability* is to be found in the negative and destructive values so commonly found in contemporary culture. The second factor then is precisely regarding mysticism not as a set of otherworldly sensations, but as the mechanism for generating the positive values necessary for creating a sustainable future. The prevalence of "nature mysticism" among varieties of mystical thinking show the close links between mysticism and ecology and its practical outcome: that which we love and are part of, we cannot wantonly destroy or damage. The attitudes embodied in "Deep Ecology" thinking are very close indeed to the expressions of reverence for nature found

in many nature mystics of all traditions. Mysticism, other than its ability to connect the practitioner to the divine, however that is conceived in those different traditions, has, then at least two other dimensions—as the basis of ethics, where no "rational" or philosophical basis can be found for ethical behavior, and as the source of values—a kind of "anti-anomie" device, that restores meaning to the world, by among other techniques, re-enchanting it and by giving back a sense of the place of the human in a vast cosmic drama in which petty political concerns are seen in their true context, as necessary but tiny interventions and squabbles in a very much bigger planetary and extraplanetary story. Yet this vast story is not one of despair and alienation, but of hope. As the Jewish mystical tradition puts it, every action, however small, contributes either to the destruction of the world, or to its ultimate repair and preservation—the concept called in Hebrew *tikkun olam*—the "fixing" of the world. Politics, seen from this perspective, becomes a spiritual activity (or should be)—the human activity of creating the world as it should be. It is noteworthy that all mystical systems teach non-violence: a new world cannot be created by the means that have brought the current one to the edge of self-destruction.

The anti-corporate and futures thinker David Korten has argued that "To create a just, sustainable, and compassionate post-corporate world we must face up to the need to create a new core culture, a new political center, and a new economic mainstream" as the bases for bringing into existence what he calls "a new integral culture that affirms life in all its dimensions" (Korten 1999: 261). This is true; the question becomes, how to do so? There are of course many answers to this, and as Paul Hawken has documented there are a huge variety of initiatives and "alternative" thinking at large in the world—NGOs, ecological movements, feminist ones, art activism, animal rights, anti-globalization movements, "slow" foods, organic farming and permaculture initiatives, and a myriad of others (Hawken 2008). But significantly, in the huge and gratifying number of movements that he identifies, none are religious. This may be wise (religions have a way of squabbling among themselves and within themselves), or it may be, tragically, that religious traditions, whatever their scriptural teachings, have little to say on issues of social justice, although as noted, many are now beginning to explore the less contentious and "political" issue of their relationship to nature in much more detail. Whatever the reasons, given their claims to be repositories of ultimate truth and meaning, it is clearly incumbent on all

religious traditions worthy of the name, to move beyond this sociopolitical (and indeed economic) quietism, to active engagement with the planetary crisis in which they may indeed be implicated in very negative ways. One route to such engagement is through the paths opened up by their respective mystical traditions and the very real possibilities of deep dialogue between religions on the basis of conversations between those mystical positions, once those positions themselves are seen not as quietist, but as urging a deep engagement with the world, not a withdrawal from it. Mysticism is social. And not only social, but potentially providing the basis for more "secular" interventions in the world. The weakness of many social movements is that their foundational ideology, if they have one, is often based on the temporal. They do not have an "eternal" or fundamental basis for their action in/on the world, with the exception perhaps of the "liberation theologies" that have appeared particularly in Catholic Christianity and have spread to Judaism, some strands of Islam and Hinduism and have transmuted into such parallel movements as "Engaged Buddhism" and the activist aspects of such movements as the Japanese origin "new religion", Soka Gakkai.

If we take up the practical and theoretical ramifications of this, it takes us in many fruitful directions, all of which cannot, alas, be fully developed here. Zygmunt Bauman has famously argued that the Holocaust was not an aberration in historical terms (however extreme a one it was in ethical ones), but the outcome of the logic of Western modernity and its socioeconomic trends (Bauman 1999). If this is so, then the very basis of that "modernity" needs fundamental reconsideration, for if in its current or recent historical forms it has so badly failed to usher in the society and civilization announced by the Enlightenment, then another form of Enlightenment is clearly needed. In some forms of mystical practices such as old European Concept, Enlightenment as a desired outcome is very differently enshrined. On the other hand, the Buddhist conception of Enlightenment states that the nature of reality is intuitively grasped and the route to this state is through the overcoming of what the great Indian Buddhist sage Nagarjuna called the "revulsion from lusts, restraint from aggressions, vanity of possessions and power", which the contemporary Buddhist social activist Ken Jones has glossed as the recognition (and overcoming) of the "three fires" of acquisitiveness, ill will, and ignorance" (Jones 2003: 47).

Such statements of course connect directly to issues of both politics and economics, especially as today these are often virtually identical.

If contemporary capitalist economies are based on consumption, resource extraction, generation of waste, and ever accelerating cycles of novelty (and of course of competition), then they do little more that fuel the "three fires", while contributing massively to ecological destruction and the promotion of climate change. In his book *The Politics of Meaning*, the activist Rabbi and "alternative" thinker Michael Lerner suggest that the problems with contemporary politics have spiritual roots, and that the problems that political cultures now face—expanding sources of alienation, crime, violence, social, and psychological dysfunctions of many kinds—despite (or because of?) rising levels of affluence, derive ultimately from this source. He suggests that the solution lies in "Envisioning a world that is far more responsive to our ethical and spiritual needs" (Lerner 1996: 21) and he suggests a number of routes that might lead to that goal, including creating a society that encourages love and intimacy, community and friendship, ethical sensitivity and spiritual awareness, which understands "efficiency" not as creating profit, but as fostering ethically, spiritually, ecologically, and psychologically sensitive and caring human beings, and which promotes an attitude of awe and joy in relation to the world and one another. A transformative politics must then be one of emancipation, not only from political and economic un-freedoms, but in a positive sense that is closer to the notion of Enlightenment—a release into an unprecedented space of freedom, an expanded sense of the self, a decolonization of the mind from the endless rubbish inserted into it not only by political ideologies, but by advertising, and so much of popular culture and its preoccupations with violence, status and getting ahead of others while ignoring the needs of other species and the larger environment. As James Jasper has rightly argued, significant social movements are also *moral* ones (Jasper 1997). If this is so, the question is naturally from what sources that morality is derived, and this essay is suggesting of course that a profound source of such orientations is to be found in mysticism. The notion of the "ecological self" need not be confined to the identification of the self with nature, but with a much more expanded version that encompasses other human beings and a profound sense of oneness with the universe—which is basically another way of conceiving of mysticism as a philosophy or spirituality of identification rather than separation, of unity rather than dualism, and as a result of compassion and caring, a deeply ethical relationship to other humans and non-human entities that share the world with us, and upon which we are in fact dependent.

A great deal of religious fundamentalism might be seen as a tragically distorted form of mysticism—as indeed a seeking for meaning, but finding it in a closing off of the self from the world and other people rather than an expanding sense of identification. The "return of God" that Owen Worth notes as so characteristic of the contemporary social and political scene with fundamentalism rising in almost every major religious community is now a highly visible phenomenon, and in many senses a frightening on as the "god" who is returning is a violent and exclusivist one in most cases, not an inclusivist and compassionate one (Worth 2013). The resistance that Worth notes to the manifold injustices of the contemporary world is very needful: its ineffectiveness may however derive from a false methodology—notably that the really deep causes of our multiple crises have not been identified, and as Einstein is famously supposed to have said, a problem cannot be solved at the same level as that at which it is posed.

It is here too that the question of art re-emerges. Art is one of the few legitimate cultural forms in which imagination and fantasy can be given full play, and while art certainly cannot be equated with mysticism, there are many parallels. We noted earlier David Korten's remark that among the ingredients for a livable future is a "new culture". Cultures are to a great extent constituted by their stories—the narratives of their histories, achievements, self-images, and which are often embodied in their religious scriptures as well as in their literature and formal histories. On examination, many of those stories prove to be violent, aggressive, colonial, and exhibiting many of the characteristics that would be least desirable in a livable and sustainable future civilization. An important need then is for "new stories"—narratives that promote different kinds of social relationships, of relationships with nature, that suggest that satisfaction can be found in other sources that in consumption and competition. This puts considerable responsibility onto the shoulders of artists and writers, since they are among the primary generators of new stories, or the creation of new myths and of fresh perceptions of the world. They are also, or should be, the generators of beauty, whether in art, music, dance, architecture, or theater. Beauty and mysticism always go together. Robert Wuthnow has carried out extensive empirical work into the attitudes of artists and has indeed discovered that for many of them their work is seen as a spiritual activity and one concerned with exploring through human creativity the spaces that in religious terms are often identified with the

mystical (Wuthnow 2001). But is it only in such recognized sectors as art that mystical experience can occur? It would seem not, for remarkably similar forms of experience are reported by performers (dancers in particular), in people experiencing near-death situations, and interestingly (and very neglected in the literature on mysticism, in sport. It is to this "unlikely" case that we now turn, arguing that in actuality the states of being accomplished in many sporting contexts fit well with the general situation that we are describing here.

Mysticism and Sports

The nature or explanation of sports contains its own ambiguities, even if defined in the simplest of terms as an event or occurrence of a game. Huizinga (1955) defines sport as an activity of play in which an individual undergoes multiple interactions with self and society, usually in a specific location or context. His way of understanding sport is as socially legitimated forms of play, as action and goal oriented movement—as rule-governed activity in a deliberately created environment which is full of planned obstacles and which demand creative solutions to overcoming them. Thus according to Huizinga games are "all temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart". The act of play in itself is beyond the range of being good or bad, except in terms of its internal criteria. Sport is a performance, and in its ideal-type form can be described as "an activity with no material interest, and no profit to be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their differences from the common world by disguise or other means" (Huizinga 1970: 13). Beyond this rather ideal model (before FIFA and the commercialization of sports) are the human desires for perfection, competition, and achievement. J. S. Russell suggests that this is the fundamental reason why people chose to voluntarily take place in dangerous and so-called "extreme" sports: "From the life of childhood right up to the highest achievements of civilization, one of the strongest incentives to perfection, both individual and social, is the desire to be praised for one's excellence. We want to be honored for our virtues. In order to merit recognition, merit must be made manifest. Competition serves to give proof of superiority" (Russell 2005: 1).

Mysticism Through the Lens of Sporting Experience

Mysticism as we know has been described in various ways and from different viewpoints, but still leaving many aspects ill-defined and failing to communicate its full range. Ninian Smart defines mysticism in terms of a *way* of contemplating life and the experiences that one undergoes (Smart 1978), or it might be seen as a kind of self-exploration and exploration of the less empirically defined areas of the outer cosmos through a kind of "brooding" on and realization of the higher veracity of phenomena (Zaehner 1961). But yet another way to understand mysticism is to acknowledge it as an experience of either paradoxically "super sense-perceptual" or as "sub sense-perceptual" that involves dealing with forms of reality or events which do not easily yield themselves to regular sense perception, introspection or the standard somatosensory modalities (Gellman 2017). In the context of sports, mysticism has been identified as a superior understanding of self which one gains by engaging in the given sporting activity, and though it engaging with nature and revealing aspects of the self otherwise hidden. Over the last three decades, literature in the field of sports has begun to address these spiritual and even religious dimensions, and a number of social scientists have reflected on two major and under-explored dimensions of the sporting experience. The first of these is through the context of positive psychology which deals with the experience of flow or "being in the zone" while performing the sporting activity (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), and the second is the exploration of the interaction that takes place between an individual and his/her surroundings during the sporting activity, especially in the context of "extreme" sports in which genuine risk is involved (Watson and Parker 2015). Taken together, these viewpoints aim to examine the content of the athletic experience by elaborating on its actual phenomenology from a holistic viewpoint, assuming that the individual is indeed a complex being containing many levels or aspects—thoughts, ideas, emotions, beliefs—and that the experiences that they undergo hold very deep meanings for them, and that such experiences have the capacity and are strong enough to initiate changes in thought processes and behavior,

and are, in fact, a means of self-exploration. This draws attention to an often forgotten aspect of mystical experience—that it almost always takes place as a result of the achievement of a bodily state. In more "religious" understandings of mysticism these take place through prescribed forms—yoga, fasting, ascetic practices, *tantra*, meditation, and so forth—but sport is rarely included, yet is one of the most common human activities across cultures, classes, and age-groups. Here we would like to reinstate it as one of the most widespread forms of "pragmatic spirituality" with a strong mystical dimension. For if sporting experiences are sufficiently strong to initiate processes of self-revelation then they can genuinely be incorporated into the pantheon of mysticism. This is slowly becoming recognized—that indeed while music, art, religious worship, meditation, mind-altering drugs, the existential reality of birth and death are sources of mystical experience and insight (Watson and Parker 2015)—so, too, sports may be recognized as a medium for experiencing mysticism (Fontana 2003).

Psychological Dimensions of Sporting Experiences

To study the relationship between psychology and mysticism is a thought-provoking task involving equally the exploration of philosophy, theology and the relationships of these to science. In sports, athletes often report the experience, even if of short duration, of spontaneous fleeting moments of what have been designated as a state of "flow". Flow as a psychological state in sports appear to involve "peak experiences", but ones separated from a theological understanding of such experiences (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). This is an important conceptual innovation as earlier forms of psychological research tended to view things from a more limited or unidirectional perspective—either physiological or social, but without relating such dimensions in a more holistic manner. This is despite the fact that some early prominent psychologists were themselves, if not fully fledged mystics, were certainly constantly interrogating the inner life. William James was certainly one of this clan, and in his landmark book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (James 1902) formulated the four inter-locking concepts of Ineffability, Noetic Quality, Transiency, and Passivity, which he argued that, when experienced within the experience of an individual, may be justifiably defined as mystical moments. He illustrates this with an example reported to him by a 27-year-old male informant as follows:

> Once it was when from the summit of a high mountain I looked over a gashed and corrugated landscape extending to a long convex of ocean that ascended to the horizon, and again from the same point where I could see nothing beneath me but a boundless expanse of white cloud, on the blown surface of which a few high peaks, including the one I was on, seemed plunging about as if they were dragging their anchors. What I felt on these occasions was a temporary loss of my own identity, accompanied by an illumination which revealed to me a deeper significance than I had been wanting to attach to life. It is in this that I find my justification for saying that I have enjoyed communication with God. Of course, the absence of such a being as this would be chaos. I cannot conceive of life without its presence.

Much later research in clinical settings by Walter Pahnke (1969) defined nine universal psychological features—namely Unity, Transcendence of Time and Space, Deeply Felt Positive Mood, Sense of Sacredness, Noetic Quality, Paradoxicality, Alleged Ineffability, Transiency, and Persisting Positive Changes in Attitudes and Behavior which were derived from mystical experiences reported by people from all over the world, different historical periods and from varied cultures and religions.

An important element in this typology is its emphasis on long-lasting changes in human behavior (Cohen et al. 2010). The process of mystical experience is such that it can involve a dynamic transformation of the subject's state of consciousness. Baruss (2003) defines this modification as a shift from ordinary consciousness (OD) to cosmic consciousness (CC) where OD is an egocentric state of mind which an individual manifests by differentiating the self from other people in his surroundings, while CC is a state in which an individual feels elated and surpasses one's own ego and thoughts of self-centeredness and experiences a sense of amalgamation with the cosmos. This shift from OC to CC is mediated by altered states of consciousness (ASC), a state equivalent to, or in which one may, undergo mystical experiences. In sport, the experiences of being "in the zone" have been referred to as "Zen States" (Herrigel et al. 1953). Indeed, in the Zen sports and arts practiced in Japan (archery, calligraphy, martial arts such as Judo), the basic principle is to move beyond the conscious, controlling self, to a state in which "flow" is achieved by the disappearance of the self and the allowing of deeper and more unconscious skills to emerge and to reflect themselves in a smooth and apparently effortless achievement of the goal that is sought, by the paradoxical method of renouncing that very pursuit. One does not have to follow a religion to achieve such states of being, even though Zen is of course historically a sect or offshoot of Mahayana Buddhism.

While individuals certainly experience the world in diverse ways depending on culture and history (Hood et al. 2009), there is little reason to exclude states achieved in sport as being beyond the pale of practical spirituality. This is especially so as in many ways they match the experiences of performers of other kinds, and dancers in particular, who have often reported sensations of flow and of transcendence. Given that many sports, especially varieties of "extreme" one such as rock climbing, mountaineering, and cross-country skiing or dog-sled racing, take place in nature and often in very rugged varieties of nature, it is also not surprising that many people engaged in these activities report experiences hardly different from those of the large tribe of "nature mystics", who probably comprise the largest "community" of mystics outside of religious structures and institutions (although of course many nature mystics may also be members of such organizations).

An additional link is to the study of happiness and well-being. The field of positive psychology has addressed these concerns and placed issues of human growth and quality of life at its center. Empirical research in positive psychology has pioneered two approaches to understanding the concept (and reality) of well-being. The first approach is defined as the Hedonistic approach in that it deals not only with happiness, but also with human pleasure attainment and avoidance of pain (Singh et al. 2016). The second is referred to as the Eudaimonia approach and centers on concepts of self-insight and self-realization (Ryan and Deci 2001). In either approach it is understood that understanding well-being involves engagement with human physical, social, and mental functioning and is not confined to a biopsychological approach, but advances to an exploration of notions such as that of life satisfaction (Diener et al. 1999), happiness (Pollard and Lee 2003), and the ability to fulfill goals (Singh et al. 2016). All these are closely related to the case of athletic performance and personal excellence (Miller and Kerr 2002). The interesting but unexplored area is the interface where concepts of positive psychology and mysticism meet, and in the light of this to consider the transcendental aspects of athletic performance and experience. This can occur at least at two levels. One is at the more pragmatic level of self-esteem, positive emotions, optimism (Huppert and So 2013), purpose of life, self-acceptance, and accomplishment/competency (Seligman 2011), and the other is to consider the points at which these begin to merge into mysticism, a point which stimulates some major theoretical rethinking of the relationships between embodiment and mystical experience and which as such links sport to the study of more

religious forms of mysticism and embodiment (Law 1995; Mellor and Shilling 1997).

Undeniably, mysticism is to a great extent inseparable from religion and ideas of spirituality, those being the institutional arenas in which it is most expected and expressed, but regarding mysticism as a religion itself is not justified (Wood 1980). Sport, as a major form of expressive embodiment, may be another area of both mystical experience and pragmatic spirituality, or if you prefer, spirituality expressed in a non-religious idiom. Some have argued too that there is a fine line between mystical experiences and madness, and the same issue may also appear in relation to sport. In mental health studies, some research into extreme sports has identified high levels of medically narcissistic and behaviorally regressive dynamics (Elmes and Barry 1999). Self and colleagues have also argued that extreme sports are sometimes aberrant activities in which participants typically have deficiency in regulating their emotions and actions in a socially acceptable manner (Self et al. 2007). Extreme sports have also been associated with drug abuse and criminal behavior. But excesses by a few do not undermine a general principle, although there have been critiques of the idea of extreme sports from a theological perspective which have argued that such activities cannot claim to lead to mysticism in any genuine sense (Watson and Parker 2015). But others have suggested the contrary—that athletic experiences constitute a genuine inner journey and promote connections between the self and larger external realities (Johnson 2016). This disagreement of course suggests a fruitful avenue of research—to at one level examine how self-reported experiences of "depth" by athletes contribute to positive psychological well-being on the part of participants, but at a more fundamental level to explore the relationship between somatic experiences and mystical states, and to ask questions about the relationships between embodiment and transcendental experiences. Even as such experiences are reported by practitioners of the performing arts, so too sport, as a major form of performance, is a legitimate candidate. It may well be that "everyday mysticism" is far more common than is usually suspected.

Re-modeling the World

It was suggested at the outset of this essay that mysticism, far from being "otherworldly" has always been deeply connected with the pragmatic. The thesis of this paper is that it does in fact provide the "deep

epistemology" that lies beneath the noisy empirical surface that we see around us constantly, embodied in political turmoil, economic crises, conflict, the willingness to pollute our own nest to the point of self-destruction. The recovery of that deep knowledge points to profoundly fresh ways of addressing these problems and for creating the new culture so urgently needed. The implications of this are many—not only a methodology for accessing a very ancient "perennial philosophy" as it has been called, but drawing out the practical consequences of such knowledge. Some of these we have mentioned—the universalism of mystical insights which provides not only a ground for inter-religious dialogue, but also creates a new form of globalization—one beyond economics, the self-interest of nation-states, the militarization that so often accompanies the conventional form. By linking people and traditions through the deep grammar of human unity, mystical thinking dissolves the negative aspects of gender differences, race, caste, class, and the other hierarchies that human beings have been so creative in erecting against one another. While so many of these social processes are exclusionary, mysticism is inclusive, it draws in but does not expel. Certainly there are stages on the mystical path and so different levels of attainment, but these are simply steps in the same direction, on a path that has no end, so no one can claim to have "arrived" at the ultimate goal, but all participate in a process of progressive widening of awareness. We see then a radical epistemology, a totally socially egalitarian "philosophy", a politics beyond power and resource-grabbing, a globality beyond globalization, and the re-discovery of our place in nature, which is an integral one, not one of human domination over other species. In a sense mysticism has to be social and political. Whether it takes theistic or non-theistic forms, it involves a radical re-orientation to the cosmos and an inclusive recognition of one's place within it, and with this the recognition that to damage or do violence to the outer is to do the same to the inner, and vice versa. Mysticism can best be thought of as a process of identification with the totality, as an overcoming of the dualism that creates a separation between the self and the "other", for if ultimately there are no "others" then the very basis of violence, crime, ecocide, cruelty, is removed. When Muslims state the foundational claim of their faith—"There is No God but God", or Jews recite the *Shema*—"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One", they are not making, as is so commonly supposed, claims for the exclusivity of their god, but on the contrary, making a profound statement about the unity of creation.

If, as both traditions maintain, there is essentially nothing outside of God, then a fundamental nondualism must prevail, a position also found in the Upanishads and in the scriptures of other religions, a teaching alas often forgotten in practice, but recovered through the medium of mysticism. But equally, as we have argued here, mysticism need not be associated only with religion in its conventional sense: exposure to nature, forms of performance that take the practitioner, even if momentarily, "out of the self" or "out of the body" qualify too. The reason for this is not hard to seek: many every day or every night experiences such as dreaming suggest to us not that we live in a state of *Maya* or illusion, but rather that reality is of infinite depth, and that in most of our waking lives we live on the surface of a great ocean, the fertile depths of which are however capable of being plumbed, and mystical experience in its many forms is the well-tested route to those expansive depths.

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CHAPTER 4

Practical Spirituality: The Art and Science of Conscious Living

Karminder Ghuman, Michael A. Wride and Philip Franses

Introduction

The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it (Nouwen 1981). Spirituality is about valuing and deeply connecting with what we hold sacred in ourselves, other beings, and the universe as an integral whole. Spirituality isn't diametrically opposed to science. *The notion that science and spirituality are somehow mutually exclusive does a disservice to both* (Sagan 1995). Like science, spirituality is also involved in the pursuit of meaning and purpose, and explores the nature of reality.

The two approaches of spirit and science have received separate emphasis in their development in Eastern and Western civilizations. On the one side (the spiritual), the individual existentially lives within the collective movement to meaning. On the other side (the scientific) the

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A. K. Giri (ed.), *Practical Spirituality and Human Development*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3687-4_4