

## **Mystical Traditions in the Great World Religions**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*For many years, nations, communities, and individuals have been in conflict about who understands and believes in a particular religion. The question asked is “who has the right or ‘true’ religion.” Mysticism is one way to transcend this question. This paper will focus on several world religions and Mysticism, studying mystical experiences that have been documented.*

### **Introduction**

There is mystical tradition present in all of the world’s great religions. For thousands of years, mysticism has been present in religion. The mystical traditions have created a connection between the major religions. Mysticism is a main aspect of all of the world’s great religions.

People practice different religions around the world. This research paper addresses a number of religions in the world today. There are many religious beliefs about God. This study will show how religions are interconnected through mysticism and our limited understanding of God.

The world is much smaller that it used to be. By means of planes, e-mail, and the internet we have access to many different cultures. This is access that we never had before. The world has started to intermix. People are now forced to live with persons from a variety of backgrounds and religions, especially in the United States. We have to start adapting to the mixture of cultures that are forced to intermix with each other on a regular basis. These different cultures bring forth different lifestyles and different beliefs.

Religion has been the cause of an enormous amount of conflict in the world. Many people have fought and died over their religious beliefs. Religion still continues to play an active role in the world and in world politics today.

This paper is about the life of us all. It is about the life of the Christian. It is about the life of the Hindu. It is about the life of a Buddhist. It is about the life of the Taoist. It is about the life of the Jew. It is about the life of the Confucian. We are all different in many ways, but

we are the same when it comes to religion and how that may play an important or fundamental role in our lives.

This research project studies the history of mysticism and how it relates to all religions. Topics addressed include “what is mysticism,” “who are mystics,” “what mystical are experiences,” and “the universalism of GOD.”

The philosophy of religion has many different interpretations. Through our non-phenomenal selves (the inner being, the yearning inside every soul to seek the divine), many people live for a union with GOD. Our non-phenomenal selves are our true selves, which differs from our phenomenal selves (outer selves, generally referred to as our true selves). We generally refer to our outer phenomenal selves as the “true self,” but the fact is that many people are drawn to the infinite because of their inner spiritual egos and because of the mystical experiences of the past. Many souls yearn for a personal relationship with the divine so that they can find peace and harmony inside of themselves. The good and bad are always at constant battle.

The universal self is the small part in mankind that seeks peace between everyone who lives on this earth. The desire to communicate with all people in the world on an equal and understanding level is something that most of our non-phenomenal selves live for. This is why the ‘universalism of God’ is so important. This is simply a belief that God is universal, and that God can appear anywhere in the world at any time. People who are involved in any of the traditional religions must understand the importance for them to respect all religions, even if they disagree.

While mysticism plays an important, and often essential, role in all the world's religions, mysticism itself is not a religion. There are Christian mystics, Jewish mystics, Muslim mystics, Buddhist mystics, Hindu mystics, Protestant mystics, and Catholic mystics. While mysticism is not a religion, it is practiced devotedly in different religions of the world. Mysticism is within most religious beliefs, meditations, and mystical experiences.

The mystical realm of religion is truly mysterious to humankind, which is what makes the study of mysticism a continuous one. Any worthwhile study of mysticism must be a study of comparative religion, and so a few will be discussed. Mysticism is a manifestation of something that could be considered the root of all religion, but that is not a universal consideration. When someone studies the mystical expressions of different religions, they need to look at the basic similarities of vision. This is a phenomenon calling for explanation if any truly objective assessment of the significance of mystical experience is to be made.

The world of religion has several understandings or traditions that are based on beliefs, cultures, and knowledge. This research will show the

unrevealed universalism of GOD through the comparisons of several religions. This paper seeks to teach that religion is universal and that we can learn from one another, instead of quarreling about who knows the truth.

We shall begin from a place in time that is thought to be the starting point of the teachings of God. Although some may dispute this, Hinduism is the oldest of all religions. Hinduism dates back almost 3,000 years ago, which clearly makes it far older than any other traditional or nontraditional religion in the world today. More than any other religious system, Hinduism is naturally predisposed to mystical interpretation. The highest ideal of Hindu religious practice, ascetic moksha ("release") has received global attention.

As one progresses, they may find they have been sensing the nearness, and seeking the direct experiences of mystical knowledge throughout their lives. They may realize they have often thought spiritual power was nearby, but didn't know how to connect with it. These yearnings are the possibilities and goals of the mystic. Through mysticism, many can realize the relationship between their individual life and the infinite consciousness that gives and sustains all life.

### **What is Mysticism?**

“Mysticism, in its pure form is the science of the Ultimate, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else,” according to Frederick Happold. ([Mysticism](#), 12)

Mysticism can be identified as the study of life by which a person becomes enabled to realize the spiritual realities and profound principles of life. Mysticism has also been defined as the doctrine of an immediate spiritual intuition of truth believed to transcend ordinary understanding, or of a direct, intimate union of the soul with God through contemplation and love (Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary, M-569). Another way to portray it is as the possibility of union with the Divine nature by means of ecstatic contemplation, reliance on spiritual intuition or exalted feeling as the means of acquiring knowledge of mysteries inaccessible to intellectual apprehension.

In order to give a clear description of mysticism, this study will compare it to magic. These methods can be referred to as “the way of magic” and “the way of mysticism, according to Ledgerwood at [Mysticism.com](#) (4) In their extreme forms, these methods are sharply contrasted. Their frontiers are far from being clearly defined. Much of which is really magic is loosely and popularly described as mysticism. They represent opposite poles of the same thing: the transcendental consciousness of humanity. Between them lie the great religions, which

might be described as representing the ordinarily habitable regions of that consciousness. Therefore, at one end of the scale, pure mysticism shades off into religion, and from some points of view seems to grow out of it. No deeply religious person is without a touch of mysticism, and the mystic cannot be other than religious. The fundamental difference between the two is this: magic wants to get, and mysticism wants to give. Both magic and mysticism in their full development claim that they give their initiates powers unknown to man. (Jones, 31)

Philosophers have created many arguments trying to share their consciousness of the term with others. Medieval theologians described what they termed "mystical theology" as "experimental wisdom," or as "a stretching out of the soul in to God through unifying love." (Huegel 91) These definitions all approach mysticism from the theological standpoint. Others have approached it from the psychological angle. For instance Von Huegel, defines mysticism as "the filling of the consciousness by a content (feeling, thought, desire) by an involuntary emergence of the same from the unconscious."(23) Some writers such as Underhill, and Happold emphasize the noetic (states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect) or intellectual quality of mystical experience. Evelyn Underhill defines mysticism as the art of union with reality, or God. She states "Mysticism is the art of union with reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in a greater or lesser degree: or who aims at and believes in such attainment."(Mysticism 59)

Mysticism, in the centuries immediately preceding the birth of Christ, came to mean a particular sort of approach to the whole problem of reality. According to Happold, mysticism has its fount in what is the raw material of all religion, but it is also the inspiration of much philosophy, poetry, art, and music. (Happold 11) It is the consciousness of beyond, of something, which, though it is interwoven with it, is not of the external world of material phenomena, of an unseen over and above the seen. In the developed mystic, this consciousness is present in an intense and highly specialized form.

The goal of mysticism is union with the divine or sacred. The path to that union is usually developed by following four stages: purgation (of bodily desires), purification (of the will), illumination (of the mind), and unification (of one's will or being with the divine). If "the object of man's existence is to be a Man, that is, to re-establish the harmony which originally belonged between him and the divine state before the separation took place which disturbed the equilibrium" (The Life and Doctrine of Paracelsus), mysticism will always be a part of the way of

return to the source of being, a way of counteracting the experience of alienation. Mysticism has always held—and parapsychology also seems to suggest—that the discovery of a nonphysical element in man's personality is of utmost significance in his quest for equilibrium in a world of apparent chaos. (Ferguson 84)

Mysticism may be defined as the belief in a third kind of knowledge, the other two being sense knowledge and knowledge by inference. Adolf Lasson has written, “The essence of Mysticism is the assertion of an intuition which transcends the temporal categories of the understanding. Rationalism cannot conduct us to the essence of things; we therefore need intellectual vision.” (Ferguson 63)

According to the British scholar William Ralph Inge in Personal Idealism and Mysticism, mysticism arises when man tries to bring the urge toward a communion with God, a "Being conceived as the supreme and ultimate reality.” (57) A 19th-century scholar, Otto Pflieger, indicated that religious mysticism is "the immediate feeling of unity of the self with God; it is nothing, therefore, but the fundamental feeling of religion, the religious life at its very heart and center." (Phil. Of Religion, 89) Don Cupit said mysticism is “the consciousness that everything that we experience is an element, and only an element, in fact, i.e. that in being what it is, it is symbolic of something else.” (Mysticism After Modernity 98)

Definitions of mysticism include a bewildering variety, ranging from the biological through the psychological to the theological. The origin of the word and certain of its features strongly suggest the possibility that mysticism is the science of a hidden life. But there is also a growing belief that "the people of the hidden" should not remain hidden too long and should come out in the open, befitting an era of "open development" and "open realization." Some 20th-century scientists, among them physicists, biologists, and paleontologists, have shown a marked mystical bias. A biologist, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, has confessed to "peak experiences" of a great unity and liberation from ego boundary: "In moments of scientific discovery I have an intuitive insight into a grand design." (Ferguson 78) He finds no necessary opposition between the rational way of thinking and intuitive experience culminating in what the mystics have tried to express. Both have their place and may coexist. Earlier there had been a sharp dichotomy between scientific and mystical knowledge. The logic of levels may never be amenable to analysis or intellectual understanding, but that is not to deny the role of reason.

God-mysticism, Soul-mysticism, and Nature-mysticism are three aspects this divinely motivated subject. These aspects are not mutually exclusive; they may and often do, intermix. Each one has some relation to at least one traditional religion. God-mysticism is basically that of the spirit returning to its infinite base, which is 'The Ultimate Divine.' God-mysticism is common of most forms of Eastern mysticism, but more characteristic of the West. This aspect of mysticism is found in religions such as: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism. All of these religions believe in 'GOD'-an Ultimate Divine entity. Although the Eastern and Western belief differs in ways, they still share one commonality, which is the faith in 'the infinite one.' Soul mysticism deals with the idea that the soul strives to isolate itself from everything which is other than itself. In soul mysticism, the existence of 'God' is absent. This idea is not alien to Buddhism. Nature-mysticism is the realization or belief of God or Soul existing in nature. These aspects of mysticism encompass God-mysticism because the life of nature is considered Godly and has its interaction with the Divine. (Happold 43-45)

To gain even an approximate notion of mysticism, a distinction must first be drawn between what can and cannot be perceived by our senses. A number of elements must be eliminated, particularly all that results from sense perception, and all that may be deduced from such perception by dialectics in the widest sense of the term. From external perceptions, feelings arise which can't logically be deduced from such perceptions, but can arise only through the cooperation of the peculiar spiritual organism of man. Such feelings may be termed mystical. Mysticism has its real beginning, therefore, when the mystical element becomes ascendant over man in connection with the world that surrounds him, and when his soul seeks to be in harmony with the universe that encompasses it, or, more accurately, with The Supreme, however this Supreme is to be conceived. It is true that there is an element of human cooperation and will, but since the will is unable of itself to produce the inner experience which it desires, it needs to be met by a divine grace which both purifies and illumines the soul, thus comes into relation with religion.

### **What is a Mystical Experience?**

What exactly are the qualities that entitle any state to be called mystical? Was Muhammad's night journey a mystical experience? Was the resurrection of Jesus Christ a mystical experience? Was the mysterious attainment of a man named Ramakrishna a mystical experience? Was the transformation from Guatama into Buddha a mystical experience? These questions have definite answers although the meanings may not be universal. We must decide for ourselves whether these incidents were in fact mystical and we should also individually establish our own belief in a mystical experience.

Beginning with the "simplest" sort of mystical experience, note the strong sense of significance and knowledge associated with the experience, its "noetic" quality. (Illuminations and revelations full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for aftertime) (Brody 227)

"Ineffable" is another characteristic, which marks an experience as mystical; the experience defies expression. Ineffability-the subject of it immediately says that it defies expression that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect. (Brody 227)

In the Encyclopedia of Mysticism, Ferguson says:

Although mystics have direct experiences with God, they can rarely be described in words, and even though he may not be able to logically explain what happened, to the mystic his experience is absolutely valid and has great certainty. He has been 'there,' he has 'seen,' he 'knows.' Most mystics will tell you that man is not a creature set over against God. He participates in the Superessential life-a state, which is more than being (essence), the super unity with the Godhead, the use of man's 'fathomless ground, which allows the potential relationship with superessential reality. (Ferguson 77)

Due to its subjective nature, the experience is much like a state of feeling. However, there are other qualities usually associated with the experience. Some mystics explain the experience as being generally transient (fading quickly). It is hard to recall the quality of the experience in memory; it remains just out of reach, but some memory content always remains. Happold said, "When having a mystical experience, however,

individuals do not seem to actively process the information.” Instead, it is a passive experience. Even though many people actively study and/or practice techniques to produce mystical states of consciousness, once occurring, the experience seems to happen without their own will. (Mysticism, 191)

Mysticism is very intriguing because it attempts to define the inexplicable. It is impossible for a finite man to completely grasp the understanding of the infinite- (no beginning and no end. It is unreachable, unattainable, it is life and death, and it is what mankind yearns for). The experience mystics go through creates a center of life for them. They truly feel that life and all things in the world are universally connected through one huge link, and that link is the “Ultimate Divine.” After a mystic participates in his blissful experience, he utilizes that to maintain his faith and strength. Today people are forced to choose one of so-called truths. How or why should a person be forced to choose “the truth” within all truths? Some people believe that there can only be one truth or path that will ultimately lead to the Divine, but mystics don’t. They believe they are all interconnected through God, and that they have many paths. Mystics must acknowledge him/her and try to gain knowledge and the realization of a mystically healing experience with the “infinite.”

What is generally known as mysticism is often said to have two strands, which are traditionally distinguished as apophatic and kataphatic mysticism, oriented respectively towards emptying or the imagistically filling. These two are generally described in terms that are with or without sensory language. (Elwood 34)

Kataphatic or imagistic mysticism involves hallucinations, visions, auditions or even a sensory-like smell or taste; it thus involves activity and is ergotropic. Apophatic mystical experiences are devoid of such sensory-like content, and are thus trophotropic. When they use non-sensory, non-imagistic language, authors like Eckhart, Dogen, al-Hallaj, Bernadette Roberts and Shankara are all thus apophatic mystics. Because visions and other ergotropic experiences are not the simple experiences of consciousness that we require, I will focus my attentions exclusively on the quieter apophatic forms. (Ellwood, 89)

The psychologist Roland Fischer has distinguished a different pairing as trophotropic and ergotropic, experiences that phenomenologically involve inactivity or activity.

A good question that remains unanswered is whether or not kataphatic or apophatic mystical experiences have been the reason that



finite man has proclaimed religion. Maybe the two types of mystical happenings have a connection. If a person has a kataphatic incidence, he or she could possibly be experiencing apophatic moments within that kataphatic occurrence.

Muhammad, the man responsible for starting “Islam,” had a mystical experience, which could be described as trophotropic or ergotropic. One night Muhammad was lying still in his bed and all of a sudden he was traveling through the heavens. He traveled through the seven heavens, where he saw many prophets from the past. He saw Abraham, Jesus, Moses, and many others. He was amazed by the realness that presumably was before him. He talked to the prophets as if they were just like himself: human. Muhammad was a very godly man and he knew that this experience, even if this was only a vision, was going to be a significant changing point in his life. He traveled far into the seven heavens and even beyond them. As he surpassed the seventh heaven, he came to point where he could not go any further. Muhammad looked into the vastly lighted vicinity and couldn’t clearly see anything. He definitely saw something or someone that he could not explain. The entity was not seeable, or explainable, yet he knew someone or something was present. He could feel the presence of The Divine, and was overwhelmed with an uncontrollable pleasure. He knew this entity was, in fact, “GOD.” (Esposito 144)

Mystical experiences may involve many forms of human consciousness. Bernard McGinn suggests, in The Foundations of Mysticism, that our minds usually are an enormously complex stew of thoughts, feelings, sensations, wants, snatches of song, pains, drives, daydreams and, of course, consciousness itself, more or less aware of it all. To understand consciousness in itself, the obvious thing would be to clear away as much of this internal detritus and noise as possible. (54) It turns out that mystics seem to be doing precisely that.

The technique that most mystics use is some form of meditation or contemplation. During meditation, one begins to slow down the thinking process, and has fewer or less intense thoughts. One’s thoughts become as if more distant, vague, or less preoccupying; one stops paying as much attention to bodily sensations; one has fewer or less intense fantasies and daydreams. When the intensity or compelling quality of outward perception and inward thoughts is reduced, one may come to a time of greater stillness. Ultimately, one may become utterly silent inside, as though in a gap between thoughts, where one becomes completely unperceptive, and thought-free. One neither thinks nor perceives any mental or sensory content. Yet, despite this suspension of content, one emerges from such events confident that one had remained awake inside, fully conscious. (Underhill, 121)

This experience is called the pure consciousness event or (PCE), has been identified in virtually every tradition. Though PCEs typically happen to any single individual only occasionally, they are quite regular for some practitioners. The pure consciousness event may be defined as a wakeful but content less (non-intentional) consciousness.

Mystical experience, which is centered in a seeking for unity, admits of wide variations but falls into recognizable types: mild and extreme, extrovert and introvert, and theistic and nontheistic. Another well-known typology--corresponding to the faculties of thinking, willing, and feeling--employs the Indian formula, the respective ways of knowledge (jñana), works (karma), and devotion (bhakti). Claims have been made on behalf of each, though mature mystics have tried to reach its place and also to arrive at a synthesis, as in the Bhagavadgita (Hindu sacred scripture). Depending on the powers of discrimination, the intellectual or the contemplative type tries to reach the Highest, the One, or the Godhead behind God. In its approach toward the supreme identity it tends to be chary of multiplicity, to deny the world that it may find reality. Plotinus was "ashamed of being in the body." In the 17th century, Spinoza's nondenominational concept of intellectual love of God revealed a sense of aloofness or isolation reminiscent of the ancient Hindus. (Pfleiderer, 66)

### **Who is a Mystic?**

A mystic is one who claims to attain, or believes in the possibility of attaining insight into mystical realms beyond the knowledge of mankind by reaching the highest level of spiritual ecstasy. A mystic is a person who realizes, and is fortunate to possibly maintain a conscious connection with the infinite spirit. (Enc. of Mysticism 138)

While mysticism is the science of union with the Absolute, the mystic is the person who attains this union, not the person who talks about it. Not to know about, but to be, is the mark of the real mystic. But we can't call everyone who has these partial intuitions of reality a mystic, anymore than we can call everyone who learned to play the guitar a musician. (Mysticism 12) A person initiated into esoteric (confident or secret) mysteries is also believed to be a mystic. The mystic is one who professes to undergo mystical experiences in which he or she intuitively comprehends truth beyond ordinary human understanding. (Underhill 147)

According to Robert Ellwood, a Mystic is a person who has, in some way, had an experience that is mysterious, and spiritually motivated. He also explains, "A mystic is a believer in mysticism; specifically, one who professes to undergo mystical experiences in which he intuitively comprehends truth beyond human understanding." (Myst. in Religion. 58)

One who, whether Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, or Muslim, seeks by contemplation and self-surrender to obtain union with, or absorption into, the deity, or who believes in the possibility of the spiritual apprehension of truths that are inaccessible to the 'normal' understanding is also considered to be a mystic. (Oxford Dictionary)

Some of the great mystics and schools of mysticism have reduced worship back to thinking, contemplation, and reflection, and have represented the end of worship as a personal knowledge of God. After all the only art of the mystic is an art of knowing, difficult perhaps, but not different in character from thought. (Hocking 351)

The founders of religion may have been incipient or advanced mystics, but the inner compulsions of their experience have proved less amenable to dogmas, creeds, and institutional restrictions, which are bound to be outward and majority oriented. There are mystics within the majority of traditional religions. There are religions of authority and the religions of the spirit. Thus, there is a paradox: if the mystic minority is distrusted or maltreated, religious life loses its sap; on the other hand, these "peculiar people" do not easily fit into society. Though no deeply religious person can be without a touch of mysticism, and no mystic can be, in the deepest sense, other than religious, the dialogue between mystics and conventional religionists has been far from happy. From both sides there is a constant need for restatement and reevaluation, a greater tolerance and a union of free men's worship. Though it validates religion, mysticism also tends to escape the fetters of organized religion. (Ferguson 194)

These are all significant ways of describing what or who a mystic is. The realness of a mystic is the devotion a person has in seeking to have that union with God, and the true mystic is always looking for a mystical experience, even if only for a few seconds, those few seconds could worth more than anything that a mystic has acquired in his/her entire life.

For many years, Christian followers have preached about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is a very well known concept outside of the Christian community, as well. Jesus carried his cross to his place of execution. He was nailed to the cross, his garments were divided, and an inscription was placed over his head. After the burial of Jesus, the holy women returned and prepared spices and ointments. The next day, the chief priests and Pharisees made the sepulchre secure with guards, sealing the stone. When the Sabbath was passed, the holy women brought sweet spices so that they might anoint Jesus. But Jesus rose early the first day of the

week. There was a great earthquake, and an angel descended from heaven and rolled back the stone. The guards were struck with terror, and became as dead men. On arriving at the sepulcher, the holy women found the grave empty. Mary Magdalen ran to tell the Apostles, Peter and John. An angel told the other women that the Lord had arisen from the dead. Peter and John ran to the sepulcher, and found everything as Mary Magdalen had reported. Mary Magdalen too returned, and, while she wept at the sepulcher the arisen Savior appeared before her and spoke with her. On the same day, Jesus appeared to the other holy women, to Peter, to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, and to all the apostles except for Thomas. A week later He appeared to all the apostles, Thomas included; later still He appeared in Galilee near the Lake of Genesareth to seven disciples, on a mountain in Galilee to a multitude of disciples, to James, and finally to His disciples on the Mount Olivet whence He ascended into heaven. But these apparitions do not exhaust the record of the Gospels, according to which Jesus showed Himself alive after His passing by many proofs, for forty days appearing to the disciples and speaking of the kingdom of God. (Knight 2)

Orthodox Christians believe in the end of days, which is, so-called, when Jesus will return to the earth for his people. This understanding of the orthodox Christians is based on the mystical birth, life, and after-life of Jesus Christ, which makes clear that their faith is based on these mystical happenings. Other religions also have mysticism embedded within them.

Dr. Basak, a world-renowned biochemist and life-long Hindu, talked about Saints within Hinduism. One saint in particular whom he talked about was a very God-like man named Sri Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna lived in India between 1836 and 1886. (Gospels of Ramakrishna) As a Hindu, he devoted himself to worshipping the goddess, Kali. None-the-less he believed that Kali was only one of the many ways in which God revealed Himself or Herself to mankind. He also felt that all religions had the capacity to lead sincere devotees to God. Some Hindus regard Ramakrishna as a self-realized saint, while others regard him as one of God's incarnations. According to Mahatma Gandhi, "The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face." (Sharma 124)

When Ramakrishna was alive, he touched many lives with his divine life. "His way of living, his devotion to God, and his mystical experiences make him one of the most known and respected Hindu saints all over the world," said Basak. Many years ago there was a Guru who lived in West India. He needed to find three disciples whom he could teach before he could reach what Hindus call "Samadhi" (it is when the heart stops and you are left in suspended animation). The Guru had been trying to reach this level for forty-two years. He traveled, by foot, thousands of

miles to find his disciples. He found and taught two, but he was having difficulty finding the third. One day he met Ramakrishna, and they began to talk. Ramakrishna told the Guru that he knew he would be coming because his mother forewarned him. The Guru knew Ramakrishna was definitely the person he had been looking for. The Guru asked him to take him to meet his mother. Ramakrishna did just that, but she wasn't what the Guru had expected; she was a huge tree. The Guru asked, "Is that your mother?" And Ramakrishna replied "yes." The Guru didn't quite understand, but he proceeded anyway.

He taught Ramakrishna for three days. On the third day, Ramakrishna fell unconscious. He was not breathing, nor was his heart beating. He had achieved Samadhi in three days. The Guru didn't understand how this could be possible, but he still nursed Ramakrishna back to consciousness by giving him water and small portions of food. Ramakrishna stayed in this state for one and a half days. When he awoke, the Guru told him that he could no longer be his teacher, for his student had now surpassed him. The Guru said, "Ramakrishna, you have reached in three days, what I have been trying to attain for forty-two years." (Basak)

Mysticism plays a significant part in Buddhism. A man by the name of Gautama felt that life had more to offer than worldly pleasures. He was born in 563 B.C. near the border of India. His childhood was very glamorous. He wore clothes of silk. He possessed elephants that wore ornaments. He had never seen any ugly people because his father would not allow ugliness into the house. Even when the driver took Gautama for rides, servants would walk ahead and clear the road of anybody that was ugly, decrepit, diseased, or dead.

So Gautama didn't see anything like that for almost all of his childhood, until one day when they were traveling the same path and came upon a man that was decrepit, broken-toothed, gray-haired, crooked and bent of body, and trembling. Gautama didn't know what to do. He ordered his driver to stop! The servants had no idea how this man had gotten there because they had already checked the road thoroughly. The legend has it that the old man was incarnated by Gods to give him the needed lesson. The next day he encountered a man racked with disease, and on the third day a man lying dead on the side of the road. On the fourth day, he met a monk with a shaven head and an ochre robe. It was that day that he learned of the life of withdrawal from the world.

Once he experienced the inevitability of pain and death, world pleasure lost its charm. When he was twenty-nine year of age, he set out to live in the wilderness in order to rejoice in solitude. He went through several phases during his quest. He learned a great deal about the Hindu philosophy. Gautama devoted his final phase to rigorous thought and mystic concentration. One evening, near Gaya, India, he sensed that

awakening was near, so he sat down near the Bo tree (short for bodhi or enlightenment).

He sat in meditation while evil ones tried to tempt him with women. They tried to scare him with dangerous hurricanes and terrible thunderstorms, but he did not move. He sat there and soon the awakening had arrived. He had been transformed into Buddha. The event was of cosmic import. (Smith 86)

### **Conclusion**

In reviewing the different philosophical understandings of religions in both the East and West, one point clearly emerges. That is, however great the variety, there is almost a universal agreement that whatever is out there and/or within us is not restricted to the facts and features of the world as they are given to or received by our senses.

Mysticism has been defined in this project. It has been looked at through mystical experiences, and who the mystic is. But why is all of this information important? The realness of life is the fact that we are able to be consciously aware of what is going on around us. The life we live is full of chaos. It is nice to know that there are some people who are devoted to building a union with the Absolute. Many are yearning for the Absolute. In this study, we have learned of the lives of religious men who sought out enlightenment, who were born as the incarnation of God, and men who attained The "Superessential life." All of this has happened over a long period of time, in different regions of the world, and to people that are from a number of cultures. These significant moments in time are essential to the foundation of several religions. They have given us all something or someone to look back on and possibly be able to relate to.

Why have all of these mystical occurrences taken place? Are these stories really true? Perhaps they are just fictional stories created by humans to give us something to believe in. Is it God being generous enough to allow us to devote our lives to the religion that best befit us? What is it that we yearn for? Is it money? Is it cars? Is it a fancy house? Is it love? Is it fame? Is it God?

The understanding you achieve depends on where you are from and your individual beliefs. It may depend on your morals and values, and on whether or not you believe in the mystical tradition upon which the religions stand. These mystical happenings are truly amazing in what they have given. How are religious men or women supposed to live? Is there only one path to God?

"Hindus believe there are many different paths to God," Basak stated, "Therefore, the path that they have chosen isn't 'the way,' it is simply a way." This concept is a foreign one to some westerners.

“Hinduism was once defined by Ghandi as search after truth through non-violent means. It may be said that this is no definition of Hinduism, since the statement would be true of every religion. But this is exactly what Hinduism claims, viz., that the truth of every religion is the same.” (Sharma 20) Followers of other monotheistic religions await a phenomenon in order to determine “The Truth”, such as Christians awaiting the resurrection of Jesus. To them, the truth is that there is only one truth. How can a person who claims a specific religion feel that every religion, other than his or her own, is false? Basak mentioned a quote of Ramakrishna: “there are as many paths to the summit as there are great practitioners or saints.” Basak went on to say, “If we are all moving in the same general direction with the same destination in mind, we will all eventually reach that place or state which we are trying to achieve.”

“It also depends on how you see, and where you see it from,” said Basak. “How can a blind person see a sunset without having the capability and privilege of sight? That person can’t! In fact, it is even impossible for the blind person to fully understand what a sunset looks like, even if a person with good sight were to explain it to them what it is.”

Another example could be of two men out in the wild, with one man at the top of a mountain, and the other at the bottom. Will these two men have the same view of this place? No. The man at the top of the mountain will have a completely different outlook on this area than the man who only resided at the bottom. They are at the same place with two different views. The only way for the man at the bottom of the mountain to understand the other guy’s interpretation is for him to go to the top of the mountain and visa versa.

God is mystical; and the history of mystical occurrence has proven that God does exist. The mystical experiences that Jesus, Muhammad, Ramakrishna, and Buddha had have played a huge influence on the religion they associate themselves with. We have discussed the fact that mysticism is the root of all religion. The mystical experience that our spiritual leaders of the past have attained has benefited people all over the world. This project displays the effect mysticism has had on our traditional religions. So whether one prays to Jesus, to Allah, meditates, and/or chants, know that God is universal.

Ramakrishna said it best.

Instead of wasting time disputing which religion was the one true religion, people could devote themselves to realizing Truth. God made different religions to suit different aspirations, times, and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of

the paths with whole-hearted devotion. One may eat a cake with icing either straight or sidewise. It will taste sweet either way. (Gospel Of Ramakrishna 99)



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