

Mysticism
and the Bahá'í Faith

Definition of Mysticism

- Stipulative definition
- Narrow definition
- Broad definition

Text and Context

- Bahá'u'lláh's withdrawal to the mountains of Kurdistan
- Bahá'u'lláh's mystical compositions
- Continuation and discontinuation of mystical narrative

This treatise was revealed in the language of the people, in the days prior to Our Declaration. The occasion for its revelation was the receipt of a letter addressed to the Most Holy Court in 'Iráq from a man of Sunní persuasion, who was both a scholar and a mystic. This treatise was therefore revealed, in accordance with divine wisdom, in the manner that was current amongst the people. However, in this day, every soul who hath fixed his gaze upon the Supreme Horizon, and hath recognized the one true God, hath verily attained unto every one of the seven valleys or seven stations mentioned therein. (*The Call of the Divine Beloved*, p. x)

Practices

- ✗ Seclusion, monasticism, asceticism
- ✓ Engaging in profession, fruitful life, reading the verses with joy, worship and service
- ✓ Essential requisites for spiritual growth
 - ✓ Obligatory Prayers
 - ✓ Reading Sacred Scriptures
 - ✓ Meditation on the Teachings
 - ✓ Bringing our behaviour into accord with standards of the Teachings
 - ✓ Teaching the Cause
 - ✓ Selfless service

Practices: Seclusion, Monasticism, Asceticism

Say: O concourse of monks! Seclude not yourselves in your churches and cloisters. Come ye out of them by My leave, and busy, then, yourselves with what will profit you and others. Thus commandeth you He Who is the Lord of the Day of Reckoning. Seclude yourselves in the stronghold of My love. This, truly, is the seclusion that befitteth you, could ye but know it. He that secludeth himself in his house is indeed as one dead. It behoveth man to show forth that which will benefit mankind. (Tablet to Napoleon III)

Doctrines and Discourses

- View of God
- View of the Manifestation
- View of the laws
 - ✗ Religious laws intended for uninitiated masses
 - ✓ Highest regard for divine laws

“... stray not a hair’s breadth from the Law, for this is indeed the secret of the Path and the fruit of the Tree of Truth ...” (The Seven Valleys)

“... in all these stages he must cling to the robe of obedience to all that hath been enjoined, and hold fast to the cord of shunning all that is forbidden, that he may partake of the cup of the Law and be informed of the mysteries of Truth ...” (The Seven Valleys)

Doctrines and Discourses: View of God

Other Mystic Traditions	The Bahá'í Faith
Union with God	God is transcendent, inaccessible, and sanctified above all creation
apprehend God directly and experience His presence	God is inaccessible, unknowable, incomprehensible, and indescribable

God is above ascent and descent, habitation and incarnation, separation and union, nearness and remoteness, relationship and association, direction and intimation, time and space, and names and attributes

“All that the sages and mystics have said or written have never exceeded, nor can they ever hope to exceed, the limitations to which man’s finite mind hath been strictly subjected. To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts.” (*Gleanings*, no. 148)

Bahá'u'lláh Redefines the Purpose of Mysticism

“By self-surrender and perpetual union with God is meant that men should merge their will wholly in the Will of God, and regard their desires as utter nothingness beside His Purpose. Whatsoever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfill. They should in no wise allow their fancy to obscure their judgment, neither should they regard their own imaginings as the voice of the Eternal.” (*Gleanings* no. 160.2)

- The mystic path is to the Manifestation of God.
- The object of the mystic quest is the recognition of the Manifestation of God for every age and union with His will and teachings.

“... the references that have been made to the degrees of mystic knowledge pertain to the knowledge of the effulgences of that Sun of Truth as it becometh reflected in various mirrors ...” (*The Seven Valleys*)

Mysticism and Revelation

- An emanational procession
- Divine presence

“In all the Divine Books the promise of the Divine Presence hath been explicitly recorded. By this Presence is meant the Presence of Him Who is the Dayspring of the signs, and the Dawning-Place of the clear tokens, and the Manifestation of the Excellent Names, and the Source of the attributes, of the true God, exalted be His glory. God in His Essence and in His own Self hath ever been unseen, inaccessible, and unknowable. By Presence, therefore, is meant the Presence of the One Who is His Vicegerent amongst men.” (*Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 118-119)

Mysticism and Epistemology

- The mystic journey and physical practices
- Sources of knowledge and methods of generating knowledge
- Spiritual perception as mystical impression

Mystical Experiences

- Constructing a mystical experience
- Mystical states that are acceptable before God
- The state of prayer, a “state of spiritual communion”

Institutions

- ▮ Structures of mystic orders
 - ▮ Hierarchical
 - ▮ Esoteric knowledge kept within elite inner circle
- ▮ Evolution of the human race
- ▮ Independent investigation of truth
- ▮ Consultation
- ▮ Study and meditation

Conclusion

- ✚ Traditional loci of mysticism: anti-worldliness, seclusion, monasticism, asceticism, rituals, union with God, apprehension of God, God's presence in this world, priesthood, hierarchy, and elitism
- ✚ Mysticism as a medium for the delivery of the Revelation
- ✚ Object of the mystic quest:
 - ✚ Spiritual growth
 - ✚ Acquisition of divine qualities and attributes, as well as spiritual virtues and powers
 - ✚ Spiritual journey of the soul towards the unveiling of truth
- ✚ “Fundamentally mystic in character”