



[Search / Site Map](#)

[Home](#)

[Active Imagination & Hypnagogia](#)

[Mystical Experiences](#)

[Body, Soul, & Spirit Awareness](#)

[Bookstore](#)

[Classes & Lectures](#)

[Related Links, Magazines, etc.](#)

[Join Mailing List](#)

[About This Site](#)

[Contact](#)

## Mystical Experience Registry



### Mysticism Defined by W.T. Stace

Walter Terence Stace is the most frequently quoted expert when defining mysticism. An English-born philosopher, teaching at Princeton (1932–55) Stace wrote on mysticism after his retirement in 1955. His most famous work on this subject, Mysticism and Philosophy (1960), was book of scholarship with less emphasis on the mystical experience than one might assume from the title. Fortunately, in the same year, Stace published a book for general audiences, The Teachings of the Mystics. This publication included Stace's thoughts on mystical experience, a few examples of that experience, and a wide ranging collection of writings on mystical philosophy gathered from the world's literature.

Below are highlights from his introductory chapter in The Teachings of the Mystics. This introduction clearly shows that Stace was a "purist" in that he did not honor beginning or intermediate states people experience along the path to full mystical experience. Visions, voices, insights, or powerful dreams are not mystical experience as he defines it. Only a "nonsensuous and nonintellectual" union fits his definition.

#### A Mystic is a Mystic

"By the word "mystic" I shall always mean a person who himself has had mystical experience. Often the word is used in a much wider and looser way. Anyone who is sympathetic to mysticism is apt to be labeled a mystic. But I shall use the word always in a stricter sense. However sympathetic toward mysticism a man may be, however deeply interested, involved, enthusiastic, or learned in the subject, he will not be called a mystic unless he has, or has had, mystical experience. (p.9)"

#### Some things which mysticism is not

"The word mysticism" is popularly used in a variety of loose and inaccurate ways. Sometimes anything is called "mystical" which is misty, foggy, vague, or sloppy. It is absurd that "mysticism" should be associated with what is

#### Related Materials

[Home - Mystical Experience Registry](#)

[What is mysticism?](#)

[Types of Mystical Experience](#)

[Read the experience of others](#)

[Register an experience](#)

[Related Links, Magazines, etc.](#)

[Bookstore](#)

"misty" because of the similar sound of the words. And there is nothing misty, foggy, vague, or sloppy about mysticism.

A second absurd association is to suppose that mysticism is sort of mystery-mongering. There is, of course, an etymological connection between "mysticism" and "mystery." But mysticism is not any sort of hocus-pocus such as we commonly associate with claims to be the elucidation of sensational mysteries. Mysticism is not the same as what is commonly called the "occult"...Nor does it include what are commonly called parapsychological phenomena such as telepathy, telekinesis, clairvoyance, precognition. These are not mystical phenomena. It is perhaps true that mystics may sometimes claim to possess such special powers, but even when they do so they are well aware that such powers are not part of, and are to be clearly distinguished from, their mystical experience. (pp.10-11)

Finally, it is most important to realize that visions and voices are not mystical phenomena, though here again it seems to be the case that the sort of persons who are mystics may often be the sort of persons who see visions and hear voices...And there are, one must add, good reasons for this. What mystics say is that a genuine mystical experience is nonsensuous. It is formless, shapeless, colorless, odorless, soundless. But a vision is a piece of visual imagery having color and shape. A voice is an auditory image. Visions and voices are sensuous experiences. (pp. 10-12)"

### **The Central Characteristic**

"The most important, the central characteristic in which all fully developed mystical experiences agree, and which in the last analysis is definitive of them and serves to mark them off from other kinds of experiences, is that they involve the apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate. In other words, it entirely transcends our sensory-intellectual consciousness. It should be carefully noted that only fully developed mystical experiences are necessarily apprehensive of the One. Many experiences have been recorded which lack this central feature but yet possess other mystical characteristics. These are borderline cases, which may be said to shade off from the central core of cases. They have to the central core the relation which some philosophers like to call "family resemblance. (pp.14-15)"

### **Two Types of Mystical Experience**

"One may be called extrovertive mystical experience, the other introvertive mystical experience. Both are apprehensions of the One, but they reach it in different ways. The extrovertive way looks outward and through the physical senses into the external world and finds the One there. The introvertive way turns inward, introspectively, and finds the One at the bottom of the self, at the bottom of human personality. The latter far outweighs the former in importance both in the history of mysticism and in the history of human thought generally. The introvertive way is the major strand in the history of mysticism, the extrovertive way a minor strand.

The extrovertive mystic with his physical senses continues to perceive the same world of trees and hills and tables and chairs as the rest of us. But he sees these objects transfigured in such manner that the Unity shines through them. Because it includes ordinary sense perceptions, it only partially realizes the description...(that is, an experience of complete unity)...It is suggested that the extrovertive type of experience is a kind of halfway house to the introvertive. For the introvertive experience is wholly nonsensuous and nonintellectual. But the extrovertive experience is sensory-intellectual in so far as it still perceives physical objects but is nonsensuous and nonintellectual in so far as it perceives them as "all one."

Introvertive mysticism..."Now it happens to be the case that this total suppression of the whole empirical content of consciousness is precisely what the introvertive mystic claims to achieve. And he claims that what happens is not that all consciousness disappears but that only the ordinary sensory-intellectual consciousness disappears and is replaced by an entirely new kind of consciousness, the mystical consciousness." (pp. 15-18)

"Of the introvertive mystical consciousness the Mandukya (Upanishad) says that it is "beyond the senses, beyond the understanding, beyond all expression...It is the pure unitary consciousness, wherein awareness of the world and of multiplicity is completely obliterated. It is ineffable peace. It is the Supreme Good. It is One without a second. It is the Self."..."Not only in Christianity and Hinduism but everywhere else we find that the essence of this experience is that it is an undifferentiated unity, though each culture and each religion interprets this undifferentiated unity in terms of its own creeds and dogmas." (p.20-21)

Stace, Walter T. The Teachings of the Mystics. (New York: The New American Library, 1960).