



Institute for the Awakened Mind

The Mysticism of Action

By C. Maxwell Cade

The Awakening of Kundalini * Pitfalls and Promises * Four Degrees of the Mystic Life * The Mysticism of Action * The Bhagavad Gita and the Sermon on the Mount * The Lesser Mystic Way * The Way of Contemplation and The Way of Action

The practice of meditation is of incomparable value in keeping the body free from stress and strain, and the mind clear of confusion and muddle.

But there is one risk. Unless the study is carried out under the supervision of a master who has himself experienced all the hazards, one may undergo – either spontaneously or as a result of meditation itself – the Awakening of Kundalini.

The Awakening of Kundalini, unless it is accompanied by all the safeguards of an Eastern school, or alternatively by a properly graded series of biofeedback exercises, may cause the subject considerable physical and mental stress, and even the fear that he is going mad.

This is unnecessary and undesirable. The present course, even with subjects who have studied meditation elsewhere, and developed signs and symptoms suggestive of Kundalini development which is proceeding too rapidly, will avoid any distressing symptoms.

Ultimately, to obtain the fullest benefit from meditation, the Awakening of Kundalini is inevitable. But that this is a perfectly natural process which can be completed without the slightest distress is properly understood.

The idea of Kundalini – the Serpent Power – is not unknown in the West. It finds mention in a veiled way in the Bible, but there are clear mentions of it in the books on alchemy and other esoteric disciplines. In the beginning of this century an American writer traced references to Kundalini in several passages in the Bible. For some years past, this ancient doctrine has penetrated even into the exclusive precincts of science, and some eminent scientists, at least, have come to know of its implications in the context of the current views about religion and mystical experience. There is, however, a general attitude of incredulity, which is not to be wondered at in the context of the present attitude of science toward religion, parapsychology and the supernatural. This attitude has resulted in a curious situation. What we see is extreme skepticism on one side and extreme credulity on the other. That seems to be paradoxical in that some scientists should lend credence to various occurrences, as for instance telekinesis and the possibility of mystical consciousness with the use of drugs, both still debatable propositions, and should hesitate to accept as an hypothesis that there does exist a dormant source of a still unidentified biological energy which is at the root of all such bizarre phenomena.

Can anyone deny that there must be an explanation in psychosomatic terms for all the seemingly transcendental and paranormal phenomena of the human mind? If the phenomena are accepted, then the existence of a causal source for them has also to be admitted. They just cannot occur at random due to causes that must always remain beyond the probe of the intellect.

Without the corroboration of one single great mystic, either of the East or West, most men of science have taken it for granted, without a regular investigation, that the conscious, semiconscious or deep sleep states induced by drugs, biofeedback, auto-hypnosis or restraint of breathing, represent or are on a par with mystical experience, without ever trying to define in the phraseology of science what “mystical experience” means. With a research span extending now to one hundred years on psi phenomena, have we come any nearer to the understanding of the force responsible for them? Has any psychic healer, physical medium, clairvoyant, yogi, been able to specify the force that is working in him? Do they not generally ascribe their extraordinary gifts and performances to a control (like the demon of Socrates), to concentration of mind, to Pranayama, to the favour of a Guru, divine grace, and the like?

Kundalini (as this power is termed in India), is the guardian of human evolution. Traditionally she is known as Durga the creatrix, Chandi the fierce and blood-thirsty, and Kali the destroyer. She is also Bhajangi the serpent. As Chandi or Kali she has a garland of skulls around her neck and drinks human blood. What can be behind this hideous picture of a divine being? It is true that conceived as both the creatrix and the destroyer, in the cosmological sense, she could only be portrayed with a frightful aspect for the latter role. There is a profound significance not only in these awful portraits of the Shakti (the divine energy) but also in many other rituals and ceremonies of Tantric worship.

The Power, when aroused in a body not attuned to it with the help of various disciplines, or not genetically mature for it, can lead to awful mental states, from hardly noticeable aberrations to neurotic

and paranoid states. The fact that Hatha Yoga practices can lead to insanity is widely known in India and, to some extent, even in the West. The term “mastana” in Persian and “avadhoot” in Sanskrit is applied to an initiate whose higher dimensions of consciousness is attended with loss of worldly sense to such an extent as to be oblivious to his behavior or, in other words, who while attaining to higher perception loses control over himself.

But I do not want you to think that Kundalini is a special visitation for the benefit, or otherwise, of students of Yoga. Kundalini merely serves the purpose very well of illustrating the theme because there is such a wealth of literature dealing with it. What we are really concerned with is the illnesses, as well as with the delusions and illusions which often inflict themselves upon the growing mystic, whatever path he follows. Fechner, for example, the physicist and mystic, and Richard Jeffries, the author of The Story of My Heart, show clearly the confusion of mind through which even great intellects must pass on the way to Enlightenment.

In that lovely but comparatively little-known treatise on the mystic life, the Four Degrees of Passionate Charity, Richard of St. Victor writes as follows: “In the first degree God enters into the soul and she turns inward into herself. In the second she ascends above herself and is lifted up to God. In the third the soul, lifted up to God, passes over altogether into Him. In the fourth the soul goes forth on God’s behalf and descends below herself.” Here, in this fourth degree of love, we have something new.

The goal of the Mystic Way is not to rest lazily in a mass of pleasant sensations. The true mystic is not like a cat basking in the sun, but like a mountaineer. At the end of his quest he finds not the enervating isle of the Lotus Eaters, but the sharp, pure air of the Mount of Transfiguration. The greatest contemplatives, transfigured on this holy mountain, have felt themselves called upon to ‘descend below themselves’, to take on the humility of Christ, who ‘took upon Him the form of a servant’, and, coming down to the plain, to become centres of creative energy and power in the world. In whatever field of active life they may engage, the great contemplatives, because they have become completely detached, because the self has been entirely subdued in them, because they partake of the Divine life and are united with that Ultimate Reality which we call God, the world can no longer touch them. Literally transfigured, filled with Divine love, serene and confident, they possess a creative strength and power, which ordinary men, tossed hither and thither by the passions of the primitive self, do not possess.

Consider the career of St. Augustine, thinking, writing and administering his diocese of Hippo in a world which was collapsing about him, or of St. Gregory and St. Bernard, whose creative geniuses had so profound an influence on the temporal pattern of their respective ages, or of St. Catherine of Genoa, said to have leapt, after her four years of intensive purgation, into the experience of the Unitive life, organizing and administering her hospitals, or of St. Catherine of Siena, correspondent and adviser of Popes, emperors, and kings. The list could go on and on.

To the mysticism of understanding and knowledge and of union and love, I would add the mysticism of action. It is not a separate type, but originates in the first two and is their expression in the temporal world. I would extend it beyond the high, creative, selfless manifestation of Divine love as it is seen in a St. Bernard or a St. Catherine of Genoa, which is its supreme manifestation. I would call it the Lesser Mystic Way – the word ‘lesser’ implies no value-judgment. It is A WAY OF ORDINARY LIVING, BUT ONE INSPIRED AND CONTROLLED BY THE PARTICULAR SORT OF INSIGHT WHICH WE HAVE CALLED MYSTICAL. It is the outward expression of a particular view of the nature of the world. It is what John Gowan calls psychedelia, what Richard Bucke termed Illumination, and what Abraham Maslow called Self-Actualization. This way, I would repeat, is available to anyone who wants it sufficiently to make the determined effort needed. And he is more than richly rewarded.

When one considers carefully and objectively that collection of the sayings of Jesus, grouped together in the Sermon on the Mount, it becomes apparent that what Jesus is implicitly saying is something like this: ‘You did not make the world or determine its nature or the moral laws which govern it. If you are to live in it successfully, you must conform with these laws. If you frame your actions in accordance with them you will be like the man who builds his house on a firm foundation; for you will be living in accordance with the real pattern of the universe. The stars in their courses will fight for you; you cannot fail; Angels will watch over you. But, if you do not accord with the laws, you will be like a man who builds on sand. Sooner or later, however beautiful and solid it may look, your house will collapse.’

The Sermon on the Mount is not impractical idealism, nor is it a collection of unlivable moral precepts. It is a superb analysis of right action in the light of things as they really are and not as they appear to be. It is an expression of the mysticism of action.

Possibly about the same time as the Sermon on the Mount, the mysticism of action was given expression in the Bhagavad Gita, the Song of God, one of the wisest and most beautiful of the religious writings of India. The Gita opens with the story of the Indian prince, Arjuna, faced with a perplexing moral decision. He finds himself the leader of one of the opposing armies in a civil war. On the other side are many of his friends and relatives. Victory in the impending battle will give him a throne, but at what a price: In deep mental anguish he turns for advice to his charioteer, Krishna, the Indian incarnation of God. What, he asks, is his duty in the face of this painful dilemma? There is no space to set down Krishna’s argument. His answer is, however, perfectly clear: “As a prince and a warrior your duty is to fight.”

But Arjuna is still perplexed by this terrible decision. How, he asks Krishna, can you at the same time tell me that knowledge of God is superior to all action and yet at the same time bid me do these terrible deeds? Then follows the famous discourse on the basis of right action. There are two ways to God, says Krishna, the way of Contemplation and the way of Action; but action of a particular sort, which he sums up in these words: “The world is imprisoned in its own activity, except when actions are performed as

worship of God. Therefore you must perform every action sacramentally and be free from all attachment to results.”

Here again, is an expression of the mysticism of action.

If life is to be lived in the right and most effective way, and men are to realize their full potentialities, the nature of human action must be understood. In the light of the ungraspable immensities of space and time, revealed by the astronomers, in the light of the vastness of the history of life on this planet, human action is, of itself, as nothing, ephemeral, insignificant, and meaningless. It only takes on significance and meaning when it is seen in relation to something higher than itself, when it is performed not for itself alone but in the light of something beyond it. To act as if action were all-important in itself is to be imprisoned in one’s own activity, to be shut up in a closed universe.

Devote yourself, therefore (says Krishna) to reaching union with God. To unite the heart with God and then to act, that is the secret of unattached work.

And Jesus, in the Sermon the Mount, gives a similar precept: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.”

To tread the hard, stern Way of Contemplation and to enter into the full Unitive Life is only for a few. Though later there may be a return, a descent from the heights to the plain, it demands withdrawal from the world and an intense concentration on a particular objective. But to lead a creative, active life is the destiny of far, far more. That too can be, in a real sense, a Mystic Way, different, but with its own hardness and sternness, its own high moments of illumination and its own spirituality. For such it is their road to blessedness and eternal life.