



*Bicycles,
Roller Skates,
& Peanut Butter*

FINDING GOD

*Contemplative
Verse #11*

Discover, being with God

Mystical refers to experiences, practices, or beliefs connected with the mysteries of the divine or the supernatural.

key elements:

1. **Spiritual Experiences:**

- Mystical experiences often involve a direct, personal encounter with the divine or the transcendent. These experiences can be profound and deeply transformative.

2. **Beyond Ordinary Perception:**

- Mystical experiences usually go beyond ordinary sensory perception and rational understanding. They are often described as ineffable, meaning they cannot be fully expressed in words.

3. **Union with the Divine:**

- A central theme in mysticism is the idea of union with the divine or the ultimate reality. Mystics seek to transcend the ego and individual self to merge with a higher spiritual consciousness.

4. **Inner Revelation:**

- Mystical experiences are often characterized by inner revelation or insight. This can involve a sense of profound understanding or enlightenment about the nature of reality and existence.

5. **Symbols and Allegory:**

- Mystical teachings and writings often use symbolic language and allegory to convey complex spiritual truths.

6. Intuition and Contemplation:

- Mystical practices typically emphasize intuition, contemplation, and meditation. These practices help individuals quiet the mind and open themselves to divine revelation.

In summary, the mystical pertains to experiencing and connecting with the divine or the ultimate reality in a way that transcends ordinary perception and understanding. It's a journey into the profound mysteries of existence, often involving a direct, personal encounter with the divine.

Jakob Boehme, a German Christian mystic and theologian from the 16th and 17th centuries, wrote extensively about the mystical experience of encountering God. Boehme believed that one could meet God in the silence, beyond words and intellectual understanding, where true spiritual insight and communion with the divine take place.

He emphasized the importance of inner stillness and contemplation, suggesting that through quieting the mind and seeking a deeper spiritual connection, one could experience the presence of God. In this silence, Boehme argued, God reveals Himself not through external means, but through an inward illumination of the heart and spirit.

His writings encouraged believers to look within, to the silence and simplicity of their own hearts, to find and commune with God, reflecting a deeply personal and intimate approach to spirituality.

What makes mystical experiences ineffable is their deeply personal, transcendent nature that goes beyond

ordinary language and concepts. Here are a few reasons why these experiences are often described as ineffable:

1. Transcendence of Ordinary Perception

- **Beyond Senses:** Mystical experiences often involve perceptions beyond the five senses, making them difficult to describe using ordinary language.
- **Higher Reality:** They are encounters with a higher reality or divine presence, which ordinary words and concepts can't fully capture.

2. Deep Emotional Impact

- **Profound Emotions:** The emotions felt during mystical experiences are often incredibly profound and unique, making them hard to express accurately.
- **Spiritual Revelation:** The insights and revelations gained can be deeply personal and spiritual, challenging to convey to others.

3. Symbolic and Abstract Nature

- **Symbolism:** Mystical experiences often use symbols and abstract concepts that don't translate easily into clear, literal language.
- **Allegory:** The teachings and truths are often communicated through allegories that require a deeper, intuitive understanding.

4. Unity and Oneness

- **Experience of Unity:** Many mystics describe a sense of unity or oneness with the divine or the universe, which is a concept difficult to encapsulate in words.
- **Loss of Self:** The dissolution of the ego or self in the experience makes it challenging to articulate using the usual subject-object language structure.

5. Personal and Unique

- **Individual Experience:** Each mystical experience is unique to the individual, shaped by their own life, culture, and spiritual journey.
- **Subjective Reality:** The subjective nature of the experience means it can be deeply personal and hard to generalize.

In summary, the ineffable quality of mystical experiences comes from their transcendent, profound, symbolic, unifying, and deeply personal nature, which resists being fully captured by ordinary language and concepts. It's like trying to describe the taste of an exotic fruit to someone who has never tasted it—words can only go so far.

William Law, an 18th-century English priest and theologian, wrote extensively about the importance of silence and solitude in encountering God. In his influential work, "A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life," Law emphasized the need for quiet reflection and prayer to truly experience God's presence.

Law believed that in the silence of our hearts, away from the distractions of the world, we can meet God and hear His voice more clearly. He encouraged believers to cultivate a habit of regular, silent prayer and meditation, as a way to deepen their spiritual lives and grow closer to God.

The christian resistance

Christian resistance to mysticism stems from several key concerns:

1. Theological Concerns

- **Orthodoxy:** Some Christians worry that mystical experiences might lead to beliefs or practices that deviate from orthodox Christian teachings. Mysticism can sometimes emphasize personal, subjective experiences over established doctrines.
- **Authority of Scripture:** Mysticism often relies on personal revelation, which can be seen as undermining the authority of Scripture as the ultimate source of divine truth.

2. Practical Concerns

- **Misinterpretation:** There's a fear that mystical experiences can be misinterpreted or manipulated, leading individuals away from the core tenets of Christianity.
- **Emotionalism:** Some Christians view the intense emotional experiences associated with mysticism as potentially destabilizing or distracting from a more rational and disciplined faith practice.

3. Historical Concerns

- **Historical Heresies:** Throughout history, certain mystical movements have been associated with heretical ideas or practices, leading to a cautious approach towards mysticism.
- **Cultural Differences:** Mysticism often incorporates elements from other religious traditions, which can be seen as conflicting with Christian teachings.

4. Personal Concerns

- **Subjectivity:** The highly personal nature of mystical experiences can make them difficult to verify or share, leading to skepticism about their authenticity and value.
- **Spiritual Pride:** There's a concern that individuals might become prideful or self-centered in their mystical experiences, thinking they have a special, exclusive connection to God.

Despite these concerns, many Christians also recognize the value of mysticism in deepening one's spiritual life and fostering a more intimate relationship with God. It's a

complex and nuanced topic that continues to be explored and debated within the Christian community.

How do we overcome this kind of resistance?

Overcoming resistance to mysticism within Christianity often involves a thoughtful and balanced approach. Here are some ways Christians can reconcile mysticism with their faith:

1. Biblical Grounding

- **Scripture Study:** Integrating mystical experiences with a solid understanding of the Bible helps ensure that such experiences are aligned with Christian teachings. Reflecting on mystical passages, such as those in Psalms, the Prophets, and the writings of Paul and John, can provide a biblical foundation.
- **Biblical Examples:** Highlighting biblical figures like Moses, Elijah, and Paul, who had profound mystical experiences, helps normalize mysticism within the Christian tradition.

2. Church Tradition

- **Historical Context:** Learning about historical Christian mystics, such as Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Julian of Norwich, shows that mysticism has a respected place in church history.
- **Theological Reflection:** Engaging with the writings of respected theologians who embraced mysticism, like Thomas Merton or Richard Rohr, provides a robust framework for integrating mysticism.

3. Discernment

- **Spiritual Discernment:** Practicing discernment through prayer and consultation with spiritual mentors helps ensure that mystical experiences are genuine and in line with God's will.
- **Community Accountability:** Sharing mystical experiences with a trusted faith community provides a support system and prevents potential misinterpretation or pride.

4. Emphasizing Humility

- **Humility and Servanthood:** Emphasizing that true mystical experiences lead to greater humility, love, and service to others helps align them with core Christian values.
- **Christ-Centered Focus:** Ensuring that mystical experiences are centered on Christ and His teachings reinforces their validity within the Christian faith.

5. Practical Integration

- **Daily Devotion:** Incorporating mystical practices into daily devotions, such as contemplative prayer, meditation, and silence, helps deepen one's spiritual life.
- **Balanced Life:** Balancing mystical experiences with practical Christian living—like acts of service, community engagement, and moral integrity—ensures a well-rounded faith.

6. Open-mindedness and Dialogue

- **Openness to Different Perspectives:** Being open to diverse spiritual experiences within Christianity fosters a more inclusive and enriched faith.
- **Dialogue and Education:** Engaging in dialogues about mysticism with fellow believers and educating oneself on its role in Christian spirituality can reduce misunderstandings and fears.

By grounding mystical experiences in Scripture, tradition, humility, and community, Christians can overcome resistance and embrace a more profound, holistic spiritual journey.

Deep Theological Insight

Thomas Merton and Richard Rohr are renowned for their ability to delve deeply into theological concepts, helping believers to understand and articulate their mystical experiences within the framework of Christian doctrine. Here's an expansion on how they achieve this:

1. Integrating Mystical Experiences with Doctrine

- **Intellectual Framework:** Merton and Rohr provide a robust intellectual framework that connects mystical experiences with traditional Christian beliefs. They show how these profound, personal encounters with the divine are not separate from, but deeply intertwined with, orthodox theology.
- **Scriptural Analysis:** By analyzing and interpreting Scripture, they highlight passages that resonate with mystical themes, demonstrating that mysticism is rooted in the Bible. They draw connections between mystical experiences and biblical events, such as the Transfiguration or the visions of prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel.
- **Historical Context:** They also place mystical experiences in a historical context, showing how mystics throughout Christian history, such as St. John of the Cross and Hildegard of Bingen, have contributed to a richer understanding of the faith.

2. Making Mystical Experiences Accessible

- **Simplifying Complex Concepts:** Merton and Rohr are skilled at breaking down complex theological concepts into understandable language. This makes mystical experiences more accessible to a broader audience, including those who may not have a deep theological background.
- **Practical Guidance:** They offer practical guidance on how to cultivate and understand mystical

Listening to the Divine:

A Path to Spiritual Revelation

Standing Still from Self:

- **Quieting the Mind:** Begin by quieting your mind, setting aside all thoughts and distractions. This is a conscious effort to step away from the noise and clutter of everyday concerns and focus inward.
- **Letting Go of Self-Will:** Release the desire to control or dictate your spiritual experience. Surrender your will and open yourself to God's guidance, trusting in His wisdom and timing.

Embracing Passivity to the Divine:

- **Passive Receptivity:** Allow your intellect and will to become passive, creating a state of openness where you are receptive to the expressions of the Eternal Word and Spirit. This means not actively seeking but rather being ready to receive whatever God imparts.
- **Holy Abstraction:** Achieve a state of holy abstraction by detaching from temporal and sensory experiences. This detachment allows you to transcend the physical realm and enter a spiritual space where you can encounter the divine.

The Soul's Ascent:

- **Winged Soul:** Envision your soul being elevated above the temporal world. This metaphorical ascent signifies rising above the mundane to a higher spiritual plane where the divine presence is more accessible.

- **Eternal Perspective:** Shift your focus from the transient to the eternal. This perspective helps you see beyond the immediate and temporal, opening your heart and mind to the everlasting truths of God.

Revelation of Divine Communication:

- **Eternal Hearing:** In this state of spiritual quiet and openness, you may begin to hear the "Eternal Hearing," which is the divine voice speaking to your heart and soul. This is not necessarily an audible voice but a deep, inner knowing or insight.
- **Eternal Seeing:** Similarly, "Eternal Seeing" refers to the spiritual visions or insights that come when you are attuned to God's presence. These may be glimpses of divine truth or deeper understanding revealed in the stillness.
- **Eternal Speaking:** Finally, "Eternal Speaking" is the expression of the divine through you. When you are in tune with God, your words and actions can become a reflection of His will and love, speaking to the world through your life.

Practical Steps for Spiritual Attunement

1. **Regular Meditation:** Practice regular meditation to quiet your mind and open your heart to God's presence. Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed and focus on your breath or a simple prayer.
2. **Prayer of Surrender:** Include prayers that express your willingness to surrender your will to God's. Ask for His guidance and be open to receiving His direction in unexpected ways.
3. **Spiritual Reading:** Engage with spiritual texts that inspire and uplift you. The writings of

mystics and theologians who have explored these themes can offer valuable insights and encouragement.

4. **Journaling:** Keep a journal of your spiritual experiences. Writing down your thoughts, feelings, and any revelations can help you track your spiritual journey and see patterns of God's communication with you.
5. **Community Support:** Share your journey with a trusted spiritual community or mentor. Discussing your experiences can provide support and help you discern the authenticity of your spiritual insights.

By incorporating these practices into your life, you can cultivate a deeper connection with God, where the divine communication becomes a natural and integral part of your spiritual journey.

experiences. Through their writings, they provide spiritual exercises, meditative practices, and reflective questions that help believers integrate their mystical encounters into their daily lives.

- **Community Engagement:** By encouraging dialogue and community engagement, they help believers share and validate their mystical experiences within a supportive environment, reducing the sense of isolation that can sometimes accompany such experiences.

Mystery and Paradox

Merton and Rohr acknowledge and celebrate the mystery and paradox inherent in divine encounters. They encourage believers to embrace the unknown and the ineffable aspects of their faith. Here's an expansion on this theme:

1. Embracing the Unknown

- **Acceptance of Mystery:** Merton and Rohr teach that not all aspects of God or spiritual experiences can be fully understood or explained. They emphasize that embracing the mystery is an essential part of faith, inviting believers to find comfort in not having all the answers.
- **Spiritual Humility:** They encourage a posture of humility, recognizing that human understanding is limited. This humility allows believers to approach mystical experiences with an open heart, ready to receive whatever insights or revelations God chooses to impart.

2. Celebrating Paradox

- **Divine Paradoxes:** Merton and Rohr highlight the paradoxical nature of divine truths, such as the concept of losing oneself to find oneself (Matthew 16:25) or the strength found in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). They show how these paradoxes

are central to the Christian experience and help deepen one's spiritual understanding.

- **Living with Tension:** They teach that living with the tension of paradoxes can lead to greater spiritual maturity. Instead of seeking to resolve these tensions, believers are encouraged to dwell within them, allowing them to transform their perspectives and deepen their faith.
- **Mystical Language:** Their writings often employ mystical language and imagery that reflect the paradoxical nature of divine encounters. This poetic and symbolic language resonates with the ineffable quality of mystical experiences, capturing their profound and often contradictory essence.

By providing deep theological insights and embracing the mystery and paradox of divine encounters, Merton and Rohr offer a path for believers to integrate their mystical experiences within the broader Christian tradition. This approach not only makes mysticism more accessible and acceptable but also enriches the spiritual lives of those who seek to understand and live out their faith in deeper, more meaningful ways

Finding God

