

# Mormonism and Eastern Mysticism

*David D. Peck*

Mysticism (see False Doctrine; Sorcery; Superstitions; Traditions of Men)

BY ADOPTING THE ABOVE-CITED DEFINITION OF MYSTICISM, the compilers of the "Topical Guide" (LDS Edition 1979) distance Mormonism from a religious heritage which is perhaps as old as any other of record. The most obvious differences between Mormonism and mysticism are ones of form, and not necessarily of doctrine. The Church organization is both pervasive and extensive, whereas mystical practices are generally much less formal. Mormonism accepts a prophet as head of the Church organization which is endowed with divine authority through an organized priesthood, whereas many mystical traditions manifest a strong non-institutional tendency and go only so far as to incorporate the notion of a "guide," a leader who does not speak with divine authority but is instead familiar with one path to God.

Setting aside the question of formal differences, if significant doctrinal correlates can be found between Mormonism and mysticism, does the latter deserve descriptive labels such as "false doctrine"? For example, the mystic maintains that the path to God must be trod alone, or at least unaccompanied by fellow humans. The journey is a personal one. This parallels Mormonism's emphasis on direct knowledge of God through individual testimony or personal spiritual experiences as central not only to conversion (Moro. 10:3-5), but to attaining salvation as well.

On what criteria, then, has the "Topical Guide" critic based the accusation of falsehood? Are the reasons substantive, or are they based on insignificant differences of terminology or tradition? These questions must ultimately be answered by the reader, yet an informed answer calls for at least a cursory doctrinal comparison. This essay briefly investigates two fundamental aspects of

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*DAVID D. PECK is completing his Ph.D. at the University of Utah, studying the history of the modern Middle East. He and his wife Rachel and their four children live in Salt Lake City where he teaches Sunday School in his ward.*

mysticism and inquires into the existence of a Mormon counterpart: knowledge of the Absolute, or God, and the unitary nature of existence.

The most accessible mystical traditions<sup>1</sup> have in common their general recognition of what constitutes the path to God: the initiate (for Mormons, a newly baptized member) into the mystic's path must transcend conventional practices and understandings of the origins and bounds of knowledge and thereby reenvision the nature of discipline — mental, spiritual, and physical. Thereafter the initiate's behavior changes to reflect a deep devotion to God, mankind, and all creation. The individual who successfully accomplishes this achieves direct unity with God.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps most radical of these concepts, from a Mormon viewpoint, are mystical knowledge and unity with the Absolute.

The need to discuss the mystic's concepts of discipline and devotion is less pressing since these correspond roughly, though not entirely, to popular Mormon ideas. So let me briefly describe two common types of mystical discipline. The first is an effort to focus mental energies, subjecting them to the spirit. This is often termed prayer, contemplation, introspection, or meditation. The second is an attempt to subject the body to the will of the spirit. The natural senses together with appetites and carnal desires are overcome and surrendered to God through fasting and asceticism.

Mormon parallels to these activities abound. Prayer is advocated frequently in scripture. Fasting is a regular feature of monthly worship. There may be, however, significant differences between discipline as practiced by the mystic. The mystic's disciplinary practice is entirely voluntary and is not performed out of a sense of duty lest the aims of linking the mind and body to God be defeated. Whenever religious practice becomes duty, the ritual forms are in danger of losing their spiritual qualities. This, to mystics, is hypocrisy and deceit, as it was to the Savior. (See Matt. 23.) Isaiah reveals likewise that when we obey God as if his commandments were coercive rather than liberative, God is offended. Speaking of fasting, Isaiah states: "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?" (Isa. 58:5). To the contrary, when we accept God's will voluntarily and submit ourselves to it freely, this voluntary servitude paradoxically becomes the source of our liberation: "Is not *this* the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break

<sup>1</sup> Some traditions are very secretive, passing on understanding via an oral tradition as was/is common among the North American Indians, and are thus not readily accessible to the average investigator.

<sup>2</sup> Among the numerous scriptures describing the path to perfection, or God, 2 Peter 1:5–11 stands out as an example of the Christian correlative to the mystic's conceptualizations. Faith, virtue (or selflessness), and knowledge as described by Peter support the mystic's vision of knowledge of reality, which is acquired through "faith/action." Temperance and patience indicate a high degree of self mastery and spiritual discipline. Godliness and brotherly kindness bespeak a devotion to humankind founded upon serious spirituality. Finally, charity is love born of unity with the divine, the love manifested by God Almighty. Thus, whether we adopt the terms employed by Peter or those of the mystic (knowledge, discipline, devotion, and pure love), the path is generally the same.

every yoke?" (Isa. 58:6, italics added). Likewise, "he that is compelled in all things is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward" (D&C 58:26–27). We must engage ourselves in the cause of righteousness of our own free will and thereby bring to pass righteousness. To obey because we feel compelled is not discipline but mere obedience. More than simple obedience is required for only "the *willing* and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days" (D&C 64:34; italics added).

Mystical devotion differs from discipline by focusing attention on rendering service to others through divine activity and good works rather than upon the individual and his or her relationship with God. The perfect balance of devotion and discipline is the hallmark of the true saint and the true mystic. It is the essence of deity. God is the Man of Holiness whose single aim is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of all humankind and all creation.

I will forego further treatment of these devotional and disciplinary practices and will present an overview of mystical knowledge and then a discussion of the concept of divine unity. Since most readers are familiar with LDS scripture and teaching, I will present comparatively little in the text, emphasizing rather the more unfamiliar writings of mystics. Hopefully these quotes from a few of the more well-known "Eastern" mystics will help the reader develop a feel for the spirit and content of these writings.

Latter-day Saints, as well as others trained in traditional Occidental or Western<sup>3</sup> concepts of conventional knowledge, will find interpreting mystical writings, especially those of the Oriental or Eastern tradition, a difficult but rewarding task. Mystics do not necessarily exclude knowledge acquired through conventional means but believe that such knowledge is often distorted by convention and not likely derived from an Absolute Truth (God, nature, the

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<sup>3</sup> I use the terms "Western" and "Eastern" with trepidation. The earliest Greek thinkers, to whom we attribute the rise of Western thought, could be described as mystics. The school of Miletus, which included Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, searched for a primary, unitary element, of which all creation was made. Copleston describes them thus:

From the moment when the proverbial wisdom of the Wise Men and the myths of the poets were succeeded by the half-scientific, half-philosophic reflections and investigations of the Ionian cosmologists, art may be said to have been succeeded (logically, at any rate) by philosophy, which was to reach its splendid culmination in Plato and Aristotle, and at length in Plotinus to reach up to the heights where philosophy is transcended, not in mythology, but in mysticism (Copleston 1:35).

The Ionian "mystics" were unfortunately replaced by the number-oriented Pythagoreans and the early Milesean philosophers. Their reliance on numbers parallels our own Western orientation. Our fields of psychology, sociology, and quantitative historical inquiry pretend to understand the complex human organism by adding up lists of numbers and arriving at answers, which, of course, fail to account for the merest fraction of what we truly are. In the same manner, the Pythagoreans sought to quantify nature, or the cosmos (God, if you will); but the "totality" of nature is greater than the sum of its parts. As God revealed to Moses: "No man can behold all my works, except he behold all my glory; and no man can behold all [the totality of] my glory, and afterwards remain in the flesh" (Moses 1:5). Even the highest states of spiritual transport do not reveal the totality of God. The Pythagoreans' logical games, as our own today, disabled them from pursuing a path of introspection, particularly when they spent much of their time trying to figure out how the square root of two fit into a "rational" scheme of the cosmos. We might as well contemplate the meaning of the imaginary square root of a negative two as to quantify God. The philosopher's axiom that man divided by reason leaves a remainder applies to God, humankind, and all creation.

universe or cosmos). The mystical path involves learning by awakened, intuitional experience rather than by deduction, induction, or simple sensory observation. It is understandably impractical to assess the value of a mystic's teachings when the student's only point of comparative reference is founded exclusively upon knowledge acquired by conventional means. Furthermore, any attempt to define mysticism, such as this one, has problems since all communication between author and reader is through a conventional medium, language.

Language presents special problems for those who would understand mystics. It is, in many cases, the only medium through which we have any record of their wisdom. The mystic would often, however, decline to acknowledge the truth or reliability of their own writings. Lao Tzu, a famous Taoist mystic of pre-Christian Chinese antiquity, sums up the problem of using language to describe the Absolute:

Existence is beyond the power of words  
to define:  
Terms may be used  
But none of them are absolute (in Bynner 1972, 31).

Chuang Tzu, a later disciple of Taoism, adds: "Were language adequate, it would take but a day fully to set forth the Tao.<sup>4</sup> Not being adequate, it takes that time to explain material existences. Tao is something beyond material existences. It cannot be conveyed either by words or by silence" (Watts 1957, 28).

The inability of words to define the Absolute applies to any and all forms of verbal abstractions:

Life and Death, though stemming from each other,  
seem to conflict as stages of change,  
Difficult and easy as phases of achievement,  
Long and Short as measures of contrast,  
High and low as degrees of relation (in Bynner 1972, 32).

While terms such as high and low, difficult and easy, help us relate to one another, they express no reality, only a relativity.

Our language trains us in certain thought patterns which do not easily lend themselves to the mystic's approach to knowledge. In language, the basis for communication and understanding is an agreement, conscious or unconscious, of the definitions of words. The words, arranged by us in certain orders, are a medium through which we transmit ideas and concepts to one another. So long as the concepts we wish to transmit are abstract or founded on a relative truth, the language functions reasonably well as a medium of communication. But when we attempt to define the Absolute, language's effectiveness becomes doubtful. As soon as we say "God is merciful," we have spoken less than the truth, as God is more than the word "merciful" represents. Furthermore,

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<sup>4</sup> Tao is often translated as "the way of Life" and calls to mind Christ's saying: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6).

“merciful” corresponds to our conventional concept of mercy, irrespective of what mercy means to God. Stringing out a series of attributive nouns does little more to paint an accurate picture of God, quantity being unable of itself to make up for lack of quality. No matter what words are used, they represent abstractions and are incapable of describing the Absolute.

The author of 3 Nephi also testifies of the inability of language to adequately describe the attributes of God or the most exquisite spiritual transports: “And behold he [Christ] prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed *cannot be written*. . . . And no tongue can *speak, neither can there be written by any man*, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak (17:15, 17; italics added). Though not a subject of much doctrinal discussion, the inadequacy of language to express the divine is a familiar event in scriptural history.<sup>5</sup>

Enoch was concerned that his inability to speak fluently and persuasively would result not in conversion but in further disbelief: “Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant?” (Moses 6:31). The Lord promised to fill Enoch’s mouth with the words that he should utter. Thus divine inspiration can function to overcome the inadequacy of language to express the divine. Joseph Smith, Moses, and other prophets also expressed concern that they were “slow of speech.” But even words supplied by the spirit must be accompanied by a spiritual and inspired understanding on the part of the listener or else even God-inspired language cannot convey a message of absolute value:

“And he that receiveth the word of truth, doth he receive it by the Spirit of truth, or some other way? If it be some other way it is not of God. . . . He that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth. . . . Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another” (D&C 50:19–22).

True understanding or knowledge of the Absolute cannot come of language unassisted by the spirit; language must be coupled with divine endowment or remain useless as a vehicle of the Absolute. Therefore, language remains insufficient, the true mode of communication being spiritual.

In addition to language, the scientific approaches which Westerners have developed over the past centuries to describe various activities — human, animal, geological, or cosmic — are often further impediments to knowledge and understanding of the mystical path, and subsequently of God (see Capra 1983). Scientific constructs are fundamentally artificial: the universe which science attempts to explain would not disappear if we all decided not to believe in science. The cosmos is absolute; it exists. It is our ideas and theories of the cosmos which are of only relative worth. Yet we persist in judging the “truth” of a particular phenomenon by our ability to describe, and thus communicate, it through a language (including mathematics). The locus of our attention

<sup>5</sup> See also Isa. 64:4; 1 Cor. 2:6–10, 12:3; 2 Cor. 12:4; Eccl. 5:2–3. Compare this to the inadequacy of language to express the reality of God as expressed in 2 Ne. 33:1–5.

has thus shifted from reality to the various scientific theories invented to describe that reality. Truths no longer “exist” in such a system but must be proved by an external theory in order to exist. The quest for truth becomes a competition to find the theory which makes sense in this closed system of inquiry. Indeed, the more we delve into the mysteries which science pretends to explain, the farther we stray from the Absolute. Our scientific specializations and subdivisions of specialization cause us to focus on a fragmented existence, rather than on the unitary nature of all Being. Doctrine and Covenants 88 and Moses 1 illustrate the scriptural foundation of the doctrine of the unitary nature of God and creation. Our attempts to understand creation without understanding God are doomed to failure: we can learn about only a portion of existence while denying God, the force that sustains and directs creation, who, through Christ, is in all things, through all things.

Albert Einstein wrote:

The province of scientifically determined fact has been enormously extended, theoretical knowledge has become vastly more profound in every department of science. But the assimilative power of the human intellect is and remains strictly limited. . . . Worse still, as a result of specialization, it is becoming increasingly difficult for even a rough general grasp of science as a whole [unity], without which the true spirit of research is inevitably handicapped (1979, 15).

A spirit beyond scientific research may, in contrast, fill the gap between conventional knowledge and the reality of God. The scientists of Daniel’s time were unable to interpret the king’s dreams. Daniel, endowed with a higher understanding and direct revelation (by which he also “saw” the king’s dream), was able to pierce the veil of confusion which surrounds understanding based upon reason and unravel what was otherwise a mystery:

The king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. . . . The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, . . . it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none who can shew it before the king, *except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh*. . . . Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision (Daniel 2:2, 10–11, 19; italics added).

Organized religion has suffered a similar frustration in its search for absolute truth. The contemporary split between science and religion was practically inevitable since Western civilization traditionally linked belief in the Absolute with institutionalized religion. When science found itself at odds with conventional religion, it found itself at odds with a conventional religion’s god. In studying the Middle Ages, it is difficult (if not impossible) to speak of society as separate and apart from the church. People’s behavior, thought, lives, and deaths were governed by conventions allegedly dedicated by God. The Absolute was thereby thought to be pervasively involved in the development, maintenance, and perpetuation of convention. During and following the Renaissance, scientists and thinkers began to question convention. Such questioning was considered heresy, since to question convention was to question the church and, ultimately, the authority of God Almighty. As modern science

developed, it raised serious questions about viewpoints vital to the conventional credibility of the church and Christianity. Scientists, for example, found themselves arguing with organized religion about the origin of species. When their conclusions were seemingly at odds with the dictates of an institutionalized God, they became atheists, not because they all abandoned belief in the Absolute, but because they no longer believed in his conventions.

Christians in general found themselves similarly troubled. So long as there was one church (ignoring the ancient traditions of Christianity in the East), there was one convention. When Luther and others broke away, they not only proclaimed another doctrine but developed another convention to go with it. As the conventions, supposedly the creation of God, multiplied, confusion resulted. No single convention could be proved superior, or more God-inspired, than the others. As a result, many chose to abandon the Absolute because they could not reconcile themselves to "his" conventions. Atheism is better understood, then, not so much as the negation of the Absolute as the denial of those institutionalized conventions ascribed to him.

Yet Westerners also have difficulty understanding the spirituality of the East because it has so few institutionalized religious conventions in the Western sense. Hinduism, Buddhism in all its varieties, and Taoism, for example, have no single visible head, no living leader, no pope, or patriarch. Furthermore, they have no scripture or "word of God" in the Western sense but rather refer to collections of sayings or stories about devout men and women who made no claim to speak for God. Adherents to strict convention are often startled by the contempt with which Eastern mystics hold convention.

Legendary or true, it is told that Confucius, impressed by Lao Tzu's influence on people, visited him once to ask advice, ironically enough, on points of ceremonial etiquette. Baffled by the answers of the older man, to whom etiquette meant hypocrisy and nonsense, Confucius returned to his disciples and told them: "Of birds I know that they have wings to fly with, of fish that they have fins to swim with, of wild beasts that they have feet to run with. For feet there are traps, for fins nets, for wings arrows. But who knows how dragons surmount wind and cloud into heaven? This day I have seen Lao Tzu and he is a dragon" (in Bynner 1972, 13).

It is precisely this absence of formal, conventional structure that allows these religious traditions to be accessible to virtually all men and women. In such a system, science and religion need not be at odds. Albert Einstein, perhaps our most eminent scientist, seemingly agreed. In fact, he indicated that his understanding of relativity may have been experiential, rather than based upon conventional Western epistemology. He described his view of the universe and religion thus:

There is a third state of religious experience . . . which I will call cosmic religious feeling. It is very difficult to explain this feeling to anyone who is entirely without it, especially as there is no anthropomorphic [institutionalized, conventionalized] conception of God corresponding to it. . . . The individual feels the nothingness of human desires and aims and the sublimity and marvelous order which reveal themselves both in nature and the world of thought. He looks upon individual existence as a sort of prison and wants to experience the universe as a single significant whole (1979, 26).

Although science need not be bound by artificial convention, for the most part it unfortunately is, and we train and educate our youth to accept this system and to perpetuate its conventions. One primary vehicle of these artificial conventions is spoken language. We teach children that the sound represented by the letters “frog” corresponds to a particular kind of animal, whereas the sounds represented by the letters “zxmdj” do not. Formal education later reinforces these lessons. Children are taught to accept as truth a difference between a “toad” and a “frog,” reinforcing what a particular group of taxonomists has determined concerning life forms. The child is thereby distracted from learning about reality by subjective contact with the universe, and from acquiring knowledge directly through experience, accepting instead what it is taught about its surroundings. As Alan W. Watts states in “The Way of Zen”:

We have no difficulty in understanding that the word “tree” is a matter of convention. What is much less obvious is that convention also governs the delineation of the thing to which the word is assigned. For the child has to be taught not only what words are to stand for what things, but also the way in which his culture has tacitly agreed to divide things from each other, to mark out the boundaries within our daily experience. Thus scientific convention decides whether an eel shall be a fish or a snake (1957, 5).

Significantly an eel is neither a fish nor a snake in an absolute sense; the agreed-upon categorization is purely arbitrary. The terms “snake” and “fish” are convenient for our everyday use but lose meaning when taken out of the context of the society that created the terms.

Grammatical categories, as well as other rule-oriented systems of inquiry, must be recognized as misleading and useless tools for arriving at truth. It is commonly understood that for virtually every rule of English grammar, there is an exception. This is because the rules are an artificial convention and do not represent any absolute truth.

We assign the term “noun” to one class of words and “action verb” to another. Watts demonstrates that the differences between a noun/object classification and that of verb-of-action are artificial: “How arbitrary such conventions may be can be seen from the question ‘what happens to my fist (noun/object) what I open my hand?’ The object miraculously vanishes because an action was disguised by a part of speech usually assigned to a thing!” (1957, 5)

In Western thought, the child is largely the product of a formalized educational system. At home or in the schoolhouse, a child is instructed to accept the ritual forms of conventional knowledge. In order to understand the mystic, we must abandon, or at least question, both our acquired conventional knowledge and the means of learning it.

Rather than focusing attention upon the relative merits of a theory, the mystic seeks direct access to the truth through personal experience — contemplation, discipline, or devotion. Mystics set aside reason and abandon the senses as vehicles to knowledge of reality. Lao Tzu states it thus:

The five colors can blind,  
The five tones deafen,



The five tastes cloy.  
 The race, the hunt, can drive men mad  
 And their booty leave them no peace.  
 Therefore a sensible man  
 Prefers the inner to the outer eye:  
 He has his yes, — he has his no (in Bynner 1972, 42).

The mystic thus prefers introspection and self-mastery to indulgence in the senses, which may mislead. Christian and Mormon thought support these same truths. First Corinthians 3:2–3 emphasizes that carnality, or attachment to the senses and the flesh, blocks our ability to experience the Absolute directly. God functions not on a carnal but a spiritual plane, and the seeker of God must seek him on that same plane (Heb. 7:16). The path away from God is, at least in large part, a carnal or sensual one (2 Ne. 28:21; Mosiah 16:12).

From the discipline acquired through self-searching (the inner eye) and self-mastery comes freedom of action. Albert Schweitzer states, “For an external abandonment of the things of the world, . . . [Paul] substitutes an inner freedom from them” (1966, 39). Paul exhorts in Galatians 5:24–25, “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” We are thereafter no longer bound by habits of the senses but are free to choose our course. We then have our “yes” and our “no.” Lao Tzu wrote:

Curb your tongue and senses  
 And you are beyond trouble,  
 Let them loose  
 And you are beyond help (in Bynner 1972, 79).

When we abandon our senses, we replace the scientific approach, based upon observation and reason, with an experiential learning, a participatory approach to knowledge in which the senses no longer confuse and reason does not mislead.

In this, as I have said, it [mystical Truth] resembles the knowledge given us in sensation [intuition] more than that given by conceptual thought. Thought, with its remoteness and abstractness, has often enough in the history of philosophy been contrasted unfavorably with sensation. It is a commonplace of metaphysics that God’s knowledge cannot be discursive but must be intuitive, that is, must be constructed more after the pattern of what in ourselves is called immediate feeling, than after that of proposition and judgment. But our immediate feelings have no content but what the five senses supply; and we have seen and shall see again that mystics may emphatically deny that the senses play any part in the very highest type of knowledge which their transports yield (James 1961, 318).

The mystic’s mistrust of reason as a path to absolute truth is well founded. In order to prove something, we must adopt a premise. If it is absolutely false, then no amount of thinking can make it true. In order to prove a premise true, we must adopt another premise, the veracity of which is equally unascertainable. The acquisition of truth by reason is further flawed since our view of the universe is always piecemeal, never composite, and science constantly attempts

to further subdivide the cosmos into a myriad of small pieces. The application of critical reason to this piecemeal understanding complicates our picture even more since we arbitrarily decide which pieces of the universe are important or significant and which are not within the context of a particular theoretical construct. Yet being unfamiliar with the larger picture, we cannot know which pieces are relevant and which irrelevant. Finally, we must add to this picture of confusion an additional limitation: we can only obtain answers to the questions that we ask. This limit to our understanding is built into any system of knowledge based upon reason. The tale told by Ch'u Ta-kao of the centipede illustrates the incapacitating effect which reliance solely upon reason and observation creates:

The centipede was happy, quite,  
 Until a toad in fun  
 Said, "Pray, which leg goes after which?"  
 This worked his mind to such a pitch,  
 He lay distracted in a ditch,  
 Considering how to run (in Watts 1957, 27).

We assure ourselves that the knowledge obtained through the scientific process is sure, that there can be no other way of learning. We train our children to accept our epistemological paradigm without question, base their punishments and rewards on how well they have learned the system, and then congratulate ourselves on our fine achievement. Should a mystic attempt to upset our fine learning by discounting the senses and our observations based upon those senses and upon our reason, we often dismiss him or her as a simpleton whose learning lacks sophistication and polish. Lao Tzu responds to this:

Everyone says that my way of life [Tao] is the way of a simpleton.  
 Being largely the way of a simpleton is what makes it worth while.  
 These possessions of a simpleton being the three I choose  
 And cherish:  
 To care,  
 To be fair,  
 To be humble.  
 When a man cares he is unafraid,  
 When he is fair he leaves enough for others,  
 When he is humble he can grow;  
 Whereas if, like the men of today, he can be bold without caring,  
 Self-indulgent without sharing,  
 Self-important without shame,  
 He is dead (in Bynner 1972, 96).

The love of reason causes us to create differences among ourselves, to convince each other that these differences are real and that we should fight and kill for a difference, shun and demean others for a difference, and deny life or sustenance to them for a difference. Thus, focusing on these false differences

(the offspring of our reason), according to Lao Tzu we divide ourselves from each other, cause conflict and strife, engender unhappiness:

People through finding something beautiful  
Think something else unbeautiful,  
Through finding one man fit  
Judge another unfit (in Bynner 1972, 32).

This contrasts with the true “unitary” relationship between God and humans, which must exist in celestial orders.

The mystic, instead of priding himself on knowledge acquired by reason and observation, develops an attitude toward life that engenders humility and love and respect for other people and for all life and all creation, thus resembling God. According to Lao Tzu:

Man at his best, like water,  
Serves as he goes along:  
Like water he seeks his own level,  
The *common* level of life,  
Loves living close to the earth,  
Living clear down in his heart,  
Loves kinship with his neighbors,  
The pick of words that tell the truth,  
The firm tenor of a well-run state,  
The fair profit of able dealing,  
The right timing of useful deeds,  
And blocking no one’s way  
No one blames him (in Bynner 1972, 36; italics added).

Thus, the mystic achieves a state of consciousness which portends a new understanding, a new knowledge. Some call this a rapture, an awakening, or Nirvana. In this state, the mystic participates with the universe in a cosmic unity, blending his essence with that of the Absolute, acquiring knowledge directly from the Source with no mediation of senses or of reason. A peace and oneness with all creation manifests itself in a concern for others and for all life. The awareness of the mystic passes beyond time and becomes an eternal awareness.<sup>6</sup> The mystic or true follower of God then comes to know him unitarily, directly, and with a deep familiarity, his or her life paralleling to a great degree that example given by Christ.

The Christian tradition echoes this aspect of Eastern mysticism in significant ways. We must all come to understand God in this wise, irrespective of our creed, or fail forever to understand and know the truth (Christ) as an absolute: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent” (John 17:3). The Christian’s quest to find the kingdom of God is an internal one. Through introspection,

<sup>6</sup> In order to attain an “eternal awareness” or that state of consciousness in which one is filled with a timeless understanding of reality, one must break free of the prison which our existence in time and finite space forms. When one realizes that there is no time, only the illusion of a past and a future separate from our present existence, then one is empowered to view the universe as God does — from an absolute and eternal vantage point.

that is, prayer (a form of meditation which supplants reason and sensory observation), we can find the kingdom of God. In Luke 17:20–21 we read: “And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, Lo, there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”<sup>7</sup>

According to scripture, knowledge, in its purest sense comes not from reason and observation but from divinely inspired action: “And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:15–17). Jesus’ knowledge of God came by direct contact with him, from days of fasting and constant prayer, and from a life of divine activity, not from a formal or conventional education. He invited all men and women, regardless of their station in life or their educational background, to follow him and his example.

Christ also petitioned all to join in unity with himself and God. In fact, directives to unity abound in the New Testament. His lesson on the true vine indicates that those who follow his path become one in a real sense (whether physical, spiritual, or otherwise is unimportant since these terms have relative and not absolute value). He is the vine, and we are the branches:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing (John 15:4–5).

If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit (1 John 4:12–13).

The disciplined person participates with all creation in a union that cannot be reasoned, observed, or fully described:

I [Krishna] am impartial to all creatures,  
and no one is hateful or dear to me;  
but men devoted to me are in me,  
and I am within them (Miller 1986, 87).

The disciple John details the last teachings of the Savior before his crucifixion. These teachings dwell on the union between God, Christ, and disciple. Christ made clear the fact that he and the Father are one, that the disciples, or saints, are to become one, in order “that they may also be one in us” (John

<sup>7</sup> This passage is often translated “The kingdom of God is *among* you,” reinforcing the notion that not only as individuals but as a community we must become one. The Zion concept attempts to create a oneness among the believers, so that the kingdom of God may indeed be among us. Nevertheless, each individual must bind him- or herself to God or a community bond is impossible. The United Order of Zion was separated from that of Kirtland due to transgressions, “the covenants being broken . . . by covetousness and feigned words” (D&C 104:52); “this was done in order to preserve the integrity of the Zion order: And this I have commanded to be done for your salvation” (D&C 104:51).

17:21). The apostle Paul also emphasized the unity or oneness that must exist among the believers: “So we, being many, are one body in Christ” (Rom. 12:5) and “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind” (Philip. 1:27). This unity, once found among the believers, can then be extended to include Christ: “For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one” (Heb. 2:11).

The unitary relationship between believer and Christ<sup>8</sup> has been likened to that between husband and wife in true marriage: “They shall be one flesh” (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:8; Abr. 5:18; Moses 3:24; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31; D&C 49:16). The Song of Solomon strongly resembles other mystical poetry depicting the relationship between believer and God as one between lover and beloved. Read in this way, the scriptural poem takes on new meaning. Christ becomes the beloved: “Thou art fair my love; there is no spot in thee” (Song 4:7). The poem depicts the search for the beloved (Ch. 3) just as the story of our lives should reflect a quest for the Absolute.

The relationship between Christ (Jehovah) and the elect, likened to the marriage relationship, was the subject of much of the book of Hosea. Israel is the unfaithful spouse and Christ the ever steady husband. Hosea, representing faithful Jehovah, is commanded to seek a whore (Gomer) as wife in order to teach Israel of her iniquity: “Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who took to other gods, and love flagons of wine” (Hosea 3:1). Eventually, Israel turns from whoring after the gods of flesh and man’s knowledge to become the faithful spouse: “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely . . . Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found” (Hosea 14:4, 8). A final parable from the New Testament, that of the ten virgins (Matt. 24:1–14), depicting Christ as the bridegroom and the believers as the bride, again illustrates the marital ideal of unity between Christ and the church, as bride.

The United Order was the Mormon attempt to create a unified church, one worthy of the bridegroom. The Zion concept has from ancient times attempted the unification of those who seek God so that he may be one with them. This earthly reflection of the celestial order has the power to create the mystic’s unity, albeit on a larger community-of-believer’s scale. The Zion ideal of oneness between God and man closely resembles the mystic’s vision of the state of man when unified in the Absolute: “And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of *one heart and one mind*, and dwelt in righteousness” (Moses 7:18; italics added).

The concept of Zion also encouraged geographic unity, Zion as a place where the righteous could gather to unite with one another and with God: “Until the time shall come when it shall be revealed unto you from on high, when the city of the New Jerusalem shall be prepared, that ye *may be gathered*

<sup>8</sup> See the epistles of John and Galatians 2:19–20, “Christ liveth in me”; Galatians 3:26–28 “for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”; 2 Cor. 5:17, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.” See also Romans 4:10–11; 7:4; 8:1–2; 8:9–11; 12:4–5; Philippians 3:1–11.

*in one*, that ye may be my people and I will be your God” (D&C 42:9; italics added). The concept of the gathering of the elect, the remnants of scattered Israel, from the corners of the earth is fundamentally a unitary concept.

Although the general concept of union with God is common to both Mormonism and mysticism, in contrast to many Western religious traditions, Mormon teachings concerning a doctrine of unity do differ from those of mystics in several respects. First of all, the mystic usually claims no power to assist another in achieving a oneness with God. In contrast, God “restored” to Joseph Smith the power to seal, or unite souls to him: “And of as many as the Father shall bear record, to you shall be given power to seal them up unto eternal life” (D&C 68:12. See also Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23; 1 Cor. 5:4; Hel. 10:7). Second, genealogical work, indicating a power to seal the living to the dead, is regarded to be the key and central work of this dispensation. Joseph Smith interpreted Malachi 4:4–5 as requiring the sealing of the living to the dead:

It is sufficient to know, in this case, that the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other — and behold what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect. . . . For it is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times . . . that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time (D&C 128:18).

However, the similarities of Mormon doctrine with the central mystical teachings of a union with the Absolute, as well as direct spiritual enlightenment or knowledge from him, cause us to question the Topical Guide label of “False Doctrine.” No doubt the doctrine of mystics is incomplete in certain respects from a Mormon point of view, but the striking similarities should lead us to question how well- or ill-informed the compilers of the Topical Guide might have been in regard to mystical thought. The devout and charitable lifestyle that mystics often adopt as the result of their beliefs is testimony to both the general veracity of their teaching and their dedication to God. As the Savior said, “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20).

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