



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

"The Mystery of God"
Excerpted from
The Gift of Life: Death & Dying, Life & Living

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Who am I? What is the meaning of life? Is there a God? If so, what's he like, or she like, and so on? Is it personal or impersonal? All humanity shares these questions and the different cultural expressions of the religious question.

THE GREAT QUESTION OF LIFE IS A MYSTERY TO US.

The great question that appears even in the very first book of Genesis suggests the great question of life is a mystery to us. The consciousness of humans and its physiological basis in the brain of the neo-cortex enables the possessor to have the capacity to know God by way of relationship, if not by way of definition, and to know oneself through the experience of human development and human relationships and a sense of belonging to the universe and a reverence for the Creator.

THE GROUND OF BEING IS A LIVING BEING.

The Ground of Being which is the Source of our being and everything in the universe is a living Being. That brings me to just point out, that in the spiritual journey, there is a time for different spiritual experiences. It follows a certain order; it's not entirely chaotic, although we may experience certain parts of it as that way. As the spiritual life evolves, there is a time for ritual that is external and for vocal prayer and for relating to God as more or less as another human being – or, at least as a God who is sympathetic to the human condition. There's a time, in other words, for a fairly exoteric, that is, a fairly external observance, which seems to involve a great many of the people who identify with a religion. In other words, they fulfill certain external demands without understanding what's involved to come.

It's only when the journey externals begin to be interiorized by whatever means – and there are many – that they may then experience a great devotion to the saints and the Communion of Saints is prominent and they look for help from departed beloveds, or from saints and sages. Then that may subside and they get more interested in the angels. So, there is a time for saints, a time for angels. Then there's a time for deepening brotherly or sisterly relationships with Christ, or there's the possibility of big brother attitudes or spiritual friendship, when Christ becomes the center and one tries

to imitate Christ, become Christ. This is moving towards spiritual marriage and Christ as bridegroom, lover or beloved begins to preoccupy one's devotional life. And then comes the Trinity and then each member of the Trinity. Then perhaps, finally, unity with the Trinity.

What is clear is that there is no possessive attitude in Divine Love; that it gives itself completely. And, in the Trinity, this is delightful. This is what beatitude is because it is a love beyond any love that we can imagine. It is a love that is totally, and actually and really being given all the time, so that it is like an enormous river of Divine Love that is flowing among the members of the Trinity forever.

**NOTHING IS MORE DELIGHTFUL THAN TO HAVE
AND TO GIVE THE PURE LOVE OF GOD.**

Nothing is more delightful than to have and to give away and to receive again this infinite agape, the pure love of God, which is totally non-possessive. And when this is not only accepted, but an object of surrender, one enters into the flow of Divine life that is eternal.

So that one's relationship – as I spoke of earlier – with God needs to be flexible enough to change, and every time it does have a breakthrough like that particular one – there could be other breakdowns or signposts along the way – at some point, the need, or the importance, of one of the other relationships is absorbed into a further, higher penetration into the mystery of the Ultimate Reality.

**MYSTERIUM TREMENDUM ET FASCINANS IS LATIN
FOR THE TREMENDOUS MYSTERY.**

The words *mysterium tremendum* that I think come from Rudolf Otto expresses it kind of well. It is the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, which is the Latin for the tremendous mystery, or the overwhelming mystery, or the mystery that can't be penetrated, or the unknowable mystery, which is also utterly fascinating and desirable and deep in human nature. Despite its clutter of other purposes in life, one is never quite satisfied without developing that relationship. So, *mysterium tremendum* is a factor, you might say, in the process of surrender – surrender to a mystery that is not understandable to us – but seems to be calling us or *determined* to share with us the beauty, goodness, freedom, compassion, forgiveness of God as something totally gratuitous.

The whole approach to God up to that point has to go through a 180-degree shift. Where we thought of ourselves perhaps as pursuing God or seeking God – and we needed to, in some ways, just to open to this deeper dimension beyond reason – so we had to exhaust what possibilities of knowing God that reason can provide with the help of religion and symbols that enable God to peep, you might say, or to slip through, the cracks of words or symbols or gestures and to give us the sense that there's more to this than meets the eye. So, it's the eye of faith that is the seeing eye, you might say, that penetrates the senses and events and sees God in everything. In other words, it sees not just the particular particle, so to speak, but it sees the Source of the particle which resides there at the same time. God is both distinct and indistinct at the same moment, with everything, and that includes ourselves.

Faith is what relates to the experience of God in some way. Belief systems refer to the way that faith is explained in a rational way so that it can be grasped by people who

don't have the actual relationship with God, as yet, but who are open to it and who have a developing of it through some disciplines – this dimension of their deeper self.

**CONTEMPLATION IS THE EASIEST WAY TO ACCESS
THE SPIRITUAL LEVEL OF OUR BEING.**

Traditionally meditation in its conceptual form, which we call contemplation, mostly in the Christian tradition, is perhaps the easiest way to access the spiritual level of our being or the Ground of Being out of which we came, which is really the Divine Presence and its creative energy and its continuing creation and accompaniment of us as our human development advances.

Everything is so carefully balanced that as life goes on, we can experience more and more segments or chunks, if you want, or presences, or levels of relationship – both in prayer and in action.

It's a process that happens to us. We don't do it. The Mystery unfolds itself. And the Christian mystical tradition has been known from the beginnings of time and is represented as a process that is appropriate for those devoting themselves to be seekers of the Mystery. Those who are motivated by the desire to relate and to get to know, and to serve, and to do the will of this immense mystery – but a mystery that becomes more and more intimate and tender.