

The Five Paths - the way of the mystic

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Every religious tradition has its mystics - the Muslims have their Sufi's, the Hindus have their Swamis, the Jews have their Kabbalists and Christians have their Desert Fathers.

The mystic emphasises direct personal experience as the primary path to God, in contrast to the religious believer who seeks knowledge of God through beliefs, scriptures and communicated wisdom via traditions, scriptures or priests.

The mystic does not dismiss or discount the value of written scriptures or the spoken word but puts primacy on personal experience and an encounter with the God that these point to. A bit like a driver learns about driving not by reading The Highway Code but primarily by driving.

Authentic experience of the divine, as opposed to vicarious spirituality, requires the individual seeker to go on a journey, to tread their own path. In Herman Hesse's classic novel about the path of the mystic, Siddhartha encounters Buddha whom he acknowledges as the awakened Illustrious One but says to him "I am going on my own way - not to seek another and better doctrine, for I know there is none, but to leave all doctrines and to reach my goal alone."

On Lanzarote, at the entrance to Jameos del Agua created by Cesar Manrique - the 'Eighth Wonder of the World' - there is an extract from poet Antonio Machado's poem Proverbs and Songs 29:

"Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar."

"Wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking."

These Five Paths walking meditations on the journey back home to yourself are more 'way showers' than tramlines - they create a space for you to experience for yourself a sense of the numinous - the presence of the divine.

"What you are looking for is what is looking." St Francis of Assisi

The Godmother of modern mysticism, Evelyn Underhill, outlines the universal mystic way by which the mystic arrives at union with the absolute as a five stage process:

1. **Awakening of the Self to Consciousness of Divine Reality:** Usually a sudden, clearly defined experience characterized by complete joy and wonder.
2. **Purgation of the Self:** An attempt to rid oneself of the imperfections and material desires that stand in the way of union with the Divine. Usually involves intense self-discipline.
3. **Illumination:** A blissful awareness of the Divine and still no true union. Often experienced during meditation or contemplation and by artists in creative moments.
4. **Purification of the Self:** Also known as the 'Dark night of the Soul'. An attempt at total surrender – of the self, of personal identity and of will – to the Divine.
5. **Union with the Divine:** A sense of eternal surrender to, and harmony with, the transcendent order or divine reality.

In his book 'Original Blessing' Matthew Fox outlines the four paths of what he calls 'Creation Spirituality' - Via Positiva, Via Negativa, Via Creativa and Via Transformativa. To these I have added Via Integrativa for completion - bringing it all back home.

The Five Paths offers the genuine seeker an accessible starting point for your journey home to your true Self.

"The world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles,
no matter how long,
but only by a spiritual journey,
a journey of one inch,
very arduous and humbling and joyful,
by which we arrive at the ground at our feet,
and learn to be at home."

Wendell Berry