

The major features of
a mystical
experience, using
examples essay
sample



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A religious experience can be defined in a number of ways. Approximately it is considered an almost supernatural occurrence, or as a 'mental event' of which a person is aware that they have undergone the experience. These experiences can be spontaneous or can be brought about through training. The term 'mystical' is used to classify many religious experiences, and involves the 'spiritual recognition of truths beyond normal understanding.' Mystical experiences have a number of experiences attached to them, that shall be addressed further later in my essay.

It is thought that mysticism is the closest a person can come to meeting the Divine. Some people say that it is possible to be 'one' with God in a mystical experience, (see Passivity), but this idea is rejected by Muslims whom see this as the sin of shirk – comparing anything to the greatness of God. William James belief the categorizing of a religious experience was too ambiguous and so he set down a number of characteristics a true religious experience should have. The first of these was a sense of ineffability. Ineffability relates to the idea that all religious experiences are personal.

Each and every one is unique to the person whom is having the experience and it is difficult to display this to someone else. The person feels there is a great event to be described but cannot find the words to portray it to an audience. The descriptions offered are of little help to people as these are usually unique descriptions. It is, for example, like trying to explain what salt and vinegar crisps taste like to someone whom has never tasted anything. The next characteristic James thought that all mystical experiences should show is a noetic quality. This is the gaining of some extra Divine knowledge.

It seems knowledge is not learned as such, but is absorbed by perception and intuition. In this form it may be considered a revelation, but often people feel the knowledge enter them, and, upon the ending of the experience, lose the grasp of the knowledge they had learnt and were simply left with a feeling of great awe and a memory that they had held a great knowledge. An experience with a noetic quality to it may be something as simple as a natural revelation, seeing God's power through the world he created.

Perhaps it may be looking at a sunset and thinking 'there must have been a creator of this beauty, I know it. You have, here, gained a hidden knowledge.

You, in yourself, now know that something must have created the world and this belief can allow all sorts of information to become available to you.

Nobody can fully display what they have learnt and how they have learned it, however, as every mystical experience has ineffability, and cannot be described. Transcency is when the significance and effects of a mystical experience make the person experiencing it lose all track of time and space. It is similar to in a dream, when you may only dream for ten minutes but dream about a scenario lasting days.

The experiences are often well remembered, and many people who have undergone mystical experiences are sure that their experience lasted longer. Passivity is the characteristic that Muslims have the largest problem with. This refers to a 'loss of control' to God and being totally overwhelmed by this. This may mean that God takes over the body, or that people act completely differently or write completely differently, for example, than they normally do. It seems then, that these experiences cannot be controlled. It

would seem, however, that the right conditions for a religious experience can be created.

For instance, a strong religious believer is more likely to undergo a mystical experience than someone who is not looking for one. Religious followers may look at the sunset and wait for the power of God to hit them, while a normal person may not. While anyone can have a mystical experience it seems that the effects of the experience can be linked to alcohol or drugs. James addressed this fact and it seems that we must take our drunken consciousness as part of our entire mystical consciousness. As well as mystical experiences, they are also mystical states of prayer.

The first of these is the prayer of quiet. This is brought about by meditation and contemplation and does not interfere with mental functions. It is often described to have 'distractions' involved in the forms of images and thoughts of a sort and while the person is in full control of movement, any actions may cause the state to be lost. This state can be trained to last for hours. The prayer of union is an intermediate stage of mystical prayer. It is more intense and emotional than the prayer of quiet, and does not appear to have any 'distractions'.

The user is, however, still in full control. Ecstasy involves a complete loss of sensory perception, and the person experiencing ecstasy is not in control of their own actions or body movements. The body appears to be in control of the spiritual superior's orders, much like a hypnotist, but it is not a trance. It is often entered into at a lesser state of contemplation and visions and revelations can occur. The spiritual marriage is when a person feels in

complete wedded bliss with God. They are so close to Him and this is considered the ultimate state of mystical prayer.