



*the greatest achievement in life*

*Five traditions of mysticism*

*Mystical approaches to life*

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## Introduction

The first essay, *What's in a Word?*, briefly outlines some of the fundamental differences between five of the largest religions and among the principal divisions in each faith. The following essays attempt to summarize many similarities among the mystical traditions in those religions. The 120 quotations of mystics highlight common views.

Essays are based on talking with mystics in 12 countries and 180 books...100 in the primary bibliography. Many people were consulted, including the directors of a Buddhist Center and of the Eastern Orthodox theological institute at two major universities, a Vedanta Society swami, the director of an Islamic Center, the director of a Reform theological college, the abbot of a Theravada temple, a Cistercian monk, a Hindu abbess, a Sufi shaykha, and a professor at a university for Judaism, plus 10 professors who each teach courses on comparative mysticism. Their suggestions led to many revisions.

The practices and/or systems of these five traditions of mysticism do vary widely, employing dissimilar terminology and concepts. These essays use generally acceptable terms and note alternate words and definitions when appropriate. Some of the quotations from mystics:

*“One Nature, perfect and pervading, circulates in all natures. One Reality, all-comprehensive, contains within itself all realities.”* Yung-chia Ta-shih [B](#)  
Note: (685–713) Disciple of Hui-neng

*“To gauge the soul we must gauge it with God, for the Ground of God and the Ground of the soul are one and the same.”* Meister Eckhart [C](#)

*“Wherever you look...see that one unique Presence, indivisible and eternal, is manifested in all the universe. That is because God impregnates all things.”* Anandamayi Ma [H](#)

*“Behold the One in all things; it is the second that leads you astray.”* Kabir [I/H](#)

*“There exists nothing which is not united to Him and which He does not find in His own essence.”* Moses Cordovero [J](#)

*“One in all, all in One. If only this is realized, there is no worry about not being perfect.”* The Third Patriarch of Zen [Seng ts’an] [B](#)

*“Eternally, all creatures are God in God. So far as they are in God, they are the same life, same essence, same power; same One, and nothing less.”* Henry Suso C

*“For the Self [soul] is not the ego; it is one with the All and the One and in finding it it is the All and the One that we discover in our Self.”* Sri Aurobindo H

*“I went from God to God, until they cried from me, ‘O thou I.”* Bayazid of Bistun

*“They are then actually united with the Divine Essence and, in all aspects, your soul is included with them.”* Israel ben Eliezer [Ba'al Shem Tov] J

*“The great path has no gates, thousands of roads enter it. When one passes through this gateless gate he walks freely between heaven and earth.”* Zen poem B

*“The soul lives by that which it loves rather than in the body which it animates. For it has not its life in the body, but rather gives it to the body and lives in that which it loves.”* St. John of the Cross C

*“Liberation cannot be achieved except by the perception of the identity of the individual spirit with the universal Spirit.”* Shankara [Sankara] H

*“I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I. We are two spirits in one body. If thou seest me, thou seest Him. And if thou seest Him, thou seest us both.”*  
Hallaj I

*“A man should actually detach his ego from his body until he has passed through all the worlds and become one with God.”* Maggid of Mezerich [Dov Baer of Mezerich] J

True mystics had direct experience in divine union. Within these essays, *oneness*, *union* and *unity* all mean to be *consciously* in the unifying divine *essence*. These are some terms which are used in mysticism most often, but they are simply words. What *is* is not changed by what it is called. People's opinions too often distort it.

Note: Comparative religions use BCE or CE, Common Era, for the Christian BC or AD; ca. is approximate. The religious calendar varies among each of the five faiths.

## What's in a Word?

The word God, as used in English, is *Allah* in Arabic, *Brahman* in Sanskrit and *ha-Shem* (the Name) in Hebrew. God is *Theos* in Greek, the first written language of the New Testament. *Nirvana* in Buddhist Sanskrit can also mean absolute Truth: ultimate Reality.

Hinduism had no one founder; the Vedas advanced orally about 200 years before being recorded in Sanskrit from ca. 1300–600 BCE. The Hebrew Bible developed at least 300 years after Moses, ca. 1000–400 BCE. Gautama had been born a Hindu and taught in Prakrit; Buddhism's first written canon was in Pali nearly 400 years later, ca. 17 BCE. Jesus was born a Jew and preached in Aramaic; the New Testament had evolved from ca. 100–367 CE. Muhammad spoke Arabic; the written Qur'an was formed within 30 years of his death in 632 CE. Scholars do not agree on those dates.\*

Hindu scriptures also refer to *Ishvara*, a more personal aspect of Brahman, and often to *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, two of Brahman's trinity, plus incarnations in Krishna and Rama. The Hebrew Bible uses the sacred, unspoken, *YHVH* (*YHWH*) for God; *Adonai* replaces it when reading Jewish scriptures. *Ha-Shem* is used in conversation. Mahayana and Vajrayana vehicles may consider the *Dharmakaya* ("dharma-body" or Buddha-nature) more correct than Nirvana, final realization of the Theravada. In the first written New Testament, Jesus referred to God as *Abba* (Father) and Lord applied to both the persons of the Father and the Son in the Trinity. In the Qur'an, *al-Haqq* (the Truth, the Reality) is supremely the title of Allah. Islam has "99 Beautiful Names" for Allah's perfection; other faiths credit many attributes to God. In English, Absolute, Almighty, Deity, Supreme and other words are used to refer to God; divine, holy, omnipotent, omniscient, and other adjectives usually apply only to God.

*Many other religions have different words for God and a few, as in Buddhism, do not include a Supreme Being or Creator. Some give God personal qualities, while most speak of God as a spiritual omnipresence or an all-pervading force.*

Many other religions have different words for God and a few, as in Buddhism, do not include a Supreme Being or Creator. Some give God personal qualities, while most speak of God as a spiritual omnipresence or an all-pervading force. Among the other religions which are still practiced today: Aboriginal traditions, African tribal beliefs, Baha'i, Druze, Jainism, Native American faiths, Polynesian spirit worship, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism, Tenrikyo, Yoruba, and Zoroastrianism. Later prophets had developed new traditions, like Jewish Kabbalah, had gained new revelations, as in

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), or had founded new religions, such as Baha'i. There are hundreds of religions and faiths.

The Vedas, most sacred to Hindus, were rejected by Buddhists who also defined many Sanskrit words differently, e.g. nirvana. The first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah, are most revered by Jews and are studied by most Christians. Practices and customs may vary between countries, as apparent among the predominately Muslim states, or blend in local mythology, such as in Hinduism on Bali. Doctrine for any one religion may differ between its divisions or their branches, like within the many Protestant denominations.

In Vedanta, Brahman is considered as the One God; Hindus of Shaivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism may worship a chosen god, goddess or incarnation who emanates from Brahman. In Judaism, behavior and worship may vary among movements: Conservative, Hasidism, Orthodox, and Reform. Mahayana Buddhists rely on guidance of others and prayer; Theravada stresses self-reliance and good works; Vajrayana has secret rituals and metaphysics. Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and other Christians differ often on grace, the Trinity and sources of doctrine. Ibadi, Shi'a and Sunni Islamic sects disagree on Muhammad's successors and on the status of imams; Sufi orders among them may worship differently.

Hindu texts written in classical Sanskrit sometimes changed when translated into India's 22 modern languages or into English. The Hebrew Bible varied in Greek and Latin; except for Protestants, the canon of Christianity's Old Testament included many books not in Judaism's canon. Buddhist texts in Pali and Sanskrit were often interpreted differently in other Asian languages and Ch'an/Zen downplays the use of scriptures. The New Testament has had many changes during translations, literal and idiomatic. The Qur'an was written only in Arabic for more than 1,200 years; first translations were in the early 1900's, but are not considered true Qur'an.

Reading the mystics of all religions can help to overcome these many apparent differences. Mysticism's message seems to be a consensus: The essence of the One is the essence of All. Although the ultimate Reality is the same, each experience of it can vary. That applies to each mystic as well as between mystics.

\* Some scholars say that the oral traditions of Hindu and Jewish texts were first written in the 3rd Century BCE and the New Testament in the 1st Century CE (AD).

Note: Five of the largest religions are mentioned in order of their usual historical origins. All had originated in Asia (India and the Near East), but Judaism, Christianity and Islam are herein referred to as "Western" (yet the biggest Muslim populations are in Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India). Mysticism is a tradition in some other faiths, too. Shinto of Japan - larger than Judaism - worships "kami," heavenly and earthly divine powers shared by some humans...not as mystics.

## *Mysticism defined*

**Oxford Dictionary of World Religions**, by John Bowker

Published by Oxford University Press 1997, 2005:

**Mysticism.** “The practices and often systems of thought which arise from and conduce toward mystical experience. Mystical systems are distinguished from other metaphysical systems by their intimate connection to a quest for salvation, union and/or liberation realized through forms of mental, physical and spiritual exercise in a classic definition. Mysticism, according to its historical and psychological definitions, is the direct intuition or experience of God; a mystic is a person who has, to a greater or lesser degree, such a direct experience; one whose religion and life are central not merely on an accepted belief or practice, but on that which he regards as first-hand personal knowledge.”

Note: Non-theistic religions, such as Buddhism, seek the same ultimate Reality, but it is not conceived as God.

**Judaism.** “Kabbalah is teachings of the Jewish mystics. The term encompasses all the esoteric teachings of Judaism which evolved from the time of the second Temple. More particularly, it refers to those forms which evolved in the Middle Ages. Kabbalah draws on the awareness of the transcendence of God, and yet of his immanence. God can most closely be perceived through contemplation and illumination. God both conceals and reveals himself. Through speculation and revelation, the hidden life of God and his relationship with his creation can be more easily understood. Since mystical knowledge can so easily be misinterpreted its spread should be limited to those of a certain age and level of learning.”

Note: The Zohar emphasized contemplation; Kabbalah of Hasidism added enthusiasm.

**Concise Guide to World Religions**, by Eliade and Couliano

Published by HarperCollins San Francisco 1991, 2000:

**Christianity.** “...a brief survey of the rich mystical tradition of Christianity, which can be envisaged as a form of Platonic contemplative asceticism integrated with devotional and often liturgical activities. In its multifarious historical occurrences, Christian mysticism embraces almost all available mystical phenomenology, emphasizing to almost the same extent both ecstasy and introspection. The mystical experience tends toward the union with God in the complete surrender of the body and the world.”

Note: Eastern Orthodox mysticism seeks union with the Godhead through the three persons, followed by a “deified” participation in life. All Friends (Quakers) should seek the Inner Light, follow divine leadings and regard all of life as sacramental.



**World Religions-Ancient History to Present**, by Geoffrey Parrinder

Published by Facts on File 1971, 1985:

**Islam.** “The objective of Sufism, as all mysticism, is to attain union with God. Mysticism seeks for an immediate experience of the divine reality through the suppression of the ego. The method of attaining this most coveted experience, however, demands insight into a special and hidden brand of knowledge. Sufi doctrine teaches that, beside the usual rules for religious life, set out in the revelation and the prophetic sunnah, there is another and deeper level of spiritual meaning, which the prophet shared with only a few of his chosen companions. The revelation, thus, wears two faces, one open and obvious, and the other only to be seen by those who have been instructed in its secrets.”

**New Penguin Handbook of Living Religions**, by John R. Hinnells

Published by Penguin 1997, 2003:

**Hinduism.** “Another concept, central and essential to Hinduism, is moksha (liberation), which is also one of the four Hindu aims of life. That from which liberation is sought is *samsara*, the cycle of birth and rebirth. The part of the human individual which is immortal...passes at death to diverse heavens and hells where it works out its karmic debt and is then reborn in the form it has deserved. This cycle continues endlessly unless it merits, or is blessed with, a lifetime during which, through spiritual efforts, the intervention of a *guru* or the grace of God, *moksha* is attained, whereby it passes out of the cycle altogether.”

Note: The notion of interim heavens and hells is not supported by all Hindu schools.

**Buddhism.** “The main aim is to emphasize immediate accessibility of direct realization. Enlightenment is to be striven for and realized in this very life. Ch’an [Zen] teachers claimed a transmission outside doctrines - direct and wordless communication between teacher and pupil. Later tradition lays great stress on this transmission. Practical action was to be preferred to study. Ch’an [Zen] often stresses the suddenness of realization of enlightenment, but in fact different degrees of realization were usually recognized.”

Note: All Buddhism seeks enlightenment; Ch’an/Zen and Tibetan Tantrism may be regarded as more “mystical.” The term “mysticism” is seldom used by Buddhists.

# What is Reality?

*Truth is One*, although people call it by many names. The world's religions honor prophets, messengers and/or incarnations: Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, and others throughout the ages. They have all sought to bring people closer to the divine. In the mystical tradition of religions, we can directly experience the divine in this life by giving up our ego and individuality to be in the soul, then consciously sharing in the unitive divine essence.

Spiritual liberation is the final objective, yet it must be sought in stages. Our attachment to our outer self, and its interaction with the external world, blinds us to the serenity of experiencing our inner self flowing within the universal whole. Few people are aware that the divine essence is the essence of All. *That art Thou*, the divine is in you, is a declaration of many scriptures; most mystics believe that essence to be the ultimate, eternal Reality. It is here and now.

*How can we realize enlightenment,  
or complete intuitive insight into unity  
with the divine, in one lifetime when the  
modern human race has not  
achieved perfection in 40,000 years  
(400,000 for homo sapiens)?*

Our inner self, or soul, is far more real than our ego self, which is cloaked in various names, shapes and circumstances. Someone's full name, their outward description and occupation tells very little about the true nature of the person. Also, many people often use external means to contemplate the divine: sacred scriptures, houses of worship, shrines, or sacred art forms. They can provide a light to guide us away from mundane concerns for survival, satisfaction and success, still none of them can entirely convey the spiritual Reality of the divine. Physical and mental appearances can be restricting.

It is not easy to leave the countless attractions of the material world nor the myriad of thoughts in the mind. Most religions use chanting, singing, dancing, recitation, and/or prayer to help us put aside our worldly activities to temporarily focus on the divine. Simple meditation can bring us centering inner peace. Our ego self then returns us to the limited realities perceived by our senses and minds to interact with our physical and social environment.

How can we realize enlightenment, or complete intuitive insight into unity with the divine, in one lifetime when the modern human race has not achieved perfection in 40,000 years (400,000 for homo sapiens)? Many people believe in only a single life, which might qualify us for an eternal afterlife. Others think we must live through numerous lives until we are in conscious oneness with the divine.

Why were we each born with our individual attributes, family and place? Those who believe in rebirth can easily understand that our circumstances at birth result from our conduct in a past life. Many persons call seeming good fortune and bad luck *divine will*. Others name it *divine justice*, the consequences or reactions caused by our own actions in this or previous lives. Some scientists say it is chance.

Many mystics view this life as theater. Following *divine law* we must perform according to our script, but only to please the divine, the producer and director, not for the applause of the audience or the praise of fellow actors. People usually act to achieve personal benefits and believe their characters and the play are reality. Our ultimate goal is to be aware of universal Reality as the true stage of life, released from attachment to our fictitious human roles.

Any religion in practice was affected by the circumstances of history and its rules and rituals are an interpretation by its leaders of what its believers must do to follow divine teachings. What might seem necessary for today, or for one person, may not be correct for tomorrow or for another person. We must seek our own liberation from mundane reality; for mystics this means to gain freedom from our limited self to realize oneness with the limitless divine.

Mysticism seeks to join, or unite, our inner self with the divine by spiritual disciplines of devotion, knowledge, selfless service, and/or meditation. What you do matters greatly to what you will become: that is divine justice. How you do it, through Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, or outside these faiths is important when it is the right way for you: that is divine law. *One is Truth*: true Reality transcends the boundaries of our beliefs. *Thou art That*: you are in the divine essence; you must be dedicated to fully realizing it.

Our religion may be right for us, nevertheless that does not mean billions of others are wrong. What of the 100 billion\* people who lived outside of our faith since the origin of our species? Religions differ in approach, beliefs and practices, although the divine Reality they seek is the same. Their mystics used the words and concepts understood by followers of their faith, but these are just alternate ways of trying to express the One underlying Truth.

Divine union must be sought in this life, even for those believers in many lives. We cannot simply wait for death to bring us to the divine; waiting may result in our losing everything which we seek.

Note: In Hinduism, “jiva” is a soul identified with the ego self; “atman” is the true Self or soul identified with Brahman. In some of the traditions of mysticism, a soul might have many aspects; in these essays, the word “soul” is only used in its divine aspect.

\*See Wikipedia on the Internet for surprising historical statistics on “World Population.”

*Few mystics wrote books or had their teachings recorded by others; fewer yet were published and are available today. There have been millions of mystics, but some are especially well known for their leadership, writings or teachings.*

### **Some prominent mystics of Judaism**

*(add ca. 3761 years for the Jewish calendar) [23 quotes from 17 mystics]:*

- \* Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia (1240–ca. 1291):  
Spanish kabbalist. Wrote *Light of Intellect* and other essays.
- \* Joseph ben Ephraim Caro (1488–1575):  
Rabbinic authority. Wrote *Beit Yosef (House of Joseph)*, code of Jewish law.
- \* Moses Cordovero (1532–70):  
Spanish kabbalist. Wrote *Orchard of Pomegranates, Precious Light, etc.*
- \* Dov Baer of Lubavitch (1774–1827):  
Russian Hasidic kabbalist. Son of Shne'ur Zalman. Wrote *Tract on Ecstasy*.
- \* Dov Baer of Mezhirech (d. 1772):  
Hasidic leader and kabbalist scholar. Teachings in *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov*.
- \* Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (ca. 1165–1230):  
German scholar. Wrote *Roke'ah and The Secret of Secrets*.
- Isaac the Blind (ca. 1160–1235):  
Described as 'the father of the Kabbalah'; wrote commentary to *Sefer Yezirah*.
- \* Israel ben Eliezer [Ba'al Shem Tov] (1700–60):  
Founder of East European Hasidism (criticized for "enthusiasm").
- \* Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935):  
From Latvia; Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel (wrote *The Lights of Holiness*).
- \* Isaac ben Solomon Luria [the Ari] (1534–72):  
Egyptian kabbalist. Wrote commentary on *The Book of Concealment*.
- \* Moses ben Shem Tov de Leon (ca. 1240–1305):  
Spanish kabbalist. Wrote *Mystical Midrash, foundation for the Zohar*.
- \* Rebi Nahman of Bratslav (1772–1811):  
Controversial Ukrainian zaddick. Followers are called "the dead Hasidism."
- \* Philo (ca. 20–50 B.C.E.):  
Hellenistic Jewish philosopher (reconciled early Greek and Jewish teachings).
- \* Shne'ur Zalman of Lyady (1745–1813):  
Founder of Habad Hasidism. Wrote *Likkutet Amarim*, its principle text.
- \* Simeon Bar Yohai (2nd C.):  
Moses de Leon attributed the *Zohar* to him (central writings of the Kabbalah).
- Hayyim ben Joseph Vital (1542–1620):  
Syrian Jewish kabbalist. Wrote *Tree of Life* and *The Book of Visions*.
- \* Quoted. Also quoted: Martin Buber, Shmelke of Nikolsburg, and Yehiel Mikhal of Zlotchov.

### **Some prominent mystics of Christianity**

*(BCE/CE, Common Era, are BC/AD) [23 quotes from 20 mystics]:*

- \* Saint Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–74):  
One of the greatest Catholic theologians (gained union very late in his life).
- \* Saint Athanasius (ca. 296–373):  
Bishop of Alexandria; church father. Wrote *On the Incarnation; Life of Antony*.
- \* Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430):  
Convert from Neoplatonism (mystical insights and later doctrines conflicted).

- \* Augustine Baker (1575–1641):  
Influential Benedictine (English exile). Wrote *Holy Wisdom (Sancta Sophia)*.
- \* Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153):  
Monastic reformer and mystical writer (Cistercian abbot and crusader).
- Jakob Boehme (1575–1624):  
German Lutheran writer. Claimed direct divine inspiration for *Aurora*.
- \* Saint Catherine of Genoa (1447–1510):  
Worked in a hospital in Genoa. Wrote *Dialogues on the Soul and the Body*.
- \* Dionysius [Pseudo-Dionysius](ca. 500):  
Converted by Paul [Syrian monk?] Wrote *Mystical Theology* among others.
- \* Meister Johannes Eckhart (ca. 1260–1327):  
German theologian/preacher of Dominican Order. Extremely influential.
- \* George Fox (1624–91):  
(English) founder of the Society of Friends (Quakers). Wrote his *Journal*.
- St. Gregory I ‘the Great’ (ca. 540–604):  
Elected Pope from 590. Wrote *Pastoral Care, Commentary on Job* and others.
- \* Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89):  
Cappadocian father. Wrote *Theological Orations* and *Philocalia of Origen*.
- \* Saint Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330–95):  
Cappadocian father. Wrote *Catechetical Orations, Life of Moses* and others.
- Saint Gregory Palamas (ca. 1296–1359):  
Greek Orthodox archbishop. Wrote *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts*.
- \* Bede Griffiths (1907–93):  
Benedictine monk; prior of ashram in India. Wrote *Marriage of East and West*.
- \* Saint John of the Cross (1542–91):  
Founder of the Discalced Carmelites. Wrote *Dark Night of the Soul* and others.
- \* Nicholas of Cusa (ca. 1400–64):  
German Christian philosopher; made a cardinal. Wrote *De Docta Ignorantia*.
- \* Saint Jan van Ruysbroek [Ruusbroec] (1293–1381):  
Flemish Christian mystic. Wrote *The Spiritual Espousals*.
- \* Henry Suso (ca. 1295–1366):  
German Dominican monk. Wrote *Little Books of Truth and Eternal Wisdom*.
- \* Saint Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022):  
Byzantine mystic; Abbot at St. Mamas in Constantinople (Istanbul).
- \* Saint Teresa of Avila (1515–82):  
Spanish Carmelite abbess. Wrote the *Interior Castle* and her *Autobiography...*
- \* Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724–83):  
Russian Orthodox bishop and mystical writer (revered by Dostoevsky).
- \* Quoted. Also quoted: Angela of Foligno, Maximus the Confessor and Simone Weil.

### **Some prominent mystics of Islam**

*(subtract ca. 622 years for the Islamic calendar) [23 quotes from 19 mystics]:*

- Abd al-Karim al-Jili (ca. 1365–1412):  
Mystic (taught in Baghdad). Wrote *The Perfect Man*, referring to Muhammad.
- \* Abu Yazid al-Bistami [Bayazid of Bistun] (d. 875):  
Persian ascetic (saint). Wrote nothing, but much quoted by Sufis.
- \* Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058–1111):  
Master of jurisprudence. Wrote *Revival of the Religious Sciences*.
- \* Abu ‘l-Mughith al-Husain b. Mansur al-Hallaj (857–922):  
Controversial Iraqi Sufi (saint). Wrote *Kitab al-Tawasin*.

- Abu 'l-Qasim al-Junaid (d. 910):  
(Saint) Laid the foundations for much of the development of “sober Sufism.”
- Farid al-Din Attar (d. 1229):  
Persian mystical poet. Wrote *Language of Birds*, *Divine Book* and others.
- \* Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri (d. 859):  
Egyptian spiritual head of Sufis of his time. Leading authority on ma'rifa.
- \* Hajji Bektash Vali (12th C.):  
Founder of Turkish Derwish order, controversial Shi'ite sufi.
- Hasan al-Basri (632–728):  
One of the influential Sufis, regarded third master after Muhammad and 'Ali.
- \* Muhyi al-Din Ibn (al-) 'Arabi (1165–1240):  
Great Sufi (saint). Wrote *Meccan Revelations*, *Bezels of Wisdom*, etc.
- Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1876–1938):  
Poet of Lahore (saint). Wrote *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.
- \* Jalal al-Din Rumi [Mawlana] (1207–73):  
Great mystic poet (saint). Wrote *Poems of Shams-i-Tabriz* and many others.
- \* Mawlana Nur al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman Jami (1414–92):  
Afghan Sufi poet. Wrote *The Seven Thrones* among many others.
- \* Rabi'a al-Adawiyya (ca. 713–801):  
Outstanding female Sufi (saint) (important proponent of selfless love of God).
- \* Quoted. Also quoted: Hazreti 'Ali, Khwaja Mir Dard, Hazrat Inayat Khan, Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, Nawab Jan-Fishan Khan, Abu-Sai'd Abi'l Khayr, Sharafuddin Maneri, Rauf Mazari, Pahlawan-i-aif, and Mahmud Shabestari.

Note: Listings were extracted from the Oxford Concise Dictionary of World Religions.

*All Hindus and Buddhists should follow the mystical quest and most believe in divine law, divine justice, rebirth, and eventual liberation, but their approach and doctrines are very different, with many variations among their schools.*

### **Some prominent mystics of Hinduism**

*(this aeon, or yuga, began 3102 B.C.E.) [23 quotes from 12 mystics]:*

- Abhinavagupta (960–1050):  
Theologian of Kashmir Shaivism. Wrote *Light on Tantra* and on aesthetics.
- \* Anandamayi Ma [Nirmala Sundari Devi] (1896–1982):  
She attained union at age 18 without aid of scriptures or guru.
- \* Sri Aurobindo [Aurobindo Ghose] (1872–1950):  
Founded ashram in Pondicherry. Wrote *The Life Divine* and others.
- \* Badarayana (1st C. B.C.E./4th C. C.E.):  
First propounded the basic teaching of Vedanta in the *Bhramasutra*.
- \* Basava [Basavanna] (ca. 1106–67):  
Founder of Lingayata, known as Virashaivism. The body is the true temple.
- \* Sri Krishna C(h)aitanya (ca. 1485–1533):  
(Maratha Saint) Major influence on development of devotion to Krishna.
- \* Jnanesvar [Jnanadeva] (1275–96):  
At age 15 wrote *The Lamp of Plain Meaning*, revered in Marathi literature.
- \* Kanada [Kanabhuj] (ca. 2nd C. B.C.E.):  
Founded Vaishesika system. Developed atomic theory of nature.

- \* Lalla [Lal Ded] (14th C.):  
Shaivite poetess. Her sayings are loved in Kashmir by Hindus and Muslims.
- \* Madhva [Madhvacarya] (ca. 1238–1317):  
Founder of Vaishnava school; proponent of dualism (dvaitavedanta).
- \* Manikavacakar (ca. 9th C.):  
Tamil poet and Shaivite saint; one of Nayanmars. Wrote *Sacred Utterances*.
- \* Mirabai [Meera] (ca. 1498–1546):  
Unconventional woman whose songs of Krishna are popular in much of India.
- \* Nimbarka (ca. 12th C.):  
Founder of Vaishnava sect; wrote commentary on the *Vedanta Sutra*.
- \* Patanjali (ca. 2nd C.):  
Reputed author of the *Yoga Sutra*, a systematic presentation of classical yoga.
- \* Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975):  
Hindu philosopher and President of India 1962–67. Wrote many books.
- \* Ramakrishna (1836–86):  
(Saint) Some English-educated Bengalis saw him as an avatar.
- \* Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950):  
Attained union at age 17. (Great saint of South India; idealized by Carl Jung).
- \* Ramananda (ca. 1360–1470):  
Founder of Vaishnavite Ramanandi (Maratha Saint); Kabir was his disciple.
- \* Ramanuja (ca. 12th C.):  
Source of Visistadvaita-vedanta school, qualified non-dualism.
- \* Ram(a)prasad (18th C.):  
Saint and poet of Bengal; devoted to Kali.
- \* Ravi Das [Raidas] (ca. 15th C.):  
Saint and poet. The *Adi Granth* (Sikh scripture) contains 40 of his hymns.
- \* Sahajanaanda Swami [Lord Swaminarayan] (1781–1830):  
Follower of Ramanuja; regarded as an avatar of Vishnu.
- \* Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918):  
Some Hindus regarded him as an avatar (many Muslims consider him a saint).
- \* S(h)ankara [Sankaracarya] (788–820):  
Proponent of Advaita Vedanta (monism). One of the most influential Hindus.  
Sankaradeva (1449–1569):  
Spread Vaishnava movement in Assam. Used music, dance and drama.
- \* S(h)ivananda (1887–1963):  
(Exponent of Japa) Founder of the Divine Life Mission, branches worldwide.
- \* Sri Harsa (1125–80):  
Great logician. Wrote *Khandanakhandakhadya*. Method parallels Nagarjuna.
- \* Tukaram (ca. 1607–49):  
Hindu poet (Maratha Saint). Wrote 7,000 verses, devotional and practical.
- \* Tulsidas [Tulasidas] (1532–1623):  
Poet devotee of Rama (Maratha Saint). Wrote *Holy Lake of Deeds of Rama*.  
Vallabha (1473–1531):  
Taught Suddahadvaita (non-duality) Vedanta; atman and Brahman are united.
- \* Vidyaranya [Madhvacarya] (14th C.):  
Philosopher of Advaita Vedanta. Wrote *Pancadasa*, its basic work.  
Vivekananda (1863–1902):  
Founded Ramakrishna Mission; taught Ramakrishna and Vedanta worldwide.  
Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952):  
Founder of Self-Realization Fellowship in the U.S.A. Advocated kriya-yoga.
- \* Quoted. Also quoted: Amritanandamayi Ma and Swami Nikhilananda.

## Some prominent mystics of Buddhism

(adopts local calendars; time is insignificant) [23 quotes from 20 mystics]:

- Asanga (4th C.):  
Founded Yogacara/Vijnanavada school of idealism; wrote monumental works.
- \* Asvaghosa [Ashvagoshā] (2nd C.):  
(Indian Mahayana philosopher) Wrote *The Acts of the Buddha* and others.
- \* Bodhidharma (5th C.):  
Indian first patriarch of Ch'an in China. Emphasized dhyana (absorption).
- Buddhadasa (1905–1993):  
Thai influential Buddhist scholar; removed myths from traditional beliefs.
- \* Buddhaghosa (4th C.):  
Wrote *The Way of Purity*, vital in understanding post-canonical Buddhism.
- Chinul (1158–1210):  
Reformed Son (Ch'an); revitalized Buddhism in Korea. Integrated lineages.
- Dalai Lama [Tenzin Gyatso] (b. 1935):  
14th Dalai Lama dating from 1391. Won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.
- \* Zenji Dogen Kigen (1200–53):  
Founded Soto Zen in Japan. Wrote *The Treasury of the Eye of True Dharma*.
- \* Fa-Tsang [Hsien-shou] (643–712):  
Third patriarch and major organizer of Hua-yen school of Chinese Buddhism.
- \* Huang-po Hsi-yun [Obaku Kiun] (d. 850):  
Ch'an/Zen master. His teachings are in *Chu'an-hsin-fa-yao*.
- \* Hui-neng [Eno] (638–713):  
Sixth patriarch of Ch'an. Wrote *Platform Sutra*; depicted as tearing up sutras.
- Lin-chi I-hsuan (d. 867):  
Outstanding Chinese master; founded the Zen Lin-chi line (Rinzai-shu).
- \* Milarepa [Mi-la Ras-pa] (1043–1123):  
Instrumental in founding Kagyu; he remains exemplary to many Tibetans.
- Nagarjuna (ca. 150–250):  
Founded Madhyamaka; very influential. Wrote *Mula-Madhyamaka-Karika*.
- \* Ratnakarasanti [Santi] (11–12th C.):  
Philosopher; wrote commentaries on *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras and others.
- Saicho [Dengyo Daishi] (767–822):  
Japanese monk; founded Tendai. Wrote *Superlative Passages of Lotus Sutra*.
- Santaraksita (705–88):  
Indian philosopher in Tibet. Wrote *Compendium of Reality* and others.
- \* Santideva (8th C.):  
Poet of Madhyamaka. Wrote *Entering the Path of Enlightenment* and others.
- \* Seng-ts'an [Sosan] (d. 606):  
Third patriarch of Ch'an/Zen in China. Wrote *Inscribed on the Believing Mind*.
- \* Daisetz Taitaro Suzuki (1870–1966):  
Professor of Buddhist Philosophy. Known in the West for his writings on Zen.
- \* Te-shan Hsuan-chien [Tokusan Senkan] (782–865):  
After satori, burned his beloved writings on the Diamond Sutra.
- Tsong Khapa (1357–1419):  
Founded Geluk school in Tibet. Wrote *The Great Graduated Path* and others.
- \* Quoted. Also quoted: Lama Govinda, Hui-Hai, Nisargadatta, Saraha, Shutaku, Shunryu Suzuki, and Yung-chia Ta'shieh.

Note: Listings were extracted from the Oxford Concise Dictionary of World Religions



## *Mystic viewpoints*

There are matters which are important within most religions' orthodoxy, to their leaders and to many followers, but are viewed differently by mystics. Mysticism often interprets them based on their effects in aiding or impeding search for union with the divine.

**Evil and deliverance.** Many orthodox religions personify evil as Satan, the Devil, Iblis, Mara, or other demonic forces. Most mystics hold us responsible for our own evils, not an external source. Some say that evil exists only in rejection or lack of awareness of good, or to balance good in the apparent dualities of this life...not in unitive eternal life. Mystics have to eliminate personal wrongs to realize divine oneness. Deliverance comes by overcoming the selfishness of our egos, ignorance of our minds and stubbornness of our senses.

*The customs, worship, practices,  
and behavior within the mainstream of  
religions frequently conflicted*

**Sin and atonement.** Christianity believes humans are born in sin because of the fall of Adam. Sin within Islam is an offense against God; in Judaism it is rejecting God's will. Buddhism and Hinduism believe that the consequences of sin can be carried over from our past life. Most mystics say that each of us is born with the essence of the divine; sin is our separation from the divine, ignoring or not seeking our soul. Mystics view atonement as accepting *at-one-ment*; it is reuniting with our soul and the One divine essence in All.

**Messiahs and salvation.** Messiahs are said to be those who can liberate or save their faithful. Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, and Rama in their religion may be considered messiahs. Many within Judaism believe that a future messiah will bring God's kingdom to Earth to save its people. Few mystics had claimed to be messianic and most rejected such claims by their followers. We must liberate ourselves by transcending our *self*; our salvation is actualizing divine union.

**Prophets, messengers and incarnations.** Buddhist mystics may venerate Buddha, arhants, bodhisattvas, or others who had realized or neared enlightenment. Christian mystics are devoted to Jesus Christ and admire the apostles who spread his Word. Hindu mystics adhere to teachings of Krishna, Rama and/or other manifestations of Brahman. Islamic mystics said that Muhammad was the Perfect Man, who taught the secret of true Reality underlying Allah. Jewish mystics are in awe of Moses as their paragon and honor many other biblical prophets. Although mystics revere these perfect exemplars, most believe that each person must seek their own unity with the divine, perhaps with guidance from teachers in this life.

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