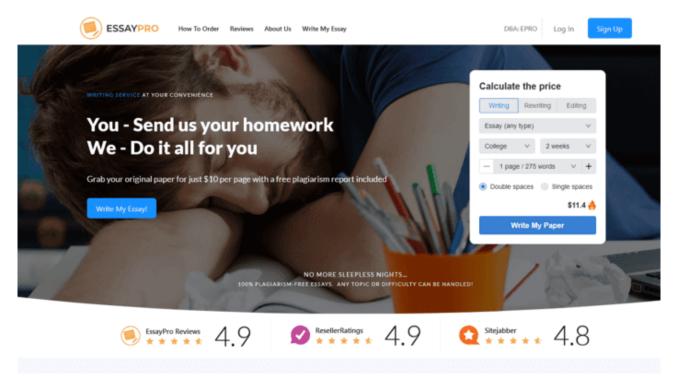
Knowing God: Mysticism in Christianity and Other Religions



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Knowing God: Mysticism in Christianity and Other Religions
Mysticism, mystic experiences, and encounters with the divine are important—and even integral—to many religions throughout the world. Mysticism, defined as experiencing the divine, should have a special importance in Christianity. Christianity posits a God who is transcendent, yet immanent, and as Christians we believe we can have a relationship with the Deity. Because of this we should have a unique conception of mystical experiences as significant to our spiritual lives.
I will begin by giving an overview of mysticism in other religious traditions—Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto, Islam, and Judaism—and then concentrate on the role that mysticism and experience should have in Christianity.
Non-Christian Religions
Buddhism

In Buddhism, one seeks salvation from pain, which is caused by desire; so one seeks a state of absence from desire. This is achieved through meditation and the "Noble Eightfold Way of mental and moral discipline: right views, resolve, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration." It is a timeless state, and is spoken of as "becoming Brahman" and entering into Nirvana. The absence of desire necessitates a certain amount of separation from the world and a constancy of mind that is not found in the normal clamor of daily life.

Hinduism

Hinduism has a pluralism of gods, but in the Bhagavad <u>Gita</u>, a sacred text of Hinduism, Vishnu is proclaimed supreme and the Gita is almost monotheistic in its tone. According to Geoffrey Parrinder, the Bhagavad Gita "teaches union with God, but in the context of love to God and love from God...." Meditation is the chief method of achieving experience of or unity with the deity, as prescrib...

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...g God and experiencing him in his fullness, and we would do well to appreciate and appropriate from that heritage.

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