

Chapter Outline

The Three Paths of Ecstasy follows the journey of the spiritual seeker. Part One discusses the initial stages of inquiry about and initiation into a Mystery school. Parts Two to Four take the reader through the work of the initiate in each of the three paths. Part Five is a brief discussion of the advanced stage of adeptness. Each Part concludes with questions and answers from Nisarg's students.

Introduction

Swami Anand Nisarg begins *The Three Paths of Ecstasy* this way:

Life is the greatest Mystery. The goal of being human is not to understand that Mystery. Mystery is Mystery and Mystery it shall always be. Instead, to be human is to have an opportunity, perhaps unique out of all the infinite combinations of existence, to fully enter into that Mystery and become One with it.... [The answer to the question of the purpose of life] lies in the works of the great Mystery Schools, the secret and not so secret orders of mystics, magicians, and holy people that can be found in one form or another in every religion or spirituality.... And while all outer religions are different, all the inner schools of mystics are ultimately the same, teaching the same fundamental truth. The truth is that all life, all existence is a great Mystery. Each one of us is part of this Mystery. This is the shared truth which I call "Universal Mysticism."

Although the symbolism used in different schools will differ, virtually every school of mysticism puts a value in the number three. In Nisarg's school the trinity is the paths of Anand, Prem, and Deva.

Questions and Answers¹

Why classify Universal Mysticism into three schools? If the Mystery is One, why do you speak of three paths?

Part I: The Preliminaries of Mysticism

Chapter One: The Foundation

Nisarg asks readers to examine their real motives for studying the mystical. He draws on his esoteric knowledge of the Tarot and exoteric knowledge of Maslow's psychological hierarchy of needs to help readers assess whether they are ready or willing to embark on the journey. There are many wrong reasons for pursuing the mystical. The only right one comes from the heart.

Chapter Two: The Three Principles of the Universe

Nisarg warns against memorizing his teachings or having faith that they are true. Instead, like all mystics, he emphasizes knowing the truth of what he teaches through personal experience. He then summarizes the three broad paths of Universal Mysticism through which the traveller may experience the Mystery: Truth or the bliss of simplicity and naturalness, Love or a sense of oneness and compassion with everything, and Being or an ability to be free of the desires and restrictions of the ego.

¹ The chapter summary contains only the questions in each Question and Answer section. The book includes the answers.

Chapter Three: The Two Means

Without having already walked the mystical path, does the reader have any experience that will allow him to trust that the Mystery is indeed real? Chapter Three answers this question by mentioning two ways: remembrance and celebration. Most people may actually have experienced the first means – remembrance – perhaps as a feeling of being completely free and escaping self as a child, riding a bike, walking in a forest, or playing a game. This feeling is a remembrance of the true state of humanity as part of the Divine. Buddhists call this *sammasati*, or remembering that everyone is a Buddha. The second means is celebration of true rather than conditioned self. People may have experienced this falling away of ego or conditioned self in dance, song or some other creative expression.

Chapter IV: Human and Divine Power

Too often the accomplishments of yogis or fakirs are mistaken for mystical powers. In reality they are only tapping into the potential that all humans possess. Chapter Four states that the path of the mystic is not about developing human potential but about preparing to accept divine power, greater than all human potential. Sufi poets like Omar Khayyam use the analogy of the empty gourd waiting to be filled with divine wine.

Chapter V: The significance of Initiation, Masters, and Mystery Schools

After describing ‘the what’ and ‘the why’ of mysticism, Chapter Five begins to describe ‘the how’. Initiation into a Mystery School by a true Master is the beginning of the journey. A Master is both an example of one who has experienced the Mystery and a

gate through which an initiate can find the Mystery within herself. The only way to find a Master is to step out of the head and listen to the heart. An initiate does not choose a Master, the Master chooses the initiate.

Chapter VI: Entering the Mystery School

Initiation marks entry into a Mystery School. This chapter describes the outward process of initiation or *Sannyas*, the term used in the Eastern mystery school of which Nisarg is an initiate. It is a physical transfer of energy or essence from the Master to the student. The Sufis called this *Baraka*. The internal experience of this is unique to each individual. Nisarg therefore relates only his own experience. There may be rules or traditions for initiates unique to each mystery school. In Nisarg's school these include a new name that reveals the initiate's path into the Mystery and a particular element of that path unique to the initiate. Nisarg calls a mystery school an alchemical laboratory where the student and teacher work together to transform the student into a pure vessel for the Mystery. Each student uses methods designed specifically for that student.

Chapter VII: Summary: What to Do?

If the seeker feels ready to commit to the path of the mystic and wants to seek out a Master and Mystery School, how should that seeker proceed? Because every Mystery School and Master is unique to its time and place there are no ironclad rules to follow, only the truth of the heart. However there are some things to consider. Is there a set curriculum or formula used for each student? Is the school asking for money in exchange for a title? Is it a comfortable place to be? If so, this school may not be appropriate,

Change only occurs with discomfort or dissatisfaction! The reader may wish to consider the reading of this book as a first step into Nisarg's Mystery School.

Chapter VIII: Questions and Answers

What is the role of asceticism in a Mystery School? What is the difference between religions and Mystery Schools? Are children better Mystics? I'm afraid to trust a Master because of all the stories of 'corrupt gurus', what to do? Why can't a Master just take care of his students' problems for them? Why would a Master want to be controversial? Is it possible to work in a Mystery School over the mail or the internet? Can I make the journey to enlightenment without a Master?

Chapter IX: Setting Foot on the Path

In and around a Mystery School there will be seven degrees or types of people: four varieties of non-initiates, and three varieties of initiates. Chapter Nine moves from the view of the non-initiate outside of the Mystery School to the perspective of the initiate within the School. Regardless of which of the three paths an initiate follows, there will be general work common to all. Nisarg advises that although the reader will inevitably feel an affinity for one path, he should read with an open heart and taste the flavour of each. With initiation comes the inevitability of awakening. It may take a short while or many lifetimes, but the first step means that there will be a last step.

Part II: The Path of Bliss ("Anand")

Chapter X: The definition of Bliss

Ordinary definitions of 'bliss', 'truth', 'love', 'divinity', or 'being' do not apply. For example, the bliss experienced by those walking the path of Anand comes from the experience of truth, not through any attempts to be happy. Anand people are head people, cut off from themselves and the Mystery by their mind, the complexity of their thoughts and what they think to be the truth. The joy of Anand will come from the letting go of complexity and relaxing into naturalness. In Hindu teachings, this is the path of Sat-Chit-Anand or Truth-Consciousness-Bliss. Simplicity, truthfulness, and courage are required on this path.

Chapter XI: The Nature of Anand

Anands are the intellectuals. Their illness is complexity. Their mind currently keeps them apart from the Mystery but will enable them to perceive the mystery. For instance, Anands may have had a spontaneous experience of romantic love. After this first true experience, their minds will try to imitate, by forcing this memory back onto any future romantic encounters. They must learn to detach from the idea that what the mind creates is real if they wish to witness real experiences. Buddhist schools call this 'pure mind'. Anands do not need the complication of metaphysics or spiritual systems but rather catharsis and silence. The real joy will come from the gradual relaxing into life without complexity. It is the joy of being true self, of being natural.

Chapter XII: Issues and Methods of Anand

Fear keeps all humans apart from the Mystery. However, fear manifests itself differently for each path. For Anands it is the fear of annihilation, the fear that they are no longer in control of their own destiny. Through their methods, they will come to realize that they are not, and never were, in control. Over-analysis will hinder success in following the methods. Chapter XII first describes the common elements of all methods used in the School – catharsis or release and meditation. It then goes on to describe the methods for the Anand which are designed to replace complexity with simplicity, to dispel the illusion of control and to move towards the experience of the whole self (heart, body, energy), not just the mind.

Chapter XIII: The Mystery Through the Backdoor

This chapter details one category of methods designed to trick the mind into thinking it can indeed use rational methods to unravel the Mystery. The first is the method of self-inquiry used by Ramana Maharishi in his Mystery School: continually ask the question “who am I?”. This deceptively simple and rational question will eventually lead to a non-rational break. To be effective it requires constant and ongoing work, something that would be very difficult without the motivation provided by Master and a school. Zen Koans operate in the same manner. Such metaphysical systems as Kabbalah, Astrology, Alchemy and especially the Tarot can be useful on this path. However these methods will only be effective if practiced diligently over a long period of time.

Chapter XIV: Counter-Intellectual Methods

The second category of methods is physical. Rather than working with the mind, these methods ignore it completely. The twentieth century mystic Gurdjieff had the students of his Mystery School dig a ditch for six hours, refill it and then dig again, sometimes for weeks on end. Methods beyond the level of purely physical labour are those that have meditational elements but concern themselves with the body. These active meditations are another way of releasing the tension of the body, and the noise of the mind. Passive meditations used in Buddhism were designed for a culture in which people were trained to meditate from childhood. Nisarg states that these are not suitable for beginners brought up in the busyness and noise of Western culture. Dance followed by silence would be a simple example of an active meditation. When ready, an Anand could move on to, for example, Yoga, Qi Gong, Tai Chi, or Aikido.

Chapter XV: Methods of Opening

These advanced methods cleanse, purify, and prepare self to accept the Mystery. They work with anger and with love. They help open the deepest level of self and remove any blocks to the Mystery. Both Gurdjieff and Jesus said in different ways that one must remove the conditioning of childhood, before it is possible to be fully open to the Mystery.

Chapter XVI: Death, the Ultimate Method

The ultimate fear for Anands is death, which they cannot control. This chapter explains the Mystic's understanding of reincarnation using the Buddha's metaphor of a lit candle dying out and passing on its flame to the next candle. It describes various

meditations on death with the purpose of accepting death as unavoidable, natural, and right. The *Bardo Thodol*, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, outlines one of the most powerful meditation techniques on death. Its purpose is to assist facing death consciously without fear.

Chapter XVII: Questions and Answers

What are the conclusions about the path of Anand, what is essential, and what is non-essential? What is the difference between bliss and pleasure? What is the connection between the meditations on opening the heart and those on death? Can an Anand work without a Master? How can I best help people? If seeking itself must ultimately be dropped, why seek at all? Where does the bliss come in? What is the value of gaining truth?

Part III: The Path of Love ("Prem")

Chapter XVIII: Love and Union

The Path of the Prem is Love. Mystics define love as uniting with the Divine or the Mystery. It is the realization that there has always been a bond between self and all other existence. This realization brings about transformation. Love is a force, not an emotion, and the purest vehicle of the Mystery. Buddhists use the term Metta or loving-kindness to describe the mystical idea of love.

Chapter XIX: The Nature of Prem

Premis are entanglement or relationship junkies. Their illness is depending on the rest of the world to give them a sense of worth. They are emotionally disconnected from the Mystery and seek to replace that lost internal source with substitute external sources. The goal of the Prem is to experience the love of the Mystery as unconditional; it does not have to be earned. With this knowing, comes true love and compassion for others. Premis must learn to cultivate openness, trust, and devotion. Devotion is a large part of the path of the Prem. What appears to be worship of the Master to an outsider is actually devotion. Unlike worship, which emphasizes the difference between self and the object of worship, the purpose of devotion is to unite to or feel a sense of oneness with first the Master, then with the Universe and ultimately with self. Love means union.

Chapter XX: Prem Methods

Whereas the primary catharsis for an Anand is intellectual, for a Prem it is emotional. A Prem must learn to accept true self without conditions. One simple preliminary exercise is to feel and look at everything in the morning upon waking. Another important method for the Prem is to find an artistic means of expressing the love of the universe. This could be through painting, sculpture, dance, music, or writing.

Chapter XXI: Ecstasy and Expression

Ecstasy holds an important place in Mysticism and particularly on the path of the Prem. It is the experience of the bliss of losing self within the Mystery. Poets have described it as being drunk on the Divine. Such an experience creates certainty of a force beyond any normal state of being. However, this experience is not the goal but only the

beginning of movement towards union. Although drugs produce a state of ecstasy, their usefulness is limited and can be dangerous unless done under the guidance of an accomplished Master within a specific tradition. Meditation, dance such as Sufi whirling, and the vibrational quality of music can also produce ecstasy. Again the guidance of a Master in knowing when and how to use some of these techniques is necessary. Hazrat Inayat Khan, a twentieth century Sufi master focused exclusively on the method of music within his Mystery School.

Chapter XXII: Tantra

The most famous and most misunderstood method for the path of Prem is Tantra. In and of itself, Tantra has nothing to do with sex-magic or sex-meditation but rather the energy of love. It deals with opening to the unity of the Mystery and hence involves breaking down personal barriers and finding the Mystery in all phenomena. This requires opening to all dimensions and experiences including sex and death. The purpose of meditations on sex and death is to understand self as part of the force of nature. An example of a Tantric meditation is to simply practice awareness of breath throughout all activities of the day. The *Vigyan Bhairav Tantra*, an original Tantric scripture, is one source of guidance.

Chapter XXIII: Bhakti Yoga and Devotion

Bhakti and Guru Yoga² are two very similar yoga systems that belong to the Path of Prem. In Bhakti Yoga, one practices devotion to God or the Mystery of the Universe itself. In Guru Yoga, one practices devotion to the Master as an embodiment of the

²Yoga means union.

Mystery. Again Nisarg discusses the difference between worship (which involves seeking something in return, perhaps salvation) and devotion (which is love for the sake of love). Worship is a projection of self onto the Divine. Devotion is a receptivity or openness to the Love of the Mystery; it is love without conditions. Those outside the mystery school often mistake devotion for control or manipulation. This chapter discusses devotional practices with the purpose of eventually experiencing a personal God or Master as Love. The most significant guide for a non-initiate interested in Bhakti Yoga is the Bhakti Sutras of Narada.

Chapter XXIV: Beyond Devotion: Metta

There comes a point in devotional practice where Prems may reach unity with the object of their devotion; there is no longer 'self' or 'the other', only oneness. The next step, the transcendence of devotion, is to create that unity with all things. This is the purpose of the Metta or Love Sutra of the Buddhists. It is an advanced technique used after a long period of cleansing or catharsis and devotional and meditational practice with a Master. In modern times this sutra has been misunderstood. Nisarg gives his interpretation of the Sutra and describes how to use it.

Chapter XXV: Service as a Method

Chapter XXV challenges the teachings of a variety of religions that emphasize alms-giving or service as a spiritual discipline. Service must come as an authentic expression of Love, not from a desire for personal or spiritual gain, fame, approval or a feeling of superiority. Charitable acts do not make a person wonderful. They come naturally when the Mystery works through an open heart. This is true compassion and

caring. It is an expression of awareness of the unity with all. Charity to another is charity to oneself. There is no judgement or attempt to fix, simply an attempt to help others help themselves. Here Nisarg also discusses reasons for having children and the ways to raise children as potential Buddhas.

Chapter XXVI: Questions and Answers

Isn't it possible to be devoted to love itself, instead of a guru? Should those starting on the path of Prem avoid social activism and acts of charity? Is there such a thing as 'service' within the Mystery School? How do I learn to trust love? How do I trust that love is a real experience? Is Sufi whirling only good for men? Can you practice expression through 'music appreciation'? Is there any point in trying to change the world?

Part IV: The Path of Divine Being ("Deva")

Chapter XXVII: Definition of Deva

The literal meaning of 'Deva' is God. It is better, however, to title the path of God as the path of divine being or God-consciousness. The task of those who walk this path is the fulfillment of their absolute being or their true nature, which is the Mystery itself. Devas are the world's nonconformists: artists, hippies, dropouts. Their failing is impatience with their current understanding of existence. They are looking for escape. Unlike the other two paths, the path of the Deva is not about methods but about being.

There are very few general statements to make about them. Nisarg concludes this chapter with a reminder that as well as the three broad paths into the mystery there is also a specific way of walking that path unique to each individual.

Chapter XXVIII: Faces of Deva

Devas are outsiders, essentially anti-social. They create masks in order to fit in, to survive. The goal of a Deva is to drop the struggle, the mask, and accept her own unique individuality. The faces of the Deva are many. Playing the fool is one way of avoiding conformity. The joker plays along with society's expectations but refuses to take them seriously; he prefers to point out their absurdity. The rebel says no to any expectations placed on them. As a warrior, a Deva has an acceptable means of expressing anger at the world. Behind each of these masks is the divine aspect that is the true nature of the Deva, waiting to be discovered.

Chapter XXIX: The Nature of Deva

The illness of Devas is isolation. They are aware of the Mystery everywhere except themselves. More than the others, they are aware of what Hindus and Buddhists call *maya*. They see the preoccupations of the world as illusion, non-essential, and meaningless. They know the world is *leela*, a game, and don't want to play. Unlike Prems and Anands, they have more direct awareness of the mystery and suffer because they cannot see it in themselves. Their goal is to play the game of life, to become fully immersed in it rather than trying to escape it. The Master's role is to enable the Deva to

fully realize her oneness with the Mystery. With this realization, she will be more capable than a Prem or Anand of following his path by himself.

Chapter XXX: Deva's Methods

The central feature of any Deva method is transcendence, to move beyond life by moving deeply into and through it. This requires meditateness or deep consciousness in all aspects of life. Awareness of the body is extremely important. Yoga is one practice that can assist with this. With body awareness comes a deeper knowledge of its energies and more subtle ways of sensing. It is important to learn this energy work through personal experience, rather than through teaching or reading.

Chapter XXXI: Methods of Extending

Past the physical body and the energetic body is a third body. This Nisarg calls spirit, the Mystery within each person. He compares the body to the hardware or physical vessel, the energy-self or what Hindus call chakras to a receiver and transmitter, and spirit to the transmission itself – the Mystery. The reason for being is to receive and transmit the Mystery. With much time and patience a Deva will begin to sense this force. A Deva will discover that while spirit is within, it is not limited by the dimensions of body. This is what Nisarg means by real spirit journeying. Rather than looking inwards to break the sense of isolation, Deva methods can emphasize outward extension, perhaps towards family or nature. One significant cathartic method is to resolve family issues. Another might involve a physical discipline such as Qi Gong or Tai Chi.

Chapter XXXII: The Arts of Being

Right living is one way of describing the fundamental work and realization of the Deva. With this comes transformation. By right living, Nisarg means more than the Buddhist concept of living in accordance with the Eightfold Path. It is the act of making one's life an expression of the Mystery. Instead of rejecting society as false, the Deva must accept society, play life as a game, and live it as an art with joy and not too much seriousness. Live without seriousness and act in the play of life with mastery. The Taoists were a school that emphasized the path of the Deva into the Mystery through light-heartedness, laughter and the four arts of living. In the Taoist tradition, the arts were often a game such as Chinese chess, a technical art such as calligraphy, a creative art such as brush painting and an expressive art such as music.

Chapter XXXIII: Devas and Masters

For Devas, the Master is a guide to finding the art of being, a deep friend and sometimes an opponent in the game. At first freedom-loving Devas may rebel against structure of any kind but may eventually turn to a Master and a school out of desperation. Once they begin to trust, devotion to the Master will begin to flower and become part of the art of being. Unlike Prems, who will connect to their Master on an emotional level, Devas will have a sense of energetic unity, which they may express through a daily salutation to or connection with the energy of the earth and the Master and a repetition of the Buddhist vows of refuge.

Chapter XXXIV: Devas and World Service

There is one final step for those on the path of Deva. Anands are stuck in their mind; they believe all the answers are there. Premis are stuck in their selves; they cannot see the union of Love. Devas are so self-centred that they are completely isolated from the rest of the human experience. It is not that they don't care about the suffering of others. Rather they tend to see the suffering of others as their own and hence feel responsible for it. This is a trap because they feel they cannot change anything but don't want to give up. Their first step is to reach inward to break down the barrier of isolation and then extend outwards to be of service to others. They must do this on an individual basis, by opening to receiving another person's suffering and in this way transforming it. It is listening to, recognizing, and then addressing a person's needs. The Tibetan Mystery Schools used these methods.

Chapter XXXV: Questions and Answers

How can I tell what my path is? Do Masters ever lie? How many steps are on the path? Is there devotional practice for an Anand? Is there a difference between 'teacher' and 'Master'? Should we give money to the poor? Are you from a specific tradition, or eclectic?

Part V: Beyond the Paths

Part V moves away from the specifics of the three paths and their methods.

Chapter XXXVI: Operating on the Path

Like any good guide book, *The Three Paths of Ecstasy* provides tips and signposts for the traveller. It is the heart, not the mind that will determine readiness for initiation. Do not be frustrated in meditation about straying thoughts – just let them be. Accept any doubts about trusting or loving your Master. Patience, practice and acceptance of self are the keys to these problems. Everything has a purpose – whatever happens after initiation has meaning. Most importantly, trust rather than attempt to understand experiences.

Chapter XXXVII: The Side-Paths

The three paths of the Mystery are broad and inclusive. However, there are some people who, for various reasons, belong to specialized paths within the broader paths. For instance, the path of Alok (light) is a side path of Anand. Those who walk this path must understand that truth is in everything. Other side paths are Chaitanya (consciousness): Das (service) – a side path of Prem focusing completely on service: Dhyan (meditation): Jivan (life) – a side-path of Deva focusing on body-acceptance: Satya (truth): Vedant (the end of knowledge): Veet (beyond): Yoga, Tao, and others. The point of this list is to help the reader understand that there is an infinite variety within the three main paths. Each individual will discover the Mystery by his or her own unique means.

Chapter XXXVIII: The Adepts

With time and effort the initiate may reach adepthood. Meditation will improve. He will be able to enter into deep states of consciousness, experience blissful and ecstatic states, and deep experiences of unity with the Mystery. Over time the adept may learn to create a space for others to experience the Mystery around him. Other unusual abilities may also develop. Ironically these powers and accomplishments may trap the adept in spiritual ego. Further effort cannot take an adept any farther. Awakening or enlightenment can only occur through the grace of the universe when ego is no longer present. At this level, all the adept can do is see his ego, remain open to the Mystery, and wait!

Chapter XXXIX: Questions and Answers

Which is greater, love or God? Aren't surrender and responsibility opposites? Can you say something for me to remember you? What is the proper way to show devotion to a Master? I feel pressured to take initiation, is there another option? Is there something simple we can do which would make an immediate change in the world and ourselves? What is the best way to express the Mystery?

Chapter XL: A Final Note

Swami Anand Nisarg closes *The Three Paths of Ecstasy* with these words:

Do not take what is said in this book literally. Do not assume you understand what is being said. Your own thought processes are a deception and the medium of words is very poor. You must read this book with a high degree of openness to gain even a little from it. Try this. Read the book and then after having made a sincere effort to practice what is in it, read the book a second time after six months. You will find that if you have been

making any progress into the Mystery, it will be a completely different book. The book won't have changed. You will. And remember, if you wish to follow your longing, the book is only the beginning of an even greater journey. Hopefully it will inspire you to push forward and find a teacher and school.