

# A Commentary on the Conclusion on True Mysticism

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In the conclusion of my paper ‘Mysticism in African Traditional Religion and in the Bahá’í Faith’, presented at the Irfán colloquium in London in July 2001\*, I wrote that true mysticism or class one mysticism in the Bahá’í Faith had no parallel in African Traditional Religion. In the light of new information and some more reflection, I modify this conclusion.

To refresh the memory, I defined true mysticism as ‘The ecstatic joy that results from communion with the Souls of the Manifestations leading to physical martyrdom or the living of a life of self-sacrifice and saintliness’. This definition is derived from a statement the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith made in *Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá’í Community*, pp. 406-7, and Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanation of the meaning of sacrifice (see notes 1 and 2 below).

First of all, deducing from the Bahá’í teachings: African Traditional Religion (ATR), like the Bahá’í Faith is divine in origin. This means that a Manifestation or Manifestations of God appeared in Africa, and brought divine teachings. True mysticism, as defined in the Bahá’í teachings, is an eternal truth. Since the Bahá’í Faith teaches that the Manifestations teach essentially the same truth, it can be concluded that the Manifestations who taught the original form of ATR also taught true mysticism. In this light, therefore, true mysticism is found in both ATR and in the Bahá’í Faith.

Deducing from ATR:

According to one scholar, the book entitled “The Sayings of the Ancient One”, purported to have been found in Zimbabwe, shows interesting correspondence to the Four Valleys of Bahá’u’lláh’.

The theme of the Four Valleys is true mysticism, therefore, this book from ATR teaches true mysticism. My previous conclusion can only hold in considering recorded examples in the lives of the adherents, in which case the abundance of recorded exploits of martyrs in Bahá’í literature would have no parallel in recorded ATR literature. However, the absence of records does not prove that no martyrs or true mystics arose in ATR. Besides, the main thrust of the paper was to classify concepts and not to examine the extent to which the adherents have applied these concepts to their lives.

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**NOTES**

\* Ref: *Lights of Irfan*, Book Three, 2002, Pp 155-172

1. The Guardian's statement on true mysticism:

We liken God to the Sun which gives us all our life. So the spirit of God reaches us through the Souls of the Manifestations. We must learn to commune with Their Souls, and this is what the Martyrs seemed to have done, and what brought them such ecstasy of joy that life became nothing. This is the true mysticism, and the secret, inner meaning of life which humanity has at present, drifted so far from. (UD 406-407)

2. *"Sacrifice of life is of two kinds. To be killed for the Cause is not so difficult as to live for it in absolute obedience to the commands of God."* (Abdu'l-Bahá, in SW 5:VIII:6:65)

3. In this brief commentary, I propose another definition of True Mysticism. This definition neither supersedes nor is inferior to the previous one: 'The act of communing with the Souls of the Manifestations of God to such a degree that the communer attains the state of ecstatic joy leading to his physical martyrdom or to his living a life of self-sacrifice and saintliness'.