

MYSTICAL PHENOMENA OF OUR DAY AND THE KABBALAH

HERBERT WEINER

May I begin with a personal word about my own approach, a bit of an apology, perhaps, for this mixture of subjects which I'm offering here; a combination of tendencies to mysticism in our day and parapsychology and Kabbalah, a strange brew to try to cook together, and I want to explain it in this way. I am not a Kabbalist nor am I a scientist in my approach to the Kabbalah.

Kabbalah is very practical. One part deals with how you live through the cycle of the day and the years and the recommendation of the Kabbalah is that the first thing you must think of when you wake up in the morning is that this is not the only world. "There are other worlds as well. If you don't have that basic thought," explained my teacher, "then you're going to go pretty mad on that day and try to grab as much as you can. If this is all there is, you're going to grab and you're going to be sad even as you're grabbing because this is going to come to an end . . ." and so on. I just mentioned that because I was at that moment in a world where no one needed any tests in order to have a sense of the existence of many worlds all intertwined, intervening with each other, and the Kabbalistic scheme is one whereby the image they use is of a series of chains, of links—you move one link and all other links are moving and all of them are just moving that way.

Well, that was that world, but I don't come personally from that world. I come from the outside and I've not been able to be either on the outside of my world where I came from or on the inside of their world, and have become therefore an insider-outsider which has its disadvantages; but the advantage is that I've been trying to translate for people of our world some of the insights gained in this little world.

Now I'd like to begin by an attempt at some definitions, without which we really won't be able to get very far. First, mysticism, and my definition will be short and arbitrary for the simple reason that I have not been able to find any agreement any place in any of the books as to what mysticism is. It has been used to describe the experience of saints,

the experience of psychotics, of those who have ingested peyote mushrooms, and those who are listening to a Bach chorale. We almost began a discussion as to whether mysticism was to be identified with irrationalism, but our chairman stopped it in time. But of course, as you know mysticism is used by many people as another term for the nonsensical, the foolishness, the obscurantism. On the other hand there is the great, wonderful Quaker scholar, Rufus Jones, who defined it as "an immediate, intuitive, experimental knowledge of God." William James offers a much broader criteria by suggesting that the mystic experience is "the overcoming of the usual boundaries between the individual and the Absolute," which would be closer to what would fit into your definition of mysticism. On the other hand, we have a scholar like A. J. Heschel who says "this is precisely what the Biblical type of mysticism would not do; namely, overcome the boundaries between the individual—the ego and the Absolute." This is precisely one of the great sins, you might say. When Isaiah enters into the Temple and when he says "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord," and he has what of course is a mystical experience, visionary and auditory, nevertheless the essence of that mystical experience is not the fading away of his own ego. It is a sense of the mysterious great gap which exists between himself and this awesome Other. Well, I have not been able to choose between them, between any of these definitions, and so arbitrarily I would simply call mystics a group among those who want "more." That doesn't mean all people who want more are mystics, but mystics are among those who always want "more." They want more than is offered them by surface appearances, and surface relationships, and surface prayers. They seek something which appears to them to be deeper, more meaningful, more vital than what's offered by the "outer" layers of reality, and this area of unscientific pragmatic definition will connect us with what's called the Kabbalah, a definition of the Kabbalah.

The Kabbalah in Hebrew is a term which literally means "that which has been received." Specifically, it means the "hidden wisdom" of Judaism. It goes back through many, many centuries.

Let me read a definition of a Kabbalist as to how he would analyze this day, our day. It goes like this:

"So long as the world moves along accustomed paths, so long as there are no wild catastrophes, man can find sufficient substance for his life by contemplating surface events, surface theories and movements of society. He can acquire his inner richness from this external kind of 'property.' But this is not the case when life encounters fiery forces of evil and chaos. Then the 'revealed,' world [by that he means the world we touch and see and deal with, the surface world] begins to totter. Then the man who tries to sustain himself only from the surface

aspects of existence will suffer terrible impoverishment, begin to stagger, then he will feel welling up within himself a burning thirst for that inner substance and vision which transcends the obvious surfaces of existence and remains unaffected by the world's catastrophes. From such inner sources will he seek the waters of joy which can quicken the dry outer skeleton of existence."

This inner source is what in Jewish tradition is called the Kabbalah. It is called the "hidden wisdom" first of all because it's secret; it's not given to everybody. It will be abused and misused and do harm if it is made public, for reasons we may have a chance to discuss later. It is also hidden in the sense that it is something less obvious than the surface laws, texts and historic events. Yesterday morning we began with "the goats and the sheep." I couldn't help but think of the Kabbalistic interpretation which immediately came to me. You know, in the temple, the sacrifices were made up of goats and sheep, and they had precisely the symbolic connotation which you gave them, Dr. Servadio. The sheep were the passive, the believing, the faith element. If anybody has had the experience of seeing a sheep slaughtered, he knows the expression is "like a sheep led to slaughter." If you've ever seen the way an animal just lets itself be slaughtered in a pathetic way—that passive, receiving element of a sheep. The goat, on the other hand, is the aggressive, destructive element. Both were used, and the thought was that everyone has within him a sheep and a goat, both elements, and your ability to become what is called a total kind of vessel which can receive, is if you have the right proportions of sheep and goat within you. If you're all sheep, you will break. If you're all goat, you will live a life of destruction.

But the Kabbalah takes a surface thing like a sacrifice and it says, "What is the hidden meaning of that sacrifice?" It's got to do with the hidden, with the kind of inner workings of our microcosm.

Now, I want to combine what I just quoted from the Kabbalist, with a quote from an underground psychedelic journal of the new movement, the new wave. Quote:

"We live in an age when the crucial connection with the source of all things is in danger of being washed away by the demands of the external world. These contemporary voyagers [the reference is to those who take "trips" with acids and psychedelic drugs] are practicing a ritual as old as human history. Their tradition descends from the ancient practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism and others. From the conception of the Christian ordeal, the forty days in the desert. From the rite of passage of the Sioux warrior. From the mushroom culture of the Aztecs. From the Greek mysteries of Eleusis. What LSD and other psychedelics offer is the opportunity," says this underground journal, "to re-experience

that awe and those rites of passage without which human life becomes less than human."

This is the new wave speaking, if I can give it that name. This is the expression of the new generation. There is, therefore, a connection, it seems to me, which we've all noticed and talked about between things that are happening in our day and in the whole area of mysticism. I want to make the connection with the specificity called Kabbalah.

Now in trying to delineate the mystical characteristics of the new wave, of our new generation, we have some of the following characteristics, it seems to me, and all of us are authorities on this subject because we all live with it.

Cognitio dei experimentalia is St. Thomas Aquinas's definition of mysticism. The emphasis is on the term "experimentalia." To sense, to feel in the "now." And a gutsy, sensory "now" experience is precisely what the new generation is after. One can sense it in the music, in the hypnotic, rhythmic, primitive beat that makes the lyrics almost inconsequential. Some of the lyrics are beautiful, but it doesn't matter. Usually it's just the vigor and the music. We talked last night at our dinner table about a rock 'n' roll operetta called "Tommy," which is sweeping the younger generation, and in this operetta "Tommy," there's a young man born blind and deaf and dumb, and the refrain of his life is "See me. Heal me. Touch me. Heal me." It's a desire for feeling one's existence by bodily now experiences.

The new psychology of which people here are far greater experts than I am, as you know, is often designed to supplant the therapy of Freud and schools that came from him. There are some psychoanalysts and psychologists in our day who are indulging almost in an orgy of "confessionalism." I've read articles where they're proclaiming that the exchange of words and even the attainment of insights have never healed anybody. I know that this has not yet reached mass proportions, but this is being said. Salvation is now supposed to come from heat, excitement, with the pain and pleasure of encounters in the here and now.

I heard somebody yesterday mention Synanon. Synanon is a commune-like society in Los Angeles and in other towns in America. It's growing, and it's built around a game. It originally was founded to get people off drugs, but now I've met people who have joined it, who have never touched drugs—young and old—and they want to live that way of life and it consists of a game, and I witnessed the game a few weeks ago. The game consists of a group of people gathered in a circle or a group like this and one person becomes the sheep and everybody whips away his defenses. "Why did you wear these clothes?" "Why do you have so many clothes in your closet?" "What are you trying to impress

us with?" And the person tries to defend himself and little by little his ego is just ripped away—if this isn't a masochism-sadism kind of display, I don't know what it is. Nevertheless, the testimony of those who go through it is that they've reached a peak experience. They love it, this kind of "now" encounter.

You know about the games being played in Esalen on the West Coast where the object of all the eye-balling and the touching and the screaming and the "letting it all hang out," is communication on this "gutsy" level.

I think I won't have time to give all the illustrations of this. You know that "relevance" is a key phrase in the academic world. Any course, any subject which is not relevant to today and today's problems, you can't get students for. The feeling abroad is that we are the last generation in the experiment with living. It's an apocalyptic kind of atmosphere. They definitely sense that they are in the last age, and this apocalyptic syndrome is evident in their attitudes, for there is pessimism and despair coupled with a "why not try everything while we can" mood and a loss of respect for all standards. There is a new button popular in Greenwich Village, "If it feels good, I'll do it," and this indeed is the new standard of much of the new waves.

There are demands which are absolutely opposite. Demands for absolute expression coupled with an unwillingness to let an opposing opinion be heard.

I heard the pathetic story of the Nobel Prize winner in physics, Isadore Rabi, who, during one of the riots in Columbia asking for freedom, went to his laboratory. In front of the laboratory were a group of students with their arms folded who wouldn't let him in. He said, weeping, "It's my laboratory," and they said, "No, no, you're doing work which in some way can be connected with the establishment." Mr. Rabi is a man in his seventies and tears came to his eyes and he said, "You know, this happened to me once before in another country when I wanted to go into my laboratory and people stood like this with their arms folded, only they wore different color shirts."

There is this paradox—this hunger for freedom, freedom, freedom, along with it "No freedom for anybody who doesn't agree with us."

Well, all of this is called in the jargon of our day "a mixed bag," but the mixture is no accident. These are the ingredients which when linked up against the perspective of the Kabbalah, do have a kind of explanation. You see, the Kabbalah, like all mysticisms, has been through all these eruptions of the human soul through the ages. There have been other times when people have felt it was the end of days. There have been other periods when all standards broke down, other times when in order to get emotions or feelings of peace, anything

would go. It isn't, as the younger generation feels today, utterly unique. It's been done again and again, and the classical mystical traditions are the ones that have been best suited to encounter, to channel, to handle this type of syndrome that appears at what the Kabbalah called "an end of days" period, namely, a time when one world is dying and a new world is not yet born. It is precisely in such an "end of days" period that these chaotic, mystical hunger impulses for more than surface contacts and realities begin to appear. It is not that mysticism is on the same hunger level at all ages. There are ages which don't feel the hunger at all, and ages when it becomes a mass thirst.

One of the characteristics of this age is an utter disrespect for the word. As you know, there is a loss of will to communicate with the word. Instead, one communicates with grunts, or with "wow!" or "great," or "magnificent," and one can even, for example, compare a delineation of the mystical drug experience as it was written up by a Coleridge or a DeQuincy—beautifully written up—and as it was written up by a Timothy Leary or Richard Alpert. One has lovely language. The other has just no language. Our age has gone away from the word and also has a disrespect for logic and for sense, and the one characteristic of the Jewish mystical extreme is (if I may use modern jargon), it's tremendously "hung up" on the word. The sacredness of the word, the importance of never surrendering the clear word. Nevertheless, the tendency of Jewish mysticism is to say that if you have had any "highs," any great experiences and they cannot be resolved in a clear communicable expression, then who needs it? You could have it but it's of no value.

Of the Prophet Ezekiel, the Bible says, "The hand of the Lord fell upon him and he fell to the ground." He was overcome by a mystical experience. That is not what makes him valuable to us. You can get it in many ways. You can get it from drugs. What makes the Prophet Ezekiel valuable is that, as the Bible says, "And then he stood up and he spoke the word of the Lord," and the word was clear, was communicable. In our Kabbalistic tradition, the greatest of mystics is one man, Moses, and incidentally in the Books of Moses, you have very little about the inner experiences of Moses. That's private. Not that it's invalid, but you don't have to tell anybody. I had a teacher who once said, "You're not going to tell me how much money you have. No, that's too intimate." Well, if you're not going to tell anybody how much money you have, why should you tell them all the most intimate things about your deepest God experiences?

Well, that would be the attitude of the Kabbalah. Moses had a face-to-face encounter which was the Biblical way of saying "he reached a peak experience." But the five books of Moses do not talk about peak

experiences. They talk about what kind of food to eat and how to establish a society based on justice, and they're logical, and they're clear, and they're lucid. It is this kind of mysticism which says that the important thing is not (as one of the modern mystics puts it) the shooting straw flaming which consumes itself in its own flame quickly, but rather a kind of fire which can be so transmuted that it tenderizes the heart, cooks the heart. This is the direction of the Kabbalah.

OPEN DISCUSSION

MUNDLE: It seems clear that belief in theism of the kind that Sir Alister has put to us and belief in mysticism of the kind that Rabbi Weiner has put to us, have something in common with such paranormal phenomena as extrasensory perception. Both the religions labelled "mysticism" and "belief in the paranormal" have in common that they are incompatible with and involve rejection of mechanistic physics and behavioristic and mechanistic psychology. But do they have anything essentially in common with each other? Is the genuineness of paranormal phenomena closely linked with, is it a support for belief in theism?

Now it seems to me the answer may be a very strong case for saying yes if, as Sir Alister does, we take telepathy as being *the* paradigm case of paranormal phenomena, and if we define telepathy as being direct communication between one mind and another mind, because this way of describing telepathy seems to presuppose dualism between mind and matter.

The suggestion has been made that not all the experiments on phenomena other than telepathy are investigating something that is not genuine telepathy and quite different in kind and merely showing runs of luck. This, if I may say so with respect, I think would be a very unscientific attitude to take. After all, Rhine's experiments, his clairvoyance card experiments have been successfully repeated, with more precautions than Rhine took, by other investigators, like Martin and Streibe. Most of his experiments, telepathy could not explain; if anything, they are a demonstration of clairvoyance. Sensitives often succeed in book tests, identifying what is written or drawn on the page of some book the third from the right on the top shelf, etc., which certainly seems to be clairvoyance. Now is not Sir Alister, and with respect I ask the question, guilty of doing the sort of thing that Eric Dingwall suggested that some of us do, trimming the facts to fit in with our own motive for being interested in them, ignoring our paranormal phenomena, stressing telepathy as not being a certain conception of telepa-

thy, and saying this is the only important kind because this supports a theistic faith, the belief in the mind's ability to communicate with God or with a non-sensory being?

HARDY: I'm glad you raised this point because I think I must have been slightly misunderstood. I'm not denying the validity at all of the results of all these experiments in so-called clairvoyance, telepathy, precognition and psychokinesis. In these particular experiments where the results are always above or below chance results, they may be demonstrating something else. As I say, I didn't want you to take me quite so seriously in what I said about luck, but there is something we call luck, something very curious in the universe that we don't yet understand. I was merely saying that the above and below chance results might indicate something that we may call luck, although of course, it may be something we don't understand. I want to distinguish between the statistical card-guessing results and the experiments in telepathy or clairvoyance or precognition or psychokinesis. It worries me that these results are so very similar in these four different kinds of experiments.

SERVADIO: Sir Alister, in a certain point in your splendid presentation you said that the concept of Super Ego does not explain God away. You referred to Freud and psychoanalysis. Now I'd like to state that Freud didn't agree with this statement because the concept of Super Ego, according to Freud, is very far from the concepts of a God who is in heaven. The Super Ego in psychoanalysis is mainly a stern, oppressive, somewhat sadistic, sometimes a persecutory agency, and one of the recent followers of Freud, Edmund Bergler, wrote a book *The Superego: Unconscious Conscience* where finally he compares the Super Ego to "an inner Frankenstein."

HARDY: I think he withdrew from that position in later life.

SERVADIO: Freud was not satisfied with that book. After a few years, speaking with a French psychoanalyst, he said that he found there were weaknesses in that book and that he had lost his "strife of percussion."

WEST: I'd like to make a comment about Sir Alister's experiments in telepathy with drawings. I do understand the theoretical difference between using drawings and cards, but I believe that drawings were abandoned in ESP experiments rather largely not for any theoretical reason, but probably for the practical reason that the kinds of results which people like Stewart and Carrington got using drawings as targets were very similar in magnitude and type to the kind of results which were got by using cards, and cards were simpler. I think that's why cards overtook drawings. But coming to the actual experiments of Sir

Alister, I think that he has come across something which seems to be rather new, and that is that spontaneously people will come up with associations which may be due to telepathy. Now it seems to me that, in the history of telepathic experiments, great care has always been taken to arrange the targets randomly or independently of the thoughts of an individual because one can get column associations for reasons other than telepathy. Now the observation that Sir Alister has made seems to me particularly interesting. What he is suggesting, if I understand rightly, is that getting a number of subjects together, he gets column associations which are more prevalent between subjects who are in physical proximity or adjacent to each other. It struck me that what would be a simple method of testing this fairly objectively (Sir Alister didn't explain how he was going to demonstrate this statistically) could be to take all this population of drawings that Sir Alister has collected and give them to an independent judge to try to figure out where there were obvious associations, pairings between drawings. One could then examine the special distribution of these pairings and see whether they were random or whether in fact they originated in adjacent cubicles in the way Sir Alister suggested.

HARDY: We also got results between non-adjacent ones at different ends of our group. I agree that this would be the way to treat them, but I don't feel very good about that. We want to get very much more before putting people to the trouble of all this evaluation. What I have done is to use random numbers. I got more results than one would expect from random numbers.

GREENBANK: I wonder if the reason that we are having difficulties with the younger generation is due to the fact that this is the first generation in the history of mankind where the older generation has not had the same experience that the younger generation is having. Namely, they have grown up in a different kind of world from that in which we or our fathers or any of our forefathers grew up, and yet we do not know that there is this basic difference between the experience of the younger generation and our own experience, and so we continue to try to teach the younger generation what is based on our experience, rather than finding out what the difference is. Now this difference is catastrophic in many ways, but in 1945 there came this tremendous difference of the atom bomb which can destroy a whole city and against which there is no defense. Now when we were growing up it was a disaster if a school caught fire. But you knew how to get out of school. You had practiced fire drill. You knew the fire engines would be coming. But this generation has grown up in a world where they know that not only the school but the whole city can be destroyed, and their be-

havior, which we see as so ridiculous, is not remarkably different from the traditional behavior of people about to die in any situation. And yet we continue to say "Follow our rules; follow the things that worked for us in a different era," and they say "No, you don't understand."

HARDY: I do agree, but there is this element which Aldous Huxley was working on long before the atom bomb. In his studies he found that the restlessness and uncertainty are really due largely to suppressed religious instincts in the modern culture.

WEINER: Many religions and many cultures lived under such conditions, so this is not the first generation which has a sense of imminent death. Of course there are differences between the atomic bomb and between a death inflicted, let us say, on one city and one country, but the individual about to die is in the same boat.

PAHNKE: I think many people use the word mysticism in a rather sloppy way. Rabbi Weiner said this morning that people seem to be identifying mysticism with something irrational or mysterious, unexplainable or nonsensical and I personally would not agree with that. I would define mysticism and a mystical state of consciousness precisely in psychological terms, so it bothers me that people do that. Perhaps some of those who used the term that way would like to define what they mean by mysticism.

WEINER: It's all the same subject of discussion—that part of such an age is a great hunger for certainty. I mean the sense of chaos, everything falling apart creates uncertainty. Now I think this does bring parapsychology into focus because we would like to find laws instead of luck, because we seem to be the products of luck every place and we would so much like to find areas where laws would apply. I find Sir Alister's intuitive feeling about discovering luck as a higher element of reality most intriguing and most true. In the Kabbalah, there is, before Creation, a world of order and law. This is a lower world. Above it comes a world of chaos, with great infinite possibilities and one goes higher as one goes toward that world, not lower. Anyway, I think young people like all of us, are looking for certainty in such a jungle world and hence the desire for horoscopes and for Tarot cards and also for doctrines which will get away from permissiveness; a doctrine that will say this is right and this is wrong. I think that's the great danger. The great permissiveness and freedom—they'll flee from it and turn to somebody who will say "this is the right way and this is the wrong way."

GREENBANK: I think that this is what most of us grownups think the young folks want and I think it's what we want, but I don't think it is

what is realistic. I think what the younger generation needs is a method of facing uncertainty; a method of handling uncertainty.

CUTTEN: I think there is some exaggeration in what Dr. Greenbank said regarding rebellious youth. I don't really believe that youth is any more rebellious than I remember it was.

GREENBANK: I did not say that youth was more rebellious today than it ever was. I said they were just more lost.

HILLMAN: I'd like to know if there have been comparable reports of spontaneous sharing of ideas such as Sir Alister discovered in the drawings, where people shared, as you said, pockets of thought in these cubicles. Can someone else tell me more about this in other experiments—not where there is telepathy from a sender to a receiver, but where spontaneously several people come up with the same idea, the same image in a relatively controlled situation such as this was.

GREENBANK: I would really like to know about these pockets of people, what common shared experiences they had before they went into the cubicles and what experiences they had coming to the meeting. You know, it would not be surprising if some of the people had come on the British railways that several of them would draw pictures of trains. Or if this were held in such a place that they had to pass a castle-like building in getting to where this was held, it wouldn't surprise me that a number of people would draw pictures of castles. This is the kind of thing you need to think of before you go ahead with this and involve somebody who doesn't work there coming in and looking at this, because we get so used to the things we see that we often don't see what others see for the first time.

WEINER: May I ask a question of Sir Alister? In your text on religious phenomena, I would find it very interesting if some place there would be a section dealing with those who had gifts of sensitivity, spiritual sensitivity, in many areas, and yet who when placed in areas, let us say, where they feel that the gift is not being used for the purpose for which God gave it to them, then caused the gift to disappear, to be taken from them. On the religious side of things, there's no question in my mind that parapsychological phenomena exist but I would think if it were yoked to counting the cards, to that kind of test, then from my perspective such a gift would flee in horror and disgust at being used for such piddling purposes.