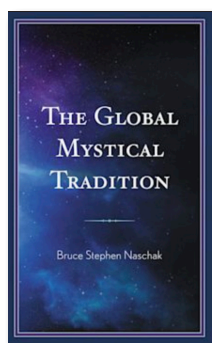


BOOK REVIEW

The Global Mystical Tradition

By Bruce Stephen Naschak. New York: Lexington Books, 2023. 264 pp.
ISBN: 978-1-7936-3790-1. \$105 (hardcover); \$94.50 (ebook).



Bruce Stephen Naschak’s *The Global Mystical Tradition* explores religious traditions characterized by their “hidden from view” nature to elucidate the lineage pathways and their possible interrelationships using historical and speculative work. Thus, it offers a great complement to research that often focuses on spontaneous, ecstatic revelation as a means to mystical encounters—such as accounts of the lives of Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), Julian of Norwich (1342–1416), Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207–1282), and Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886).

Naschak postulates that esoteric traditions require a master/disciple model for more complete understanding. Thus, the method of the book is found in “tracing over history through the master-disciple relationship.” While the linear stance is helpful, life itself can be a teacher for those who do not require or do not find an individual master from whom to learn; and many mystics engage wholly in the material world as explored in books such as *Ordinary Mysticism* by Mirabai Starr and *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics* by Marsha Sinetar.¹

Each of the first nine chapters of *The Global Mystical Tradition* discusses esoteric practices meant to facilitate mystical experience—that is, the union with the Divine—of a particular worldview: Shamanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Through these explorations, Naschak shows a type of continuity and similarity in the higher order of consciousness that is part and parcel of the mystic traditions: when one cannot say the unsayable, language needs

1 Mirabai Starr, *Ordinary Mysticism: Your Life as Sacred Ground* (HarperOne, 2024); Marsha Sinetar, *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics: Lifestyles for Spiritual Wholeness*. Paulist Press, 1986.

to be supported by images, objects, dreams, and/or visions. Naschak tends to these interweavings in his concluding tenth chapter. There he brings in the Goddess across traditions, emphasizes the creativity, inspiration, and revelation coming from these practices, and states that, “while the personal ecstatic experience is a foundation...training by masters of the tribe’s tradition is also essential” (217).

As an Advaita practitioner, I was sensitive to cases in the book that demonstrated the appreciation of the differences of each tradition, syncretism, and even possible misappropriation.² For example, concepts from Hinduism are used to ground much of the discourse in the book. Regarding a particular aspect of the Hindu concept of bhakti, while a devotional mindset might be a requirement for entry into the master-disciple relationship, the definition of sublimation of one’s lower self to a higher principle needs to be more carefully nuanced. There are many of the tradition who see such thinking—that is, “train the seeker on his or her fundamental physical and mental levels so that he/she will be open to the higher spiritual/mystical experience” (10)—as a principal barrier to mystical experience. They may assert that it is more salient to recognize that we are born of light and just remember. As mentioned above, there are pathways that emphasize more spontaneous, direct encounters of the Divine. They do not require rigorous practice and abstinence and rather are supported by full and whole embrace and acceptance of all.

Naschak tends to equate esoteric practice as perhaps disengaged from practical reality, as opposed to exoteric practices such as communal ritual, prayer, and scriptural reading. I would add from personal experience and the spiritual care of fellow mystics that there is an inner sensibility from engaging in life that calls one towards the more mystical aspects and direct experiences of the Divine—which may lead, eventually, to a search for a teacher. All in all, as Pravina Rodrigues shows us: to convey Oneness we can embrace the differences and possibilities of Manyness.³

In conclusion, I greatly appreciated the chronological and geographical order of exploring the hidden towards an integrated approach to directly experiencing the Divine. *The Global Mystical Tradition* offers a survey of

2 Banerjee, P. M. (2023) “Ashes of the Forehead: Appreciation as an approach to religious difference.” Mosher, L., Pierce, E. J., & Rose, O. N. (Eds.). *With the Best Intentions: Interreligious Missteps and Mistakes*. Orbis Books.

3 Rodrigues, P. (2023). *A Sakta Method for Comparative Theology: Upside Down, Inside Out*. Lexington Books.

multiple practices and experiences across mystical traditions that can support one's own journey in a detailed, interreligious way.

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