

# Universalism and Mysticism

Many universalists believe that we all have a “higher self,” which is that portion of our soul or spirit that remains in heaven when we incarnate on earth. The portion we take with us into our mortal bodies is not only intimately connected with our “higher self” but also with God. The human soul or spirit is actually a part of God and an expression of God. We were created from God’s own DNA, so to speak. We are all God’s offspring. Our “real or true” selves may be discovered by looking within, where our human spirit resides and connects with our “higher self” and with God. Biblical support for this concept may be found in Ephesians 2:6, where Paul states that all Christians, and by extension all who are destined to become Christians, have already been “seated” with Christ in the heavenly places. In his speech on Mars Hill in Acts 17, Paul tells us that we are all the offspring of God. In Romans 7, Paul talks about our two natures, our inner self or “mind” and our physical self or “flesh.” Through our physical bodies, we, and by extension God Him/Her/Itself, experience life and the created world through the senses of a physical body. This concept may also be found in 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul describes us as individual parts of the “body of Christ,” through whom Christ accomplishes his purposes here on Earth.

The goal of both Christian and non-Christian mystics is to bypass the physical senses and directly connect with God and our “higher selves.” This has been achieved by various means through prayer, meditation, out-of-body experiences, hypnotic regression, near-death experiences, and the like. Sometimes this experience is referred to as “enlightenment,” whereby we actually experience what it is like in heaven. To the mystic, the fleshly body hinders us from connecting with our inner self. In Romans 7, Paul likened this to a war of sorts, with our physical nature warring against our spiritual nature. To win this war we need God’s help and the help of the indwelling Spirit of God. See Romans, Chapter 8.

The goal of mysticism, however, should not be to escape from the trials and tribulations of this world, but to view them from a heavenly, rather than an earthly perspective. The achievement of various “mountain top experiences,” or “enlightenment,” in both Christian and non-Christian settings, does not represent the goal or purpose of our earthly existence. God did not send us to Earth to escape from the Earth and earn a place in heaven after we die. We already had that before we came. Our purpose here on Earth is to learn and grow into the likeness and character of Christ. He is our example. When we return to heaven, after death, we take with us the lessons learned. The reward we receive for a life well-lived is not Heaven itself, but the treasures we have laid up for ourselves in Heaven while on Earth.

I believe that “enlightenment” or “mountain top ecstatic experiences” can in many ways detract from our life mission and purpose. It is God’s plan for us to live by faith, not sight. There is value in not knowing all there is to know about Heaven and our pre-existence there. There is value in the experience of doubt, fear, and a healthy dose of sufferings and disappointments. There is value in making mistakes and learning from them in this “crucible” of our earthly life. There is value in not knowing for sure if God is even there to rescue us from our negative experiences. God hides from us on purpose and with good intentions. Yes, God may be found if we look deep enough within ourselves, and it is wonderful to discover faith in God and experience God’s presence in our lives. But the greatest rewards are to be found primarily during

our journey, and not after arriving at the final destination. The reward you receive when you finally arrive back at home in Heaven is the person you have become. Interestingly, you become this person, this “new creature in Christ,” before you get to Heaven, during your Earthly walk. The joys of Heaven may indeed be experienced in the here and now. God’s Kingdom is among us here on Earth. Christian salvation is something that we experience in a progressive manner during our current lifetime. The icing on the cake is being able to look back on our lives, during our life review after death, and hearing those wonderful words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”