

**The Phenomenology of Everyday Experiences
of Contemporary Mystics in the Jewish Traditions of Kabbalah**

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Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
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In Memory of
Francis Xavier Levasseur
Beloved Husband

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Abstract

This phenomenological study was conducted in order to understand the everyday experiences of contemporary mystics in the Jewish traditions of Kabbalah. This author could find no available information about psychological research of this topic in psychological, educational or psychiatric databases. She used the applied phenomenological methodology of Howard Pollio and the Research Groups at the University of Tennessee. Interviews were conducted by this author with eight volunteer, living, adult participants who lived throughout the United States and ranged in age from 37 to 60+ years. These mystics were found through various means after they had described themselves, by their own definitions, as mystics in the Jewish traditions(s) of Kabbalah. There were six men and two women who participated; four were Jewish and four were not. The interviews ranged from one to three hours in length, were recorded, and later transcribed for confidential analyses. After analyzing the results, the Ground of the participants' experience was determined to be Being Aware. The Thematic Structure of the participants' everyday experiences of living with their mystical events and processes contained six themes: 1) Divine/Sacred, 2) Receiving/Calling/Gift, 3) Knowing/Realizing, 4) Practices/Body, 5) Developing/Stages, and 6) Struggling: Self/Others/World. Implications for this study suggest that the everyday experiences of these mystical participants are different in many ways from everyday experiences of non-mystics. There is some support for the ideas of spiritual intelligence, spiritual giftedness, consciousness advancement. Appreciating intuition, higher emotional states, and the deeper, yet usually hidden parts of human experience, along with learning to identify and support young people who are having mystical experiences is a worthwhile goal for psychologists.

Keywords: phenomenological psychology, contemporary Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah, everyday experiences, spiritual giftedness, spiritual intelligence

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1	1
Literature Review of Mysticism.....	1
Introduction	1
Definitions of Mystics and Mysticism in General	1
Judaism and Mysticism	14
Short Description of the History of Jewish Mysticism within Jewish Traditions.....	19
Jewish Mysticism Compared with Jewish Rationalism	22
Where is God in All of This?	26
God as Buber's "I-Thou" or "I-It"	26
How Mystics Experience "I-Thou" Relationships with God	27
God and the Hebrews	28
Names of God	29
Direct Connection with God	31
Brief Note about Jewish, Mystical, Kabbalistic Traditions	33
Summary	36
CHAPTER 2	38
Common Core/Perennialist Philosophy	39
Social Constructionist Philosophy	48
Debate and Psychological Issues	54
Philosophical and Psychological Phenomenology	60
Debate Summary	62
CHAPTER 3	64
A Modern Look at Mystics and Body in General	65
Behavioral and Physiological Psychology	66
Mystics' Bodies.....	74
Paranormal Experiences vs. Mystical Experiences.....	76
Mystics and Health or Disease	78
Jewish Views of Illness and Disease.....	83
Jewish Mystics and Body	87
Religious Advancement and Body	87
Conclusion	89
Other Types of Psychology and Mysticism	90
Psychology and Spiritual Giftedness	98
Summary	116
Psychopathology of Mystical Experience	117
Psycholinguistics and Mysticism	122
CHAPTER 4	125
Literature Review of Everyday Experiences of Mystics	125
CHAPTER 5 Methods	135
Phenomenological Philosophy	135
Hermeneutics.....	141
Phenomenological Psychology	143
Body, Time, Others and World in Psychological Phenomenology	150
Psychological Method of Phenomenology as Applied	152

to Everyday Experiences of Mystics in the Jewish Tradition of Kabbalah	152
CHAPTER 6 Results of the Phenomenological Analyses	154
Researcher's Bracketing Interview	154
Participants	160
Participants' Interviews.....	163
A Case Study.....	191
Body/World/Time/Others	194
Summary of Results	195
CHAPTER 7	196
Discussion Relevant to Chapter One Literature Review.....	196
Discussion Relevant to Chapter 2 Debate.....	198
Discussion Relevant to the Psychologies of Mysticism in Chapter 3.....	200
Discussion Related to Chapter 4	204
Thoughts on This Research Project	206
The One Who Refrained to Be Interviewed.....	209
Implications.....	213
REFERENCES.....	215
APPENDICES	224
VITA	229

List of Figures

- Figure 1. Sefirot, also called Tree of Life (Hopking, 2001, p. 29).....Page 35
- Figure 2. Thematic Structure of the Everyday Experiences
of the Participants who were Mystics in the Jewish
Traditions of Kabbalah.....Page 191
- Figure 3. Schematic summary of interview process and analyses
used in this study (Pollio, et al, 1997).....Page 226

List of Tables

Table1. Participant Demographics.....	Page 164
Table 2. Categories of Participant's Themes (see Appendix 2 for a more detailed list subcategories of Participant Themes).....	Page 177
Table 3. A List of the Subcategories of the Participants' Ground and of their Thematic Structures.....	Page 227

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review of Mysticism

Introduction

The first chapter contains some definitions of mysticism, a brief literature review of mysticism, some background notes about Judaism (both culture and religion), and information about the role of mysticism in Judaism and how this stands in relation to Jewish rationalism. Last will be a short description of the history of Jewish mysticism within Jewish traditions.

The second chapter reviews the major points of the ongoing debate about the psychological and philosophical aspects of mystical experiences. The third chapter develops the literature review of the psychology of mysticism although most of this literature is about non-Jewish mystics. The fourth chapter includes a review of the limited research available about the everyday experiences of contemporary mystics. Chapter five includes the description of applied psychological phenomenology and its use as the method for this research project. The sixth chapter presents the results of this research project which contains both the Ground and the Thematic Structure of the everyday experiences of contemporary mystics in the Jewish traditions of Kabbalah. Following this chapter is a discussion of the results and implications for future studies.

Definitions of Mystics and Mysticism in General

Probably there are as many definitions of mysticism as there are mystics. Some of the definitions mentioned here come from dictionaries, encyclopedia, etymology,

religious texts, philosophy and psychology. Afterward, this author will suggest the one definition that she considers easiest and most relevant to this study.

Dictionaries

Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines the adjective "mystic" as: "1) involving or characterized by esoteric, otherworldly, or symbolic practices or content, as certain religious ceremonies and are spiritually significant ; ethereal, 2) of the nature of or pertaining to mysteries known only to the initiated; mystic rites, 3) of occult character, power, or significance: a mystic formula, 4) of obscure or mysterious character or significance, and 5) of or pertaining to mystics or mysticism" ("Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary," 2001, p. 1272). *Webster's* says the noun "mystic" is "1) a person who claims to attain, or believes in the possibility of attaining, insight into mysteries transcending ordinary human knowledge, as by direct communication with the divine or immediate intuition in a state of spiritual ecstasy; 2) a person initiated into religious mysteries." "Mysticism," according to *Webster's* (2001, p. 1272), means: 1) the beliefs, ideas or mode of thought of mystics, 2) a doctrine of an immediate spiritual intuition of truths believed to transcend ordinary understanding, or of a direct, intimate union of the soul with God through contemplation or ecstasy, or 3) obscure thought or speculation." So, we can understand that mystics have unusual experiences, ideas, thoughts, and beliefs that are otherworldly or ethereal (sometime occult), which transcend ordinary understanding, and that might demonstrate a connection with the divine. Jewish mysticism was not mentioned in this reference.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines the adjective “mystic” as: 1) spiritually allegorical or symbolical; of the nature of, or characteristic of, a sacred mystery; pertaining to mysteries of the faith, 2) pertaining to the ancient religious mysteries or to other occult rites or practices; occult; esoteric, 3) secret, concealed, 4) the distinctive epithet of that branch of theology which relates to the direct communion of the soul with God; hence, pertaining to or connected with this branch of theology, 5a) of hidden meaning or nature; enigmatical, mysterious, 5b) in recent use, inspiring an awed sense of mystery...one who maintains the validity and supreme importance of mystical theology...hence, in extended application: One who, whether Christian or non-Christian, seeks by contemplation and self-surrender to obtain union with or absorption into the Deity, or who believes in the possibility of the spiritual apprehension of truths that are inaccessible to the understanding” (p. 175). Of particular note here is the information that a mystic can maintain the ‘validity and supreme importance’ of his beliefs, that he/she ‘seeks [by practices] to ‘surrender to obtain union with or absorption into the Divine, and that the ‘spiritual truths’ that he/she finds are ‘inaccessible to the understanding.’ These points are particularly relevant to this study, although no reference to Jewish mysticism was found in this text.

Harper’s Bible Dictionary (Achtemeier, 1971, p. 674) defines a mystic as “one who has a direct experience of the divine presence, an intimate and transforming communion or union with God.” *Harper’s* adds “OT [Old Testament] prophets, especially Ezekial [aka Ezekiel], seem rooted in this experience, which is also suggested by several Psalms (e.g., Ps. 73: 23-26).... Traces of mysticism are sometimes identified

in the Pauline Letters (2 Cor. 12:2-4; Gal. 2:20), especially where Paul speaks of union with Christ.” With this definition we move into the religious, Biblical aspect of mystical experience and away from the occult. Although the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel was cited here, no other Jewish reference was made.

The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words (Strong, 1996, p. 174) has no word in English for mystic or mysticism, but a word often associated with mysticism is “mystery.” *Strong's* connects this word with the Greek word “musterion” which means “secret” which is from the root word “muo” (to shut the mouth) and “relates to mystery through the idea of silence imposed by initiation into religious rites” (Strong, 1996, p. 662). Here we are connecting mysterious or mystical experiences with some practices or initiations, but Jewish mysticism in particular was not found in this citation.

Etymology

Chambers Dictionary of Etymology (Barnhart, 1988, p. 691) describes the adjective “mystic” as “occult, secret, arcane....Before 1382 ‘misticke’ as spiritually symbolic, in the Wycliffe Bible; borrowed from Old French ‘mistique’, and directly from Latin ‘mysticus, from Greek ‘mystikos’ secret, mystic, from ‘mystes’ one who has been initiated; see ‘Mystery’ secret. Chambers also writes that the noun “mystic” means a “person who believes in mystic things...The meaning of having a spiritual significance or value, is first recorded in Sir Thomas More’s *Supplicacyon of Soulys* (1529)” (Barnhart, 1988, p. 691).

The meanings of words and their history is important in this research project for several reasons. First, phenomenological psychology relies upon the words used by the

participants' interviews as serious indicators of their meaning, whether consciously selected or not, because they are unreflected and give a more true representation of the participants' experiences. Secondly, language is a living and changing thing as it travels among peoples throughout time and places—adapting in order to express contemporary experiences that draw from our histories as humans who currently live in a global society. Third, please observe that most of the lingual information in the common usage as disclosed above comes through Greek, Latin, and French, for example, into our English language—particularly as it is used in the Biblical sense most often in relation to Christianity. For the current study, there will be an additional approach since Hebrew stands out more directly, even in its English translations which have not been filtered through Christian usage and interpretation, for the participants who are Jewish. The subject of language in relation to this study will be taken up in greater detail in a different chapter of this paper.

Encyclopedia

The Cambridge Encyclopedia (Crystal, 1994, p. 762) discloses that mysticism is a “spiritual quest in any religion for the direct experience of God.” Mysticism is commonly practiced in Eastern religions, and the mystics focus on “prayer, meditation, contemplation, and fasting” to facilitate the attitude they believe to bring about that personal encounter with God. This article points out the difference between Christian mystics and others: Christian mystics do not seek absorption into the divine but remain distinct from God (Crystal, 1994, p. 762). The differences of the other types of religious

mystics in this situation were not mentioned here. Relevant to this study is the mention of the spiritual seeking of the mystics and some of the practices that they incorporate into their dedicated lives to bring about these mystical experiences.

Religious Texts

The sacred scriptures of all major world religions contain the mystical experiences and teachings of the masters. Precisely because these masters lived exceptional lives in which “miracles” occurred, followers listened to and copied the lives that these masters modeled. These masters explored and developed their own inner lives, and upon reaching very high realized states that included mystical experiences, demonstrated to others some better ways to perceive and experience the world.

Hindu Mystical Texts. For example, some of the primary Hindu texts are the Vedic (a Brahmanic tradition of knowledge) *Upanisads* (aka *Upanishads*) (Svetasvatara, 1986) which are written in the sacred language of Sanskrit (Holdrege, 1996). The *Upanishads* contain the metaphysical stories and instructions written by the sages for understanding the phenomenal (manifest physical) created world and the ultimate reality within the “unitary ground of existence, Brahman-Atman” (Holdrege, 1996, p. 69). In the *Bhagavad-Gita* (“The Bhagavad Gita,” 1962), Sri Krishna (a great master yogi who at the end of the story disclosed his divinity) discoursed with Prince Arjuna the warrior way of fighting war honorably and selflessly as a spiritual way of living out our human drama that takes place in the world. The object of this instruction is to merge with the Absolute. These dialogues in the sacred texts show a spiritual development that moves closer and

closer to a sense of a “mystical presence...which is with the one who had given up selfhood to serve” (Ellwood, 1987, p. 82). There are many lineages of Hinduism and many ways to travel the paths to enlightenment both through inner work and in daily practices taught by their masters for millennia.

One of the many Hindu Vedic lineages which helps us to understand mystical experiences is that of Patanjali, a 2nd century yogi and philosopher who composed the *Yoga-Sutra* which gives instruction for realizing spiritual freedom through practical, disciplined action pertaining to body, will and mind (Baba, 2002; Fischer-Schreiber, Ehrhard, Friedrichs, & Diener, 1994, p. 269; Schuhmacher & Woerner, 1994). An example of this practice is a contemporary monk in this lineage, Swami Chandrasekharanand of the Saraswati order who carries the oral traditions of over 500 years of scholarly knowledge and oral traditions about Kundalini process (Harrigan, 2006).

Kundalini Shakti is the divine life force or energy that is within each human. There are several ways Kundalini could be awakened within a person, and, once awakened, a spiritual process begins. This process could include longing for spiritual study and service, physical sensations not explained by modern medicine, hyper-awareness of inner life, altered states of consciousness such as mystical experiences, a development of unusual talents such as healing abilities, and a feeling that transformation in a sacred way is happening (Harrigan, 2006, p. 8). Swami Chandrasekharanand, in several personal meetings with this author, has shared his wisdom and experience about spiritual process. His forte is his ability to support spiritual and mystical development no

matter what religious orientation his students present. Kundalini process is a universal situation for awakening humans, and Swami Chadrasekaranand brings Eastern spiritual science to Westerners who may not have had any support or understanding for their mystical development and experiences. It is through his and Joan Harrigan's guidance that the present research began several years ago when they disclosed the process and how the science of Kundalini could also apply to the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah.

Buddhist Mystical Texts. The 5th century Gotama (aka Gautama) Buddha, whom we're all familiar with as the namesake of modern Buddhism, was the fourth in a line of Buddhas. One of his predecessors, Shakyamuni Buddha, taught over 2500 years ago, and the lineage of his teachings has been recorded in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand: A Concise Discourse on the Path to Enlightenment* (Pabongka Rinpoche, 2006).

[Remember that Buddhism branched off from India's Hinduism and has been established in various lineages in Tibet, Japan (Zen) and Viet Nam, for example.] In this text, the great Buddhist masters first found their own way to enlightenment and then showed the way to others, who, in turn, found enlightenment and then added their own insights and experiences to the traditions. There is one main difference in Buddhism and the teachings of other religions: Instead of God, the goal is to enter the Void—to experience Nothingness with total loss of self which comes after learning the release of all attachments including the thoughts occurring in the mind, the senses, and everything in the physical world (Bhakhang Tulku Rinpoche, 2009).

To these Tibetan Buddhists, consciousness occurs in multiple states that always means there is a conscious knower, an object of consciousness, and “the occupation of the consciousness with the object” (Pabongka Rinpoche, 2006, p. 645). This consciousness is something constructed, so all materiel in the world is mutually interdependent and is, finally, illusion since cognition and space do not truly exist (Pabongka Rinpoche, 2006, p. 646). In the meantime, one who is caught in samsara (the wheel of karma) is to live with total compassion for all living beings as if they were one’s mother (and probably had been during previous multiple incarnations). Being enlightened grants mystical abilities and knowledge to the finders with the end result, through meditation practices and studies, being “emptiness” (Pabongka Rinpoche, 2006, p. 647). This text gives instruction for developing through all the stages and levels until one reaches the point of releasing from embodied life into the Void or of returning to the earth as a teacher who reincarnates to help other sentient beings attain Buddhahood. A Buddhist nun or monk, until he or she gains the Void, has the mystical experience of the non-embodied Buddhas and other gurus at the ceremonies of the taking of the boddhichitta vows of developing the path of the supreme enlightenment (Pabongka Rinpoche, 2006, pp. 656-658).

The Gotama Buddha (word ‘Buddha’ means ‘awakened one’ or ‘enlightened one’) sought to relieve suffering in the world. He began with his understanding and knowledge of the earlier *Upanishads*, chose renunciation, did practices of fasting, contemplation, meditation and studying with the masters, and found the Middle Path to

truth after mystically and successfully confronting Mara, the Evil One (Humphreys, 1958).

An example of how the Buddhist traditions of mystical experiences travel across the globe and across time is *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: First Complete Translation* (Padmasambhava, 2007) that was “composed by Padmasambhava [8th century],” “revealed by Terton Karma Lingpa,” “translated by Gyurme Droje,” “edited by Graham Coleman and Thupten Jinpa,” and includes an “introductory commentary by His Holiness The Dalai Lama.” The classic Western version of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead: or The After Death Experiences of the Bardo Plane according to Lama Kazi Dawa Sandup’s English Rendering* [this version only included three of the many chapters found in the original version] was compiled and edited by Evans-Wentz (1960/2000) which included a Psychological Commentary by C. J. Jung.

In his Psychological Commentary, Jung (Evans-Wentz, 1960/2000) wrote that this book was about the bardo, or transitional, state that one passes through between one lifetime and the next reincarnated lifetime. Historically, Tibetan masters who were mystics had entered the bardo states by meditating very deeply without dying and had returned to tell their followers about these states. These masters advised that one could learn many lessons and experience enlightenment without having to die over and over again between life-lessons. Of relevance to this study is that Jung wrote that Western philosophy would have difficulties with this kind of philosophy. However, Jung said that, although philosophy and theosophy were medieval, psychology was not. He wrote that “metaphysical assertions are statements of the psyche, and therefore psychological”

(Evans-Wentz, 1960/2000, p. xxxvii). He also wrote that this book was about an initiation to restore the soul (also part of the psyche) to its divinity which was lost at birth (Evans-Wentz, 1960/2000, p. lxi). According to Jung, the invisible structures of the psyche are not less than the visible structures of the physical body.

Jewish, Christian and Islamic Mystical Texts. In addition to Hindu and Buddhist texts about sacred development and mystical experiences, Ludwig's textbook on world religions, *The Sacred Paths* (Ludwig, 2001), briefly discusses three kinds of mysticism: Jewish (Kabbalah), Christian, and Islamic (Sufism). According to him, Jewish mysticism has always been about close communion with God since the time of Moses when Moses faced God and received *Torah* on Mt. Sinai. Jewish mysticism evolved with the *Torah* and the *Talmud* [the conversion of oral traditions and commentary to this written form that began a few centuries after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem during and after which the Hebrews were scattered around the world] took the form of Kabbalah [Hebrew for 'tradition' and 'receiving'] which began to take its contemporary form during medieval times. Kabbalah was open only to initiates who studied secret traditions and worked to have inner experiences and understandings that went beyond the written sacred texts. The *Zohar* (Lachower, Tishby, & English translator Goldstein, 1949/2002; Scholem, 1949/1977) (Hebrew word for "splendor") was a primary Kabbalistic text whose author and date are debated; this work described God, the mystical meaning of creation, the purpose of all mystical Jews, and provided hope in the Messiah to come (Ludwig, 2001). More about the Jewish sacred texts, mysticism and the mystics will be discussed later in this chapter.

Ludwig (2001) wrote that Jewish mysticism had a direct influence upon the development of Christian and Islamic mysticism. Christian mysticism was found in and also focused on the New Testament (especially the parts about St. Paul) of the Bible and was influenced by Francis of Assisi (12th -13th century) and continued development in medieval times, especially due to the 13th century German Meister Eckhart. Eckhart said that mystical goal was to “complete union of the divine spark in us with God, which is the loss of individuality and immersion in God’s reality” (Ludwig, 2001, p. 394). Eckhart directed this to happen through nullifying the individual self and living a life of poverty, quietness and contemplation that assist a person in transcending his life to unite with God (Ludwig, 2001, p. 394). Later, Teresa of Avila (16th century Catholic nun) considered her experiences as a “mystical marriage to Christ” (Ludwig, 2001, p. 394); she also wrote about the levels of approaching that union as “mansions.”

The Islamic Sufi movement began slowly during the Greek philosophical period and picked up both speed and followers in Asia, Africa and Spain. The mystical Sufis, like the Christian mystics, devoted their lives to poverty and asceticism, to the goal of unity with God, to their understanding of the Qu’ran [Koran], to the inner path that included meditation, and to the love of God. For the Sufis there were levels and states of development along the way toward knowing and attaining God (Ludwig, 2001, p. 442). The prophet Mohammed was a respected businessman, husband and community leader who was, at age 40, visited during a contemplative retreat by the angel Gabriel; Mohammed thought at this first vision that he was going insane (Cleary, 1994). After other visions and revelations, Mohammed, a direct descendant of Abraham through his

son Ishmael, began his spiritual teachings (Cleary, 1994). Nicholson (1914/1989) wrote that Sufism was a school that taught the devotees how to become saints; however, prophets were immaculate and saints were not.

Miracles happened in the presence of Sufi saints, but these miracles were only effects of the intent and works of the saints and not the goal. For the Sufis, miracles were called so because, to outsiders, these events seemed irrational and unbelievable (Nicholson, 1914/1989). To the Sufi saints, there was no problem with these “miracles” because the saints lived at a different level of consciousness in which they were comfortable with the paradoxes that seemed like miracles to others but were everyday happenstances with the saints (Nicholson, 1914/1989). Some famous Sufi saints/ mystics were Jalaluddin (aka Jelaluddin) Rumi whose poetry was written as instruction to ascetic dervishes in training (Barks, 2004) and Ibn al-Arabi, a great theosophist who wrote explanatory commentaries on Sufi mystical poetry which often had been misunderstood as romantic love poems instead of as ecstatic worship of the divine (Nicholson, 1914/1989). There is a common factor in these two kinds of love; love involves a selfless stance whether or not the object of the romantic love is a human or is God. The love of the divine is sacred, but as the mystical Sufi develops, the relationship of the mystic’s position changes from objectifying love toward God into entering union with God where self no longer exists (Nicholson, 1914/1989).

According to Ludwig (2001), the lineages and teaching of mysticism in all three of these world religious traditions came to exist in opposition to the rational, orthodox, everyday teachings. For Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Sufi devotees who were in

training, these people often entered convents, monasteries and ashrams for study and practices. By joining communities of like-minded people, these spiritual humans who sometimes became mystics were able to live in safe places where the irrational, paradoxical and miraculous events were accepted—unlike what often happened to mystics who lived in public locations where the miraculous happenings were often threatening to the neighbors who judged the mystics, for example, as insane or intoxicated by alcohol. Compared with these practices of Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Sufis entering private religious communes, Jewish mystics continued to live and work in the everyday world.

Judaism and Mysticism

All of the previous information about varieties of religious, mystical experiences may now serve as a background for the current study of everyday Jewish mystical experience. In this section we shall review some of the Jewish definitions of mysticism, a very brief history of the development of Jewish mysticism, some of its lineages within Jewish culture, and a short discussion of how this view stands in relation to Jewish rationalism. Finally, the question “Where is God in All of This?” is addressed as it relates to the sacred in the mystical lives of the participants in this study.

Definitions and Historical Meanings of Jewish Mysticism

Scholem. Gershom Scholem (Scholem, 1946/1995, p. 5), a professor and scholar of Jewish mysticism at Hebrew University who said that he was not a mystic, examined the various definitions of mysticism as they related to Jewish mysticism. He particularly said that there was no “union with God” in Jewish mystical experience. The early

Talmudic Jewish Gnostic [Greek for “knowledge”, elaborate system of mystical thought that matter is evil and the treatment for that is “esoteric knowledge of spiritual truth” (Eisenberg, 2008, p. 160)] mystics wrote that the Jewish soul ascended to the Celestial Throne and accessed in ecstasy a look at God’s majesty and acquired the secrets of His Kingdom. Later, the Hasidic mystics [to be discussed later in this text] wrote that some obtain the crowning experience of gazing on the Nothing [not the same as the Buddhist Void] in which they lose the mundane reality of intellect, but, when they return, they find their intellect enriched and “full of divine inflowing splendor” (Scholem, 1946/1995, p. 5). Note the similarities of these descriptions.

Scholem (Scholem, 1946/1995, pp. 18-19) saw that Jewish mysticism evolved as a movement from Talmudic times until the present and that there were many varieties of Jewish mystical experiences; he estimated that there were over 3,000 mystical Jewish texts in their possession and that there are many manuscripts not published to date. Scholem wrote that there is no abstract definition of mysticism; only mystical experiences in relation to a religious affiliation are possible. For him, the Jewish religion can only be related to “an immediate awareness of relation with God” (Scholem, 1946/1995, p. 6). He differs in opinion when he wrote that we cannot call Moses or the Biblical Prophets mystics because this only confuses the issue of finding a clearer definition of mysticism. So Scholem (1946/1995, p. 7) simplifies by writing that

“Mysticism is a definite stage in the historical development of religion and makes its appearance under certain well-defined conditions. It is connected with, and inseparable from, a certain stage of the religious consciousness. It is certainly incompatible with certain other stages which

leave no room for mysticism in the sense in which the term is commonly used....”

The first stage (Scholem, 1946/1995, pp. 7-9) is like the childhood of humanity in which there is a world of many gods, and humans have no inner consciousness of God—only primitive dream-like quality. In the second stage of history an awareness of true separation, like an “abyss,” occurs as a classical religious consciousness of the infinite God and finite man; this separation, or duality, cannot be breached except by the “voice” of God. The third stage consists of the “phenomenon of mysticism” which is a quest for the “hidden path” that will breach the gulf between man and God in order to restore unity, or non-duality. But Scholem wrote that this return to unity with God arrives at a different, new level of consciousness than was evident during the first stage of spiritual childhood.

The last stage continues with mystical evolution but also includes a creative, non-static factor. In this fourth stage the old religious values are retained but the new mystical experiences may also bring conflict with the old values. From this conflict is the possibility of the emergence of new religious values that transform the individual person. Scholem wrote that this process is an expression of the standard Jewish concepts of Creation, Revelation and Redemption that are echoed in the “characteristic feature of mystical experience, the direct contact between the individual and God” (Scholem, 1946/1995, p. 9). Spiritual forces have shaped Jewish lives for thousands of years, and mystical experiences offer the insights for freeing our inner selves from psychological

slavery just as the Jewish people as a whole were freed from actual slavery in Egypt (Scholem, 1946/1995, p. 19).

Idel. Moshe Idel cites one story that has become a classic about Rabbi Aqivah [aka Akiva or Akiba], a 13th century mystic who entered Pardes [“orchard” or Garden of Eden] with three other sages: Ben Zoma, Ben Azzai and Elisha ben Abuyah [aka Avouyah-Aher]. Rabbi Akiva was the only one to return undamaged from that experience (Idel, 2002, p. 433). The following details of this story come from Samuel Avital, a contemporary Sephardic Kabbalist:

Ben Azzai was a saint and did not return from Pardes because he weakly surrendered to death before his time in order to merge with the Ain-Sof [aka Ein Sof], or God; Ben Zoma became demented since he lived mostly in his right, intuitive brain that was strongest during mystical experiences where he was caught up in what he had thought were the revelations of God—so he was not balanced with his left, logical brain; Elisha Ben Avouyah-Aher became a heretic because he lived too much in his left, logical brain and could not conceive of truths that he was experiencing in Pardes that were beyond the rational; Rabbi Akiba entered in peace and returned in peace—surviving a strong encounter with the inner state because he was well-balanced and had a strong enough sense of self so as to see the truth and not to die or be swayed too far in either the logical or the heretical directions (Avital, 2008).

This story avails us of some of the potential psychological effects of Jewish mystical experience. There are risks to the mystic that are directly related to his or her level of conscious development during each stage of mystical experience. Idel (2002, p. 433) refers to the tradition among Kabbalists that mystical hermeneutics be “restricted to the very few.” The method of initially determining whether a mystic could qualify for screening into a Kabbalistic school included four basic requirements: 1) the person must be a male, 2) the person must be at least 40 years old [so he would be familiar with the

ways of the world], 3) the person had to be married [so as not to be distracted from study and meditation by sexual desires], and 4) the person had to know *Torah* before tackling advanced mystical experience.

Idel (2002) described the lives of Biblical persons as receiving messages from God, as being obedient, as witnessing and fulfilling divine will and direction, as being in the ever-present Divine, as experiencing miracles, and as having no creative function in their everyday lives. These Hebrews were living the epic events; today when we read the texts about those people and their situations we are a step removed from the original experiences. Idel says that modern readers are absorbed to different degrees in the texts and participate in interpreting and making meaning of the sacred texts. The degree of absorption relates to the intent and the focus of the readers. *Torah* and *Talmud* scholars read from their perspectives, but Kabbalistic mystics read and interpret *Torah* through different eyes. Particularly important to mystics are the various hidden meanings of the names of God in the *Torah*. By living the ultimately observant life, and by focusing on the names of God in the *Torah*, one can draw down that divine presence specific to one of the names of God into his or her being.

There is a tradition among Kabbalists of the importance of reading as being a major piece of mystical experience. After all, the Jewish people (and also Christians) are known as “The People of the Book” (Eisenberg, 2008). Samuel (2007, p. 263) describes that *Torah* can be read from four perspectives listed here in the order of increasing depths of understanding meanings: 1) the literal, 2) the allegorical, 3) the midrashic [branch of oral *Torah* that contains analyses, teachings, parables and legends], and 4) the mystical.

The mystical level of reading *Torah* is the “esoteric mystical center of the Kabbalistic approach” from which all the secrets of God’s Realms are obtained. So studying and absorbing *Torah* on all of these levels is an obligation of Jews and, especially, Jewish mystics.

Short Description of the History of Jewish Mysticism within Jewish Traditions

There are two main lines of Jewish religious traditions in the modern Western world. The first is the Sephardic line which includes descendants from Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East. Their customs, language and foods differ from the second line, the Ashkenazi, which includes Jews from Central, Eastern and Western Europe. According to Eisenberg (2008, p. 392), there are about 20 percent Sephardim in the world today, and Israel contains about 50 percent Sephardim. From each of these lines of Judaism come distinct lines of mystics and mystical traditions. Of historical importance is the Sephardic mystic of the 13th century, Moses De Leon who is known as the author of the Zohar, a mystical treatise on the *Torah*. Another important person was the 16th century mystic Isaac Luria, also known as “the Ari,” who founded the school of thought known as the “Lurianic School” of Kabbalah. Luria was born in Jerusalem and studied mysticism both in Cairo and at the mystical town of Safed in Israel. However, since his father had immigrated from Germany or Poland, Luria was also called Isaac Ashkenazi. A third influential mystic was the 18th century Ashkenazi mystic Israel ben Eliezar, also known as “the Besht” which was an acronym for “the Baal Shem Tov” [“master of the good name”] (Wigoder, 1991a).

Lurianic School

A brief description of the Lurianic School of mysticism that had a tremendous effect on Kabbalistic thought must include the Ari's understanding of the process of Creation (Samuel, 2007). Luria's four main teachings were about Tzimtzum, Shevirat Ha'Kelim, Tikkun and Sefirot. Tzimtzum is the Hebrew word for "contraction," and it means that God, in order to create a world that held imperfections within it, must make a special, separate place within the infinite universe for this to happen. So God withdrew Himself to create an empty, primordial space for His Creation —yet this exiled space was still located within the Godhead (a paradox, of sorts).

The next step that the Ari described was the "breaking of the vessels" (Shevirat Ha'Kelim). In this process, God allowed His combined, multiple essences to be broken down into individual essences that were different and then organizing them for God's purposes for facilitating Creation. Some of the essences were Good and Evil; these existed as a duality that, in the infinite God outside the Creation, had existed only as non-duality. So, within the contracted space of Creation, God allowed potentiality to become actuality; the purpose of this was to allow Creation to "return" (Tikkun), or reconcile the differences within the Tzimtzum in a process of spiritual repair (Samuel, 2007). This Tikkun is why God created humans—especially the Jews. (For explanation of Tikkun, see section "Brief Note about Jewish, Mystical, Kabbalistic Traditions" further in this chapter.)

The last part of the Lurianic School that is important to Kabbalists is the creation of the Ten Sefirot [plural] as ten attributes of Divine Personality (Samuel, 2007). These

were organized from the top down, through the Four Worlds, in the shape of a zigzag lightning bolt striking downward to the bottom Sefirah [singular] which is the realm of humans. Each Sefirah is a vessel (Samuel, 2007). This lightning bolt is the manifesting divine light that permeates Creation; the lower into the world the light flows, the less the light is visible. This is why we feel separate from God; His light is not visible to us. The mystics begin, through practice, to see and know the light and God's divine presence, not only in the lowest Sefirah, but also in the ascending Sefirot as they learn the attributes of God.

Baal Shem Tov School of Mysticism

The founder of Chasidism (aka Hasidism) was Rabbi Israel Ben Eliezer who also was known as the Baal Shem Tov (Hebrew for “master of the good name”) (Samuel, 2007; Sears, 1997). Prior to his time, only erudite Jews had access to the higher wisdom and learning of God; this usually meant those few scholars who studied *Torah* and *Talmud* every day and were usually supported financially by their families or communities in order to do this. The Baal Shem Tov brought the teachings to the common people in Eastern Europe, and of importance is that he also brought ecstasy and joy into their burdened lives. His practicing unconditional love for all people, teaching the people to be morally and physically responsible for each other, sharing the power of joy and music, and including the mystical scope for everyone endeared him to his followers (Samuel, 2007) but also brought criticism from other parts of the Jewish world. He moved the study and practice of Kabbalah into an additional realm of higher emotions

instead of relying only upon the intellect. For his dedicated followers, a new era of Kabbalah bloomed.

Jewish Mysticism Compared with Jewish Rationalism

In the book *Guides for an Age of Confusion*, Cohen (2000) wrote about Mordecai Menahem Kaplan (a rationalist who was ordained a Conservative Rabbi and whose writings helped found the Reconstructionist Jewish movement) and Avraham Yitzhak Hakohen Kook (first chief rabbi of Israel and a Kabbalistic mystic) and how they approached some of the intellectual knots in Jewish life. Cohen said that Kook used terms such as “feeling, exaltation, communion with God, secrets of *Torah*....” Kaplan expressed himself with terms such as “reason, wisdom, logic, experience, and intellectual honesty...and showed “his distaste for popular mysticism” (Cohen, 2000, p. 48). Of particular interest to Cohen in this paper was the problem of the definitions of mysticism and rationalism.

Cohen used what he called a popular definition of mysticism: “a quest to experience God directly, often accompanied by irrational or pseudo-rational recommendations for achieving this aim...it is usually marked by a feeling of ecstasy stemming from the search itself...many will dispute this definition” (Cohen, 2000, p. 49). However, he wrote that mysticism is not empty of rationalism and that much of the mystical texts and experiences include in some part reason or an attempt at logic. He made the effort to explain that Kaplan and Kook did not rely on reason or emotion for singular explanations for meaning in life and that a symmetry between both of these types of consciousness was needed (Cohen, 2000, p. 49).

In comparison to the mystic, the rationalist, according to Cohen, undertook a “quest for meaning and truth [and] refuses to rely on historical revelation, on intuition that lacks any basis in experience and disciplined thought, or on any other method of cognition that ignores the canons of elementary proof...that rationalistic rules must be subject to the same standards of historical and scientific judgment...[that] rationalism usually leaves no room for miracles and is insisting that the rule of natural law is total” (Cohen, 2000, p. 49). But what about the limitations of the mind? Kook and Kaplan realized this happens, but there still is a chasm between these two schools of thought. One unifying factor is that both believe in God’s existence: the mystic through direct experience, and the rationalist, like Maimonides, through logical points (Cohen, 2000, p. 61). One major difference for Kaplan as a modern rationalist is that he asserts that the “theophany at Sinai, historical revelation, *Torah* from heaven, exclusive access to God’s will—these claims of traditional Jewish religion, all of which epitomize mystical thinking, have now been rejected or significantly reinterpreted by the bulk of Jewry” (Cohen, 2000, p. 64).

There are four major factors in the controversy between the mystics and the rationalists: “1) tension between reason and emotion, 2) the chasm between supernaturalism and naturalism, 3) the different perspectives of theism [i.e., Kook] and humanism [i.e., Kaplan], and 4) the theological distance between defining God ideationally and experiencing Him in communion” (Cohen, 2000, p. 68). One unifying factor between Kaplan and Kook is that both believe in the “role of transcendence in search for God” – that change is part of reality (Cohen, 2000, p. 69). But the mystics

point out that God, the Source, is beyond nature. Cohen wrote that, nevertheless, both Kaplan and Kook “love God, Israel and *Torah*”; we must view love as an emotion that binds Jews no matter what their position in this debate—and that love is the epitome of the holiness that permeates and fuses the Jews (Cohen, 2000, pp. 70-71). For the purposes of this research, the author takes the position of the mystical Rabbi Kook in that mystical experiences do occur, that miraculous events may happen, and that there can be a direct connection with God. There are also binding factors of love and holiness among Jews--both rationalists and mystics, and transformations can take place although these transformations may vary across persons.

Sabbatai Svi. One of the large reasons for the contemporary chasm between mystics and rationalists is due to the historical Jewish experience of Sabbatai Svi (aka Sabbatai Zevi). Sabbatai Svi was a Jew in the early 17th century born in Smyrna (now Greece). He attended Yeshiva, and later, through the influence of another young rabbi, Nathan of Gaza, came to believe that he was the Messiah (Davies, 1976). Gaza convinced Svi of his messianic duty, and a movement started and spread to Jewish communities in Yemen, Persia, England, Holland, Russia, and Poland, for example. It was believed that all things on earth would end in 1666, but, of course, that didn’t happen. Later, Svi converted to Islam, but neither that nor his death totally stopped the movement. Davies cited Scholem in that there was an important difference between the Svi movement and traditional Jewish beliefs in the coming of the Messiah: the Svi movement was similar to Christianity in that it believed that man became God/Divine as Jesus and his followers had claimed—and this was unlike the usual Jewish position in which there is a

“qualitative difference between God and man” (Davies, 1976, pp. 530-532). Davies and Scholem wrote that the medieval period of mysticism that had developed relevant to Svi had a strong influence on this movement traversing quickly throughout much of the Jewish world.

Scholem called the fast rise and sudden collapse of Sabbatianism in 1665-1666 C.E. a catastrophe and a heresy. He wrote that this was a result of the “latent energies and potentialities” which had arisen as a result of Lurianic mysticism which had spread throughout the diaspora begun with the expulsion of Jews from Spain [1492 C.E.] (Scholem, 1946/1995). He described the movement as a “manic excitement” that was an “important part played by religious and mystical movements in the development of eighteenth century rationalism...a generally accepted fact...in England and Germany” (Scholem, 1946/1995, pp. 287-324). Scholem points out that anyone claiming to be Divine sets him- or herself above and separate from the crowd and beyond good and evil. This was exemplified by the Sabbatian movement and proved a dangerous way. This could not help but affect other mystics in the Lurianic School and in other mystical traditions. It was during the rationalism of the later centuries that mysticism became separated in the West from many Orthodox and Reform traditions and practices. This historical event of Sabbatainism is an example of why Kabbalistic mystics sometimes are quietly hidden, or underground, from the world and at other times more open in their teachings and writings (such as in the current era). The warnings found in the story of the “Four Who Entered Pardes” is understandably cited often as a warning to mystics in the

Jewish traditions of Kabbalah (found previously in this chapter) since one of the four emerged from the Garden as a heretic.

Where is God in All of This?

Mystical experiences can range from a simple, awesome moment of viewing the earth as the astronauts did from space to the classical experience of Moses conversing with God before the burning bush that was not consumed. Aryeh Kaplan (1990), a Jewish scholar of Kabbalah, defined mystical experience as a “direct connection [but not union] with God.” This author likes this definition because it expresses sacredness as an important aspect of the experience.

God as Buber’s “I-Thou” or “I-It”

For many everyday humans, God is often distant, terrible, uncaring, judgmental, patriarchal, or old-fashioned. Many people don’t even think of or believe in God at all. Martin Buber (1958) wrote in *I and Thou* that there are two kinds of understandings of God. The first is an “I-It” situation in which the I of the person thinks of God as an It—an object distant, outer and separate from the I. To this person, the world, too, is an It. There is no relationship in an I-It view of God or world. The second kind of experience is “I-Thou”; this is an intimate relationship between a subjective human and God whose spark supports human life—a relationship in which words are not necessary since spoken words treat God as object and outside of self. An I-Thou person not only experiences God as intimately present but also experiences the world and everything in it as relational Thou—where Creator and Creation (including I) are one and not separate. Buber writes that there is both risk and sacrifice in the I-Thou relationship: risk, because one must

connect with God only with one's whole being, and sacrifice, because endless possibilities (such as in the creative process of art) are relinquished (Buber, 1958). This means that when one chooses a singular way to God and a completely dedicated life of intent and cleaving unto God, then all other possible ways and choices during a specific lifetime are rejected just as, when a sculptor "sees the figure" in the marble before one cut is made into that stone, all other options (possibilities) of cutting that marble are rejected in favor of the original "seen figure."

In the I-Thou relationship there are no assumptions, goals or preconceived paradigms that would interfere with the direct, immediate relationship with God (Buber, 1958). This direct relationship is open and truthful; the I really surrenders or gives over its own ego to receive the whole experience of God with neither judgment nor expectations. Buber wrote that the holy experience of God in the I-Thou relationship transforms the person and that God, too, is affected by this relationship. Buber said that the more intense the I-Thou experience, the more the spirit occurs between the I and Thou (Buber, p.39) and the more the human wants this spirit in his life. Only through silence is the I-Thou experience received in the fullest sense (Buber, 1958).

How Mystics Experience "I-Thou" Relationships with God

There are two Hebrew words that describe the way Jewish mystics relate to and connect with God. The first is "devekut" which means "cleaving," and the second is "kavvanah" which means "intent" (or concentration or mindset for prayer). Schmidt (1995) cites Deuteronomy 11:22 in the *Torah* as giving instruction from God that we are "to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to *cleave* unto him." There are many

examples in *Torah* of this and other ways to connect with God. Cleaving is more than just loving, worshiping or fearing God—although these are important, too. Cleaving to God as directed by *Torah* and classical exegesis, especially of the Book of Ezekiel, often would lead in ancient days to direct connection with God that resulted in mystical experiences and prophesy (Kaplan, 1990; Schmidt, 1995, p. 104).

Moshe Idel (2002) writes in *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* that “kavvanah” means directing one’s thoughts with intent in order to draw down the holiness of God into the prepared vessel of the corporeal body which is thereby uplifted. This spiritual intention usually occurs with sacred rituals both mental and physical. However, this is dangerous for the unprepared person because lack of knowledge of *Torah* or *Talmud*, immaturity (both physical and spiritual), or lack of wisdom that comes with at least 40 years of age, could harm someone’s life or sanity by that person’s participating in mystical experiences with God such as told in the Talmudic commentaries about Rabbi Akiva who entered Pardes (Scholem, 1974/1978; Schwartz, 1995).

God and the Hebrews

The Encyclopaedia Judaica (Abrahams et al., 2007, pp. 652-672) describes God as “the One, Incomparable God...the Godhead...the True God...the Infinite as Ein Sof.” “God’s power and wisdom find their ultimate expression in the work of creation.” God is the one, constant theme throughout the Bible. Israel is the microcosm in the macrocosm of creation. The Israelites were chosen specifically to receive serious consequences of merit if they lived within the higher morality of Biblical teachings and the “iniquities”

when they did not (Abrahams, et al., 2007). An everlasting covenant was established between God and Israelites that “demanded wholehearted and constant devotion to the Will of God” (Deut. 18:13).

Kabbalistic Jewish mystics take this covenant very seriously as both the “Way” and the “Work” of their lives (Halevi, 1976, 1985; Luzatto, 1734/1999). God offers grace and man or woman offers devotion—analogous to a symbiotic type of relationship. Kabbalists know the two concepts of God’s hiddenness and the revealed God and see neither contradiction nor disparity between these (Abrahams, et al., 2007). We might think of this as Buber has done: an I-It view of God may represent the hidden God, and the I-Thou relationship with God allows Him to be revealed.

Names of God

Mystics in the Jewish tradition receive God in an I-Thou relationship. The ways the mystics expressed this connection with the sacred took many forms. These are some of the more common Jewish names used for God (Hartman, Sperling, Rabinowitz, Idel, & Fox, 2007): HaShem (“the name”), Yahweh (YHVH, referred to as the “Tetragrammaton”), Adonai (“lord”), Elohim (“gods”), Absolute, Source, Creator, Jehovah (YHWH), El Shaddai (“all powerful”) and Makom (Hebrew for “He is the place”) (Abrahams, et al., 2007). An observant Jew would never say aloud the name YHVH. Only the high priest would be able to say the name in the Holy of Holies (room where the Ark of the Covenant was kept) in the Temple at Jerusalem (destroyed in 586 B.C.E by the Babylonians and again in 76 C.E. by the Romans) and only on Yom Kippur (High Holy Day of Atonement that occurs once a year), and we don’t know how it

sounds. Mystics in other religious traditions have used other names for God such as Shiva, Shakti, Void, Almighty, Divine Being, Deity, Providence, Allah, Maker of Heaven and Earth, First Cause, Ruler of Heaven and Earth, Most High, Glory, Sovereign of the Universe, Truth, Krishna and Ram.

Since some of the participants in the current study have not been born Jewish, any of these names of God might appear in the interviews. The participants selected themselves as mystics in the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah when asked if they would like to be interviewed. Many contemporary Jewish-born mystics who were not raised by their parents as Kabbalists and who were not exposed to Jewish mysticism (usually the case in Western Synagogues, Temples and Yeshivas during the 1930's through the 1980's) often found themselves seeking teachers of mysticism in other traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. These Jews are often called "Jew-Bus" (Kamenetz, 1995). Once these Jews found that there was a heritage of mysticism in Judaism, many returned to their Jewish roots. Now that Jewish mysticism has surfaced in the West, many non-Jewish people also are learning Kabbalah to understand their personal mystical experiences. An example of this is the popular rock singer Madonna who is a student of the Los Angeles Rabbi P.S. Berg.

The participants in this study could come from any of these traditions. The contexts of the relationships of the participants with God could vary depending on whether or not the participant is Jewish, observant, or has had Jewish mystical training in his or her formative years. This author left this up to the participants when they self-selected for this study.

Direct Connection with God

Every human has the potential of having this direct connection with the sacred (Kushner, 1977). However, most ordinary people do not develop this potential; mystics do. As young people mystics began to have unusual experiences and learned to catch hold of them, repeat them and begin to understand them (Piechowski, 2000, 2006). This developmental aspect of mystics will be addressed in another chapter of this paper, but for now we will address the part of the mystical experience that is relevant to the direct connection with God.

Mystics across religions, across millennia and across the globe have taught and written about their experiences. As their practices to repeat and strengthen this connection intensified over their lifetimes, so did their experiences become more powerful and more memorable. The product of this work and joy had to do with finding deeper meaning for existence and for the suffering that all living beings experience. The mystics realized that there were different ways to be in the world than the ways most average, everyday humans chose for themselves. The mystics' lives were transformed by these mystical experiences and connection with God.

Jewish mystics over time used the sacred Hebrew letters of YHVH in combinations and permutations as a meditative way of experiencing God in “His” multiple aspects. The Jewish God is translated and thought of as masculine—hence Judaism is considered a patriarchal religion. However there is also the feminine aspect of God which is the Divine Presence, or “Shekhinah,” found within all of creation. These meditative practices, among others, were often taught secretly among families and

students for generations; in this way certain lineages of Jewish mysticism developed (Matt, 1995/1997). In the 13th century Rabbi Abulafia (Abulafia, 1288/2006) disclosed in writing some of these secret meditative permutations and was practically excommunicated by Jewish rabbis, scholars, mystics and communities.

Idel, in his book *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia* (Idel, 1989) that he published based upon his dissertation on Abulafia's mystical techniques, points out that Abulafia's theory of language (Hebrew as sacred language), the meaning of *Torah* in his method, and his use of hermeneutics give us a different philosophical view of Kabbalistic practices and understandings. Abulafia designed permutations of the Hebrew letters of the Divine Names that he found in the classical Kabbalistic text *Sefer Yetzirah* (Kaplan, 1997) that used basically allegorical perception mixed with his revelations. Abulafia also experienced processes of change both intellectually and imaginably. Idel wrote that Abulafia deconstructed the language of the *Torah* texts in order to transcend it and to find revealed within it the living and present Source (Idel, 1989). Abulafia thought that the elements of the Hebrew language themselves had meanings all their own. Idel (1989) credits Abulafia with ferreting out the psychological processes of the practices of doing the permutations—taking the understanding of mystical experiences a step deeper.

The tradition states that the name YHVH was never spoken but breathed—inhaled for “Yah” and exhaled for “Weh” (Cahil, 1998). The breath itself is very spiritual since, in the Genesis story in *Torah* (or five books of the Bible), God Himself breathed into the earthen clay figure of the man that He had formed in order to give him life. Man is

therefore part earth and part spirit. Therefore, Kabbalists (Luzatto, 1734/1999; Zalman, 1797/1997) describe man as having two souls—one is his animal soul and one is his divine soul. According to the *Tanya* (Zalman, 1797/1997), the aim of all Jews is to master the animal soul [impulsive and egotistical self, also known as the Freudian “id”(Hall, 1954)] and live in the realm of the divine soul (the higher, true Self) every day and night. Breathing is the essential thing of human life; science cannot create this wonder. Breathing practices are often used across religions to facilitate connection with God. Some of these breathing practices can be done as singing, meditating, chanting or in silence. Even the formal reading of the *Torah* and *Haftorah* (sections from the books of the Biblical Prophets), if done traditionally, is chanted (called “trop”). Often these techniques are used to bring about altered states of consciousness in which mystical experiences, or divine connections, occur.

Brief Note about Jewish, Mystical, Kabbalistic Traditions

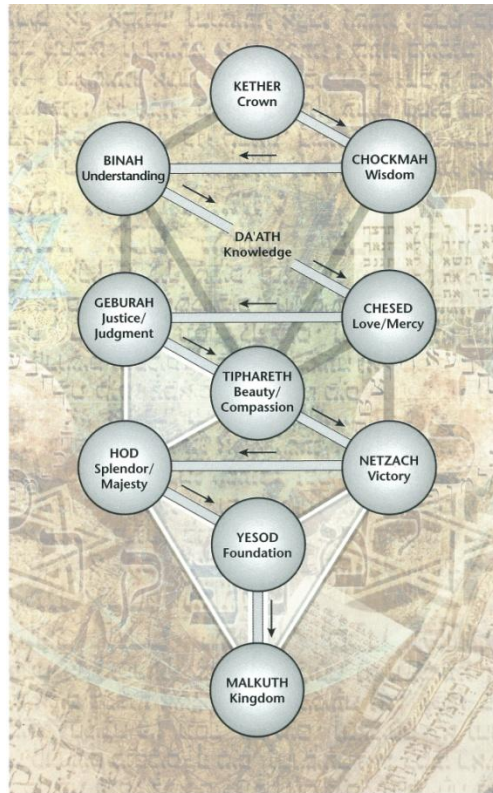
God named this first man “Adam” [Hebrew word Adamah for “earth” (Runes, 2001, p. 6)]. Jewish mystics call this man Adam Kadmon (Scholem, 2007)—the undivided first Adam—the androgynous Adam. Later God separated Adam Kadmon into separate male and female humans. Adam Kadmon was the primordial source of every human who was ever born afterwards. One Kabbalistic version of this story is that each descendant has a spark of the original Adam in him or her. As a matter of Jewish and Kabbalistic understanding, every physical thing in creation has a spark of divinity in it. It is the goal of all Jews, and especially the mystics, to raise the sparks within themselves and all created materials to return them to God by their good thoughts, words and deeds

[called “Tikkun Ha’Olam” aka “spiritual repair of the world” (Samuel, 2007, p. 358)].

Another version is that the Tree of Life, or the Sefirot, represent the “principal Adam” and each aspect of creation (including the Four Worlds”) is a part or an expression of this principal Adam. Only when a soul becomes perfected does it once again become Adam Kadmon (Schaya, 1971). This connection with God is current, ongoing and immediate.

The Divinity in Kabbalah is called “Ein Sof” (“the Infinite” that is indescribable). From the Ein Sof come the emanations that are called the Sefirot; each Sefirah represents one attribute of God. These levels of Sefirotic emanations are represented in the symbol of the “Tree of Life” diagram:

Figure 1. Sefirot, also called Tree of Life (Hopking, 2001, p. 29)



The topmost Sefirah, Keter or “crown,” which is all inclusive and is the first emanation from Ein Sof [Hebrew for “Infinite One” of “Infinite Nothingness”—the formless God (Samuel, 2007, p. 90)] which is usually depicted as above Keter. The Ein Sof is “above or beyond thought” (Scholem, 1974/1978, p. 89). The lowest sefirah is Malkhut which is everything in the physical universe including rocks, plants, animals, humans, planets, stars, water and air, etc. The small arrows in a zigzag line in this diagram represent the path of creation in a lightning-like pattern from top (Ein Sof, then Keter)) down through Malkhut. Jewish mystics, using this pattern as a model for certain practices, strive to raise their consciousness and beingness from Malkhut back up the Tree and through the Sefirot through Keter where they seek to connect with the Divine at

Ein Sof. With practice, the divine spark works to return to its Source—hence completing the circle of Emanation, Creation, Formation and Making (these are the Four Worlds of creation) -- followed by “the Return.” A human’s job is to “choose,” through connection and contacting the Divine, to return to his or her Source—ideally carrying all bits and pieces of the divine sparks in Malkhut back with him or her (Kaplan, 1990). Of course, this explanation is over-simplified. (Please note that in this diagram the Sefirot are spelled differently from the usual ways of Jewish Kabbalistic spellings: Chokmah is Chochmah, Geburah is Gevurah, and Tiphereth is Tiferet for our purposes.)

Summary

Although there are many different types of mystical experience, this paper is concerned with the sacred mystical experiences in the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah. Buber describes two ways in which humans approach God: in a no-dialogue situation of I-It or in a post-dialogue relationship as I-Thou. I-It is not a relationship but a positionality of separateness between man and God as impersonal object. I-Thou is a relationship in which God is experienced intimately by man, others and the world directly (without separation or objectivity).

There is a covenant between God and the Hebrews in which the Hebrews receive the consequences of their obeying the higher moral commitment or not. Kabbalists know this and strive to honor the covenant with their whole being.

Mystics call God by many names with various meanings across religions. The mystics in the current study have selected themselves as being in the tradition of Jewish mystical Kabbalah, and some are non-Jewish. This may or may not make a difference in

the final analyses of the everyday lives of the mystics in that the non-Jews are not considered under the Abrahamic covenant with God, so their everyday might vary depending on their ideas of the way and the work of Jewish mystics.

Some of the work of the Kabbalists is to become righteous by undertaking to have their divine souls predominate over their animal souls. There are various practices such as meditation and breath-work that mystics use to facilitate direct connection with God. Some of these practices have to do with the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, or Sefirot, and the Four Worlds. The purpose of much of Kabbalistic work is to raise the divine sparks within all of Creation and themselves back up to return to the Divine Source from which we came. This would complete a large part of the purpose of creation.

CHAPTER 2

Philosophical Debate about Mysticism in General

Philosophers exploring mysticism have found the task challenging because the experiences are not common to everyone, are not rational, are difficult to explain afterwards in a manner that is clearly understood by others, and can occur within or outside various religious cultures. Attempts to address these challenges have resulted in a great debate among philosophers, theologians, and psychologists. This chapter will address two of the most widely accepted, though divergent points of view in this debate. The first is that of the “Perennialist” or “Common Core” philosophers, and the second is that of the “Social Constructionists.” After a brief description of both, some implications of each position and their application to other philosophical and psychological issues relevant to the research conducted on mysticism in the present study will be discussed.

This author accepts as given several points relevant to the question posed. The first concerns the numerous and varied definitions of mysticism which has been addressed in Chapter 1. Secondly, validity across philosophical views is unlikely to occur since various philosophical methods of thought and reasoning are used to address the problem of mystical analysis. Thirdly, the philosophical view of the functions of language itself must be addressed although only briefly here and in more depth elsewhere in the dissertation. Fourthly, any discussion of Perennialist versus Social Constructionist positions typically takes place generally within “metaphysical philosophy.” The current discussion views mysticism as a theistic or non-theistic way or of receiving knowledge through other than ordinary senses, reasoning or ways of knowing (Audi, 1995).

Common Core/Perennialist Philosophy

Position

Aldous Huxley, who made popular the term “perennialist philosophy” (Huxley, 1944/1970), attributed the first use of the phrase “philosophia perennis” to Leibniz, who pointed out that God creates and that the state of each human is the consequence of that causal creation (Audi, 1995). Simply stated, Perennialist Philosophers support the ontological idea that God is perfection and is the cause of existence. This Cause is the “common core” underlying all mystical experiences; mystics experience this Cause as pure unmediated consciousness. In addition, these scholars have described various other characteristics of mystical experiences as direct experiences of Cause; these are the common core of all mystical experiences. Among the primary philosophical Perennialists are William James (James, 1902/1961) who was an American philosopher, psychologist and physician, W. T. Stace (Stace, 1960) who was an English philosopher, and Robert K. C. Forman (Forman, 1990) who is an American professor of religion.

Perennialists

William James. In the classic text *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1961), James states that God is behind or within mystical experience—thereby God is the common core of mystical experience. Accordingly, mystical experiences exhibit characteristic states of consciousness that are universal no matter what culture or religion the mystic embraces. These characteristics are: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity (James, 1902/1961). James would describe a mystical experience as being

direct, and difficult to articulate, with insights or revelations of knowledge not derived from conscious intellectual activity and conveying an authority that was absent prior to the experience. The experience cannot be sustained over a long period of time, and occurs of itself rather than as a result of some willful action; hence it arises from the common core. James' method of analyzing such experiences was phenomenological. According to Edie (1987, p. 49), James' contributions were the "first to establish any solid basis for a true phenomenology of religious experience."

W. T. Stace. Stace (1960), following in the Common Core tradition of James, characterized mystical consciousness as an experience of the One, of blessedness, and of a feeling of the holy, the sacred or divine. Stace questioned whether mysticism is a subjective phenomenon or something that could be understood as an objective reality (Stace, 1960, p. 14). Mystical states, according to Stace, are important to philosophers because they are experienced directly and thus lie outside science and/or logical thinking. Studying accounts of direct mystical experiences thus presents an opportunity to approach certain universal "truths" that had previously been hard to explicate. Additionally, Stace questioned the many definitions of mysticism found in various texts and traditions. His efforts were made in order to arrive at some suitable standard that could be generalized across various traditions and disciplines. As a result of these efforts, he posited two research questions (Stace, 1960):

- (1) "Is there any set of characteristics which is common to all mystical experiences, and distinguishes them from other kinds of experience, and thus constitutes their universal core?"

- (2) “If there is such a universal core, is the argument for objectivity which has been based upon it a valid argument?”

Using the example of William James, he selected written samples of mystical experiences that represented various traditions, both theistic and non-theistic. He chose accounts that have been recognized historically as authentic and that described actual lived experiences rather than interpretations of experience; some of these he duplicated from James’ research. In this endeavor, he noted the paucity of textual Jewish mystical experiences available to philosophers (Stace, 1960, p. 48). It is important to note that his method of choosing descriptive accounts of actual experience is phenomenological according to philosophical traditions although distinct from phenomenological methods of analysis used in contemporary psychology (which will be employed in this study and will be discussed in the methods section of this dissertation).

Stace considered visions, voices, raptures, trances, or hyper-emotionalism to be “borderline” experiences and eliminated these from his sample. These were eliminated because they were dependent upon personality styles, conflicting definitions, unclear sources of the experiences as stated by the mystics themselves (e.g. Teresa of Avila), or extreme bodily changes (Stace, 1960, pp. 47-51). Because these experiences were non-Universal across mystics, they contradicted the goal of Stace’s research: to find the universal, or core, essence of mystical experiences.

What remained was a sample he called a “nucleus group” (Stace, 1960). Within this group of mystics and their specific experiences, he sorted these mystical experiences into two categories labeled “extrovertive” or “introvertive” [not to be confused with

psychological usage of these terms which have other meanings]. Both of these types of experiences occur within the common core of the Causal, but each of these two types of mystical experiences can be described differently. During an extrovertive experience indicates that the mystic “looks outward through the senses” while during an introvertive experience a mystic “looks inward into the mind (Stace, 1960, p. 61). Then Stace analyzed his data looking for examples of the two subcategories as evidenced in the “common core” of mystical experiences.

The common core characteristics that Stace identified for extrovertive, or “extrospective” (Stace, 1960, p. 61) mystical experiences were:

- 1) The Unifying Vision—all things are One,
- 2) A more concrete apprehension of the One as an inner subjectivity, or life, in all things [this “subjectivity” was projected outwardly into the world, perceived sensually and different from introvertive subjectivity that was separated from exterior life or world because it occurred in the mind without any sensory awareness]
- 3) Sense of objectivity or reality,
- 4) Blessedness, peace, etc.
- 5) Feeling of the holy, sacred, or divine, and
- 6) Paradoxicality

Four of these core experiences (i.e., 3-6 noted above) also were common to introvertive experiences; however two additional characteristics for introvertiveness, or “introspectiveness,” were unique. These were:

- 1) The pure, Unitary Consciousness characterized as the One, the Void
- 2) Nonspatial, nontemporal consciousness.

Stace, admittedly, was unsure whether that the outward One and the inward One were the same for extroverts and introverts even though mystics queried by Stace claimed this to be the case.

Stace attributed differences across these categories of common characteristics to differences in experiences of the outer world which is analogous to sensory experience and the inner world of the mind which is analogous to the intellect. His perspective on these two categories was that extrovertive mysticism was like an “incomplete version” of introvertive mysticism: the extrovertive mystic perceived the “universal life of the world,” while the introvertive mystic realized a “universal consciousness of mind” (Stace, 1960, p. 133). Stace characterized the introvertive consciousness as the “top rung of the *ladder* of life” because it is a “completion” and a “fulfillment” kind of “pure consciousness” experience of unity and mind that is higher than the extrovertive, universal consciousness of the world (Stace, 1960, p. 133).

In comparing the question of subjectivity and objectivity, Stace further asserted that subjective, mystical experiences have just as much value as philosophical objectivity since morality and art are also subjective yet valuable aspects of human experience which are also philosophized (Stace, 1960, p. 206). To Stace, another complexity that made mystical experience stand alone (among other human forms of thought or experience) “above” reason was due to mysticism involving both the divine and the world (Stace,

1960, p. 251). Mystics also experienced paradox in a way that is different from philosophy's verbal paradoxes (Stace, 1960, p. 253); the main difference was that verbal paradoxes contradicted and mystical paradoxes did not. He described differences between intellectual techniques that were based upon, for instance, the objectivity that a square is not a circle. However, mystical experiences in which something could be experienced in pure consciousness as both a square and a circle simultaneously—a state beyond reason (Stace, 1960, pp. 251-276)—in effect represent pure consciousness that is different from everyday, intellectual consciousness that usually is founded upon reason alone.

Stace (1960, pp. 277-306) also discussed the problem of language and mystical experience because all mystics say, as James had stated, that mystical experiences are ineffable and that mystics use words afterwards to try unsuccessfully to describe those experiences and what they mean. Even an awareness and understanding of knowledge or truth that came during the mystical event was often lost not only verbally but also logically and emotionally upon the mystics' returning to everyday conscious states afterwards. Stace addressed the attitude that mystical experiences were more emotional and therefore less logical by suggesting that one did not exclude the other and that the difference regarding emotionality was really only a difference in perception. Stace also confronted the difficulty of language as something that occurred between a mystic and a non-mystic in a speaker-to-hearer relationship as something like a color-seeing person trying to describe colors to a blind person. Stace examined this relationship as similar to the Universal Self, the One, the Self as the mystical experiencer/speaker Who is trying to describe the experience to the non-experiencer/hearer who is the logical, worldly, self.

This is like trying to describe an unspeakable, undifferentiated non-concept occurring in the mystical experience to a person who understands only words and concepts and who lives outside these experiences (Stace, 1960, p. 297). The problem is, therefore, twofold: firstly, non-language during the unity experience, and secondly, remembering and converting the experience to language and duality (non-Oneness or non-Unity) after the experience. This pure consciousness experience is, therefore, converted to “remembered mystical experience” (Stace, 1960, p. 299). So for Stace, the pure consciousness experience comes prior to language. This is the core of the debate; did language come before the experience, or did language shape the experience?

Robert K. C. Forman. A Jewish philosopher (who has also meditated in the Hindu tradition for 20 years), Forman (1990) questioned the social constructivist model of mysticism. He explained that philosophers should rethink the definitions of mysticism that stood as the foundations of Stace’s (and by implication, James) and, subsequently, Katz’s phenomenological analyses. Forman argued that mystics experience a “pure consciousness event” (PCE) that is “neither constructed nor shaped in either form, content, or process” (Forman, 1990, p. 21); pure consciousness in these cases is non-intentional and objectless. He writes that if the PCE is shaped by language and social constructions, then why are mystical experiences described across cultures, ages, religions and languages in the same ways?

Forman thought that there was a “forgetting” or “state of being oblivious” (Forman, 1990, p. 30) (term borrowed from Eckhart and Underhill) involved during the mystical event; the remembering came after the experience. What had been forgotten

during PCE's were "emotional attachments, all thoughts, feelings and sensations" (Forman, 1990, p. 31). So Forman's model expressed the idea that the "contentless" mystical experience occurs first in its purity and then, immediately afterwards, is remembered and fitted into a language and culture as the mystic seeks meaning and expression of the event in his everyday, non-pure consciousness. Western culture doesn't necessarily support this "massive forgetting," but Forman cites several scientific, ocular discoveries that show that when observers saw a completely patternless visual field, or Ganzfeld, such as during a blizzard, the whiteness pervaded for awhile and then the field went black or blank like a "blackout" in which the observers couldn't tell whether their eyelids were open or closed.

Forman compares this experience to that of mystics' forgetting (Forman, 1990, p. 36). Awareness or consciousness was there even if there was neither a figural, visual image nor, during the "blackout," a visual field or ground. Some kind of "seeing" was happening even if what was being seen was other than everyday ocular sight and other than a sensory experience of eyes and eyelids or world and objects in it. Forman re-examined both the Experience and the Experiencer. So, during mystical experiences, the seer (Experiencer), the seeing (Experiencing), and the seen (Experience itself) were, on the surface, very similar to the ocular experiments, but, when considering all levels of meaning and consciousness, they were not the same. [This will be connected to the phenomenological method derived from Merleau-Ponty's work in the Methods Chapter of this dissertation].

Given that Forman examined mystical experiences and compared his ideas to those of Kant (Audi, 1995) and Whorf (Carroll, 1971), he found that Kant's philosophy supported the Social Constructivist idea that belief and language "impose categories of unity onto the experience." Whorf's philosophy supported the PCE idea of the Perennialists in that experience is a "seamless whole, a continuous flow of existence" (Forman, 1990). Kant described that the shaping of experience was a "formless flux"; for Whorf the "seamless whole" experience imposed upon a person resulted in [subsequent] divisions of the whole experience into various categories (Forman, 1990).

Forman thought that neither of these two directions by Kant or Whorf applied to the mystical experience. Kant's ideas regarding *Phenomena and Noumena* were that "the produce of mind is not borrowed from experience but is for use only in experience" and "we cannot conceive a mind which knows...by a nonsensible awareness" (Rader, 1969, pp. 400-401). Mystical experiences are nonsensible (non-sensory) and outside of logical consciousness; therefore they are exempt from this discussion. Although for Whorf language was a seamless whole with existence, there was a problem with Whorf's idea that language influences thought and that different languages bring about different thought patterns resulting in the world being divided experientially across humans by the different language categories (Carroll, 1856/1971). Whorf's ideas cannot apply to mystical experiences because there are no thought patterns occurring during mystical events and, therefore, non-existent thought patterns could not possibly shape these events as they occur. Forman (1990) concluded that "PCE's neither constructed nor shaped experience in either form, content or processes" because "PCE's don't occur with (by)

normal, everyday intellect (thought), sensation or perception.” Therefore, for the Perennialists, neither language nor social constructs shape mystical experiences.

Social Constructionist Philosophy

Position

The “Social Constructionist” philosophers opposed the Perennialist position by saying that no common core exists because any mystical experience precedes any subsequent “interpretation” as to Cause. Steven Katz, an American professor of Jewish history and religion (Katz, 1978), and Proudfoot, an American professor of religion (Proudfoot, 1985), provided an argument that interpretations of experience result from linguistic and religious beliefs that mystics bring into the experience and that precede their experiences. In other words, the mystical experience is mediated a priori by the social constructions of language and belief systems within which the mystics live. These mediated experiences, according to the Social Constructionists, are not the same across all situations and belief systems. So, in opposition to James and Stace who said that mystical experiences were universal, the Social Constructionists propose that mystical experiences are not universal but can vary depending upon social factors such as the language or religious background of the mystic.

Social Constructionists

Steven T. Katz. The Jewish scholar Katz criticized James, Stace and others for their writings on mysticism which included too many biases and assumptions. In his opinion, these hurt the validity of their works (Katz, 1978). The idea that all mystical experiences are the same is not very “sophisticated” according to Katz (1978, p. 24). He

writes that a more sophisticated view of the Perennialists should be that all mystical experiences are the same but the language of the reported experience is culturally bound. Also, when one separates mystical experiences into “types” (not the same as Stace’s categories) that can be applied across cultures, the highest level of sophistication in understanding such experiences becomes possible. It is evident at this new level, that, although language is culturally bound, the experiences reported by different mystics are similar [not universal] and can be characterized by type. For Katz, although Stace’s work employed the highest level of sophistication in understanding mystical experiences, Stace’s phenomenological and philosophical methods were problematic because in Katz’s estimation, Stace forced the texts of mystical experiences into incorrect categories (i.e., introvertive or extrovertive).

Essentially, Katz took a semantic view when he wrote that even though mystics might have used the same words to describe their experiences, these words did not necessarily mean the same things across cultures (Katz, 1978, p. 25). He is proposing that the culture, language, and religious beliefs (or non-beliefs) of the mystic “shape” the mystical experience. His conclusion is that there could be NO “pure consciousness experience” (PCE) for mystics (Katz, 1978, p. 26). Katz states that the “process of differentiation of mystical experience into the patterns and symbols of established religious communities is experiential and does not take place in the process of reporting and interpreting the experience itself; it is at work before, during, and after the experience” (Katz, 1978, p. 27). For him, a mystical experience by one mystic, no matter how it was described, was not necessarily the same as one experienced by another mystic.

For example, both a Hindu mystic's experience and a Christian mystic's experience might be theistic and expressed with identical words, but the experiences themselves would be different. A Christian mystic might use the descriptive expression of having had a "union with God" meaning he has had a theistic experience and some "resemblance" with, but not identity to, God. A Hindu mystic might also use the same descriptive expression "union with God" and mean that his "individual self is identical with Brahman or the Universal Self" (Katz, 1978, p. 29). A Buddhist might have a similar experience but not describe it as union with God or Universal Self. With these examples, Katz criticizes Stace's non-appreciation of these "linguistic, social, historic, and conceptual" complexities (Katz, 1978, p. 29).

Katz also reminded us that the phenomenological problem of the mystic's own "interpretation" (i.e., his or her choice of descriptive words) of his or her experience involved, at the minimum, a reporting procedure that was one step removed from the experience itself since an experience would be [physically] impossible to report during the time of the actual mystical event. [The perspective of phenomenological psychology in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty (which says that speaking or the voicing of experience is synonymous with the experience and not removed from the experience) will be discussed in the Methods chapter of this study.]

Katz (1978) also criticized Stace concerning "loss of self" during a mystical experience that Stace reported had occurred most commonly, during Introvertive mystical experiences which he characterized as "Unitary Consciousness" (Stace, 1960, p. 131). In this experience, individuality dissolved into unity with the One (Stace, 1960, p. 111).

Katz argued that this could not be true across mystical experiences because Jewish mystics do not dissolve into God since their belief is that a human's individual self is always distinct from God. Judaism shapes, or socially constructs, the mystical experience-- thus proving that Stace's conclusion was incorrect (Katz, 1978, p. 33).

Katz continued to debate mystical experiences when he stated that the "conditions of experience" (Katz, 1978, p. 32) also affected mystical experiences. He used the example of the Jewish mystical theology of the Kabbalists that supported a learned and conditioned experience of mysticism. This system instills the belief that "the visible and perceivable is unreal and the unperceived and non-sensual is the real" (Katz, 1978, p. 33); this belief then sets a world view in advance of the experience. ([note: I have seen references in Jewish books that refute this "reality" position; various lineages of Kabbalists have assorted interpretations.] The intent of the mystics within this worldview, according to Katz, shapes the mystical experience beforehand and the interpretation afterwards. For Katz, therefore, the mystical experiences are "contextual" and not pure consciousness experiences (Katz, 1978, pp. 56-57); these constructed contexts create the ground in which all mystical experiences occur (Katz, 1978, p. 63).

So, taking into account the previous statements by James (1902/1961) and Stace (1960) that the mystical experiences themselves were impossible to describe during the experience and also hard to language after the experience, Katz (1978) went further in examining mystical experiences by questioning not only the philosophical approaches (e.g., Stace's categories of introversion, extroversion and the Oneness experience) of the Perennialists but also the phenomenological processes that had been used in their

analyses (e.g., Stace's acknowledging of lingual terms as having equal meaning across mystics of different religions, cultures and eras). These additional points made by Katz suggested a deeper awareness of problems concerning phenomenological analyses of the experience (phenomenon) in the mystical texts that Stace had addressed. In this sense, he is talking about analyzing the experience (phenomenon) rather than phenomenological analysis of the sort used by psychologists (i.e., in the current study). Regarding phenomenological analytical processes, he recommended improvements in text editions, text analyses, text sources, a priori assumptions, and in philosophical methods (not to mention translations from other languages into English!) (Katz, 1978, pp. 65-66).

Wayne Proudfoot. Continuing in the vein of Social Constructionists, Wayne Proudfoot (1985, p. xii) addressed the importance of studying human experience in the academic traditions of religion, philosophy of mind and psychology. He wrote that Descartes and Kant were chiefly responsible for interfering with the progress of philosophical metaphysics so that theology was reduced to dogma and that religious philosophical inquiry was reduced to "science, metaphor and morality" by their limiting presentations of empirical (logical) evidence (Proudfoot, 1985, p. xiii). Before this Age of Reason (17th century), experience was unmediated and undifferentiated by logically splitting intellect away from body and making it an object as other objects in the world. Also during this time the split of church and state (i.e., empiricism vs. religion as dogma) occurred and continues in scholarship today. This is relevant to the current research because the current topic allows an opportunity for reuniting of the scientifically reduced Cartesian split into the investigation of a whole and unmediated experience.

Proudfoot cited the philosopher Schleiermacher (1768-1834) as “freeing” religious beliefs and practices as experiences that are expressions of the current moment and irreducible. These experiences are also unmediated by linguistic representations. Per Schleiermacher, the subject is the only person who can interpret his experiences without reductionism (Proudfoot, 1985, p. xiv). [These ideas are perfectly in line with Merleau-Ponty—to be discussed later.] Using this view as a basis for inquiries about mystical experiences, Proudfoot said the “aim of phenomenology in classical studies of mysticism [is] to distinguish a single core or several fundamental types of mystical experiences from the perspective of the mystics’ attitudes and beliefs (Proudfoot, 1985, p. 121). Proudfoot noted as problematic and not addressed in the Perennialists’ analyses that since attitudes and beliefs are usually adopted prior to the mystical experiences, these experiences are shaped by concepts and expectations that the mystic brings. Therefore, he agrees with Katz that these beliefs and attitudes are formative of the experience as debated by the Social constructivists as empiricists (Proudfoot, 1985, p. 121). For example, Jewish mystical experiences involve “devekut” (Hebrew word that means “cleaving to God” in mystical connection) (Schmidt, 1995) and are not the same as Buddhist mystical experiences which involve “Nirvana” (Sanskrit word that means having a period of freedom in an unmanifest condition).

Proudfoot agreed with the Perennialist James that mystical states “have primary markers both ineffable and noetic” (Proudfoot, 1985, p. 120), but he disagreed with Stace who recognized the embedded conditions of belief and attitudes in the mystics but still claimed the core experience could be different from the various interpretations

(Proudfoot, 1985, p. 123). Proudfoot declared that the “logic that governs the concepts” is different across various religions and that these differences are part of the shaped experiences of mystics. Therefore, he said we cannot separate the common core from its interpretation as the Perennialists had done, and the interpretations alone make up the experience. If analysts separate the experience from the interpretation, the experience is lost. So for Proudfoot, the term “mystical experience” cannot be used universally across cultures or history, and the search for the common core is a waste of time. He does agree, however, that similar experiences of mystics deserve attention to common characteristics (Proudfoot, 1985, pp. 123-124).

Debate and Psychological Issues

Philosophical and Psychological Issues

Compared with philosophers who offer “views or theories on profound questions in ethics, metaphysics, logic and other related fields” (“Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary,” 2001, p. 1454), psychologists focus on the “science of mind or mental states and processes” and the “science of human and animal behavior” (“Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary,” 2001, p. 1561). In other words, philosophers intellectualize or cogitate about their questions and then propose answers according to their understandings and analyses. Psychologists go a step further and scientifically investigate the world and the people in it by hypothesizing theories about certain topics and then experimenting in order to establish observable, reproducible and generalizable facts about behaviors and processes that support or negate those theories. In this way, psychologists may apply investigative methods to prove or disprove

philosophical ideas. In both approaches, psychologists and philosophers seek to make meaning of human existence although using different approaches.

In the area of mystical experiences, these two fields of science and philosophy come together. Historically, religions and mystical experiences have been in existence globally for millennia. For example, Western philosophy of mysticism can be easily demonstrated in the writings of Philo (c. 20 B.C.-A.D. 40) (Audi, 1995, p. 579) during the Hellenistic Greek period and Plotinus (A.D. 204-70) during the Roman era (Audi, 1995, p. 624). Eastern philosophies include those of Hindu scholars, for example, that predate Western mystical philosophical traditions by thousands of years.

In modern times with the origination and development of the field of psychology, William James comes to the forefront. Later, although Behavioral Psychology and Psychoanalysis did not sincerely recognize religious experience, empirical Psychology of Religion began to arise in the mid-20th century (Hood, 1996, p. vii). Hood emphasized that religious experience through empirical research, has now moved beyond basic philosophical theories and conceptions into verifiable, data-based psychological knowledge (Hood, 1996, pp. vii-viii).

Debate and Empirical Psychology

Ralph Hood. The importance of empirical research in psychology has been demonstrated in Hood's work as a philosophical psychologist, a psychology professor of religion and mystical experience, and a William James scholar (awarded in 1985 by the American Psychological Association) (American Psychological Association, 1985). He reported studies that included several empirical research questions, methods and findings

that are summarized briefly in the following paragraphs concerning the psychology of the nature of mystical experiences. Then he reviewed those studies and suggested ways to understand them in relation to, and as applications of, the debate between the Perennialists and the Social Constructivists. Hood described himself (Hood, 2004) as having joined the debate on the side of the Common Core/Perennialists. The following information collected and observed by Hood is offered as a foundation for understanding mystical experiences that will promote deeper appreciation of the participants' experiences in the current study.

First, Hood addressed some concerns with the definitions and concepts of mystical experiences. He particularly noted the differences between “numinous” and “mystical” experiences (Hood, 1996, pp. 225-226). Those two types of experiences often have been lumped together solely as “mystical” but actually could be understood separately. The word “numinous”, according to Hood, comes from the Latin word *numen* “denoting a power implicit in a sacred object.” However, the “mystical” experience is more a unity type of experience without any connection with objects in or of the world. Hood and the researchers he mentioned contrasted the numinous with Stace’s “extrovertive mysticism” and the “mystical” with Stace’s “introvertive mysticism” or Forman’s “pure conscious experience” (Hood, 1996, p. 225). Hood supported the idea that introvertive experiences likely come before extrovertive ones; however he wrote that neither experience is necessarily “higher” than the other. The views of these two types of mystical experience as being either different from each other or not definitely affect research designs regarding measurements of aspects of a mystical experience. Hood takes

the position among most scholars that together both of these types combined characterize mysticism in a unique way (Hood, 1996, p. 225).

Secondly, Hood (1996, p. 226-227) noted that psychologists including William James have recognized and accepted mystical experiences as being either “impersonal” or “personal.” Impersonal experience is described as being absolute or introvertive. Personal experience is numinous, holy, being in the presence of God as other, or extrovertive. Whether personal or impersonal, psychologists have also shown that, due to “identifiable empirical consequences” (Hood, 1996, pp. 227), mystical experiences can be considered “real.” Hood wrote that these “foundational realities” which are beliefs are authoritative [in both a scientific and philosophical sense] and represent “faith” [beliefs in these experiences] shared by others who may not have had actual mystical experiences themselves. Hood said that one cannot deal with any religious traditions without willingly agreeing with the assumption that “transcendent objects” of mystical experience are real.

Thirdly, Hood (1996, p. 228) summarized the three major social-scientific, classical views of mystical experience as quoted below:

1. *Mysticism as erroneous attribution.* Mystics attribute to transcendence objects that can in fact be explained in social-scientific terms. These processes have been variously identified as physiological, psychological, or sociological. The misattribution is to assume that something more is involved in such experiences. Most commonly the “more” is believed to be something transcendent, including, in cases of personal mysticism, God, Allah, or Yahweh.

2. *Mysticism as heightened awareness.* Mysticism is an awareness of ultimate reality that occurs with heightened or altered awareness. This awareness may be variously interpreted, or the interpretations may reflect different reality claims. Although social-scientific processes can be identified that permit the experience of transcendence to occur, they need not deny genuine ontological status to the object of transcendence. In simple terms, both the mystical experience and its object are real in the terms of which they are experienced.
3. *Mysticism as evolved consciousness.* Mysticism is the most evolved form of consciousness. It is variously interpreted to be potentially common to all humans or to currently characterize only some humans (a few advanced or “evolved” persons). Typically, this form of consciousness is interpreted in purely scientific terms. The transcendent is merely the naturally evolved form of consciousness (Hood, 1996, p. 228).

More simply stated, the first classical view is that mystical experiences are not real and can be explained in terms like those Freud used when he said religious experiences were illusory and delusional; therefore mysticism is pathological. The second view is that mystical experiences are a form of heightened awareness in some people that could be understood as a wider interpretation of consciousness such as coming from other dimensions such as from the “subconscious” or from an “overbelief” in God. This perspective brings to bear the tensions between science and religion as the field of

psychology evolved post-Freud. The third view says that consciousness is evolving in humans and that mysticism is not pathological but is a form of that higher consciousness; Jung, as an example of a “dynamic mystical [evolutionary] theorist,” said that everyone could potentially have numinous experiences (Hood, 1996, pp. 228-231).

Hood determined from this that there were four key issues that impact empirical psychological understanding of mystical experiences:

1. How is mysticism to be operationalized and measured?
2. What empirical relationships exist between mystical experience and its interpretation? How does language affect experience?
3. What kind of persons report mystical experiences? Do such experiences occur across the developmental spectrum? Are they characteristic of the healthy or the sick? Do they occur only among religiously committed?
4. What triggers such experiences? Can they be facilitated, or do they occur only spontaneously? Is an experience affected by how it is produced? For instance, are experiences reported under drugs possibly the same as those reported during prayer? (Hood, 1996, pp. 231-232)

So in view of this, Hood found three ways that mysticism has been operationalized and measured in psychological research:

1. Open-ended responses to specific questions intuitively assumed to tap mystical or numinous experience. These responses may then be variously coded or categorized.

2. Questions devised for use in survey research. Of necessity, these questions are brief, limited in number, and worded in language easily understandable for use in random surveys of the general population.
3. Specific scales to measure mysticism, including (a) numinous sense of presence, and (b) a mystical experience of unity (Hood, 1996, p. 233).

Hood, in reviewing multitudinous empirical research findings (including some of his own), concluded that the mystical and numinous remain important in researching religious experiences, that people who have these experiences deserve attention to their claims, that there may be less variance across cultures concerning these experiences than previously thought, and that social scientists cannot deny there may be truths within religions as experienced by mystics who are often converted to those beliefs (Hood, 1996, p. 265). There is no separation of experience from experiencer here; this position upholds the Perennialist position and is in opposition to that of Forman and the Social Constructionists.

Philosophical and Psychological Phenomenology

Both philosophical and psychological phenomenologies are based upon the philosophical writings of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. However, to be very brief, psychological phenomenology moves phenomenology from philosophy to scientific research that entails actual, subjective and lived human experience. The method involves open-ended interviews between researchers and participants. The interviews are

then transcribed and examined hermeneutically (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Hermeneutics is a theoretical method that originated as a way of examining [Biblical] texts so that depth of meaning could be reached without altering the wording or intent of the original texts or their translations (Audi, 1995, p. 323). In this method, according to Pollio, the words in the interview texts are examined as parts that relate to the whole text. Each word is in the context of and never separated from the interview. Pollio says that this method is different from the “linear” reading that philosophers do and is more like Gestalt psychology that stresses “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” As a result of using the hermeneutic method in phenomenological research, the Cartesian split or separation of mind from body/world/spirit can be repaired to allow the full and whole human experience to be expressed and understood psychologically. In the hermeneutic method used in psychological phenomenology, we have the best method available for soliciting the whole, everyday experiences of mystics. [An expanded description of hermeneutics and psychological phenomenology shall be addressed in the Methods chapter of this research paper.]

Language is another issue raised by the debate. Husserl (1965) said that language is the first reduction of lived experience and that the experiencer must formulate and speak his or her experience through the symbols of language. Then a second reduction occurs when a hearer/interpreter renders the first spoken language. The debate centers within this issue. Both experiencer and listener symbolize and interpret according to the contexts of their own individual lives. Since language is the vehicle of communication between humans, and since mystical experiences are ineffable and noetic, the difficulties

of this aspect of the current phenomenological project are important and shall be addressed in another portion of this dissertation.

Debate Summary

In essence, the two major positions taken in the philosophical debate about mystical experiences are by (1) the Common Core/Perennialists and (2) the Social Constructionists. The Perennialists such as James, Stace, Forman and Hood posit that mystical experiences originate in a universal or divine source and can be understood afterwards no matter what the religion, language or culture of the mystic. On the other hand, the Social Constructionists such as Katz and Proudfoot say that mystical experiences are a pure consciousness experience that afterwards is shaped by the religion, language and culture in which the mystic lives; without this construction, the experience is undecipherable.

Implications for Current Study

The debate about Common Core/Perennialist and Social Constructionist positions regarding mystical experiences is relevant to the study because the participants have self-identified as mystics and are expected to talk about their mystical experiences. However, there are several differences between the issues that have arisen in the discussion of the debate and those occurring in the current study.

1. This study is not focused on the mystical experiences themselves but upon the everyday lives of mystics. The participants' discussions of mystical experiences will only set the stage, or fix the context if you prefer, for the discussions of how they go about their lives while, at the same time, either

naturally receiving or purposefully facilitating these various mystical experiences.

2. The debate as discussed above is about mystical experiences in general, but the participants in this study will be discussing their mystical experiences only as they are limited to the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah.
3. Since this study is phenomenological, the interviews and, possibly, the thematic structures are expected to express in some ways the relationships between the participants, their mystical experiences, and the functions of their lives such as when they are awake, asleep or carrying out their day's work, social, and personal activities.
4. The participants probably will talk about numerous types of mystical experiences which could encompass the numinous, introvertive, unitive, and extrovertive variations as noted above. For the purposes of this study, all types of mystical experiences such as have been considered in the debates shall be included without differentiation (except when addressed in the final discussion chapter of this dissertation).

In the psychological tradition of James, the phenomenological method used by philosophers of mysticism no matter whether Perennialist or Social Constructionist remains an effective research method of choice for psychologists today.

CHAPTER 3

Psychologies of Mystical Experiences

The psychology of mystical experiences has been explored for centuries, even over millennia if we include Eastern religions. This author will not review all the literature available but will hit the top of the information available as it might pertain to the current study. The focus of this research is not the mystical experiences themselves but is about how the mystics who are her participants live their everyday lives with these mystical events happening. Mystical experiences can occur either spontaneously or by being facilitated by various practices. Those practices will be addressed later in this chapter.

Evelyn Underhill (Underhill, 1911/1999), originally a poet who researched and wrote her classic book about mysticism, became the first woman to lecture at Oxford on Theology. She mainly described mysticism and the varieties of spiritual ways that mysticism manifested personal lives and in Christianity. She stated that the “central fact of the mystic’s experience is:

“an overwhelming consciousness of God and of one’s own soul: a consciousness which absorbs or eclipses all other centres of interest”
(Underhill, 1911/1999, p. 9).

She wrote that some religious traditions supported mysticism more than others; mystical experiences were found in all traditions. Pertaining to the development of mystics, Underhill wrote that

“the mystic way is best understood as a process of sublimation, which carries the correspondences of the self with the universe up to higher levels than those on which our normal consciousness works. Just as the

normal consciousness stands over against the unconscious, which, with its buried impulses and its primitive and infantile cravings, represents a cruder reaction of the organism to the external world, so does the developed mystical life stand over against normal consciousness, with its preoccupations and its web of illusions encouraging the animal will-to-dominate and the animal will-to-live” (Underhill, 1911/1999, pp. 13-14).

Underhill (1911/1999, pp. 14-15) suggested that we compare the lives and declarations of different mystics and then that we re-translate these into psychological terms so that the meaning in the psyche of human life will be exposed and further understood. These words were prophetic for the task of psychologists of the future who wanted to understand the people who had lived such different lives from the rest of humanity. This research is just another step in the progress of understanding how ordinary lives turn into extraordinary lives.

A Modern Look at Mystics and Body in General

The relationship of the human body and mystical experience is powerful and complex. First we must discuss this relationship in order to set a context for understanding the position of mystics regarding health and disease. [The issue of mental illness, however, will be discussed later in this chapter.]

Body as facilitator of mystical experiences

Non-Mystic body. The body is affected by, and can be used to facilitate, mystical experiences. The average state of the body for non-mystics in the general population can be known through the study of the sciences of human physiology and medical texts. Included in these works are reports of the body awake, asleep (dreaming or in deep sleep), dreaming (REM sleep), sick, unconscious (e.g., anesthetized or in a coma), and in

death. The experiences of mystics in relation to these bodily situations may have different perspectives, meanings, beliefs, cultures, medicines and understandings. The following paragraphs will address briefly some of these differences.

Mystics' Development of Body Skills. Mystics often develop their abilities over a lifetime and within different traditions so that, after mastering many relevant skills, they have affected the normal, everyday states of their bodies' physiology. For example, advanced mystics of many sacred traditions (e.g., Hindu, Sufi, Buddhist and Jewish) are usually experienced meditators. Much research has been done on the physiology of meditation, and a little has been done on meditation and mystical states. So listed below are some of these research projects and findings. (Please bear in mind that there are multitudinous meditation practices within and across disciplines that will not be addressed here.)

Behavioral and Physiological Psychology

Meditation and physiology. [Note: Although physiological research is not part of this current study, some physiological information is included here to show that there are scientific ramifications physiologically to inducing altered states of consciousness and to show that meditation, as an aspect of Jewish mystical practices, has real-time and real-world ramifications for people involved in these practices.] Julian Davidson (1976), in her classical work "The physiology of meditation and mystical states of consciousness", reviewed many of the reports of "significant decreases in heart rate, respiration rate, oxygen consumption and carbon dioxide elimination, arterial blood lactate titer, and minute ventilation, as well as significant decreases in skin conductance" (Davidson,

1976, p. 350) that were common conceptions at that time. She was not able to find much hard, scientific research available then that supported these claims, and she added that the prospects for research of true mystical experiences were poor (Davidson, 1976, p. 374). She recommended studying Zen and Hindu practitioners, psychopharmacologic effects of psychedelic drugs, and non-intrusive EEG monitoring related to hemispheric dominance, for example.

Since that time, with increased abilities and availabilities of scientific measuring equipment such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI's), sleep monitors (PSG's, polysomnographs), electrocardiographs (EKG/ECG's), electroencephalographs (EEG's), and electromyographs (EMG's), contemporary research has begun to address the effects and benefits of meditation. The following paragraphs show some of the results of modern research in these areas. This author suggests that these studies might hint that mystics, who usually meditate in one form or another, might have actual physiological changes both temporary and permanent in their bodies which could lead the way in explaining the various ways these mystics experience realities as different from reality experienced by non-mystics. Rabbi Yitzchak (2003, pp. 72-87), a Hassidic scholar, views the respiratory system as the "spirit of the breath of life that enters and sustains the body." He writes that there are parallels of spiritual/mystical life with each of the body systems.

Kaul, et al, (Kaul, Passafiume, Sargent, & O'Hara, 2010) found that psychomotor vigilance improved for novice meditators, and sleep duration decreased for experienced

meditators. For mystics, these might indicate their hyper-awareness and their deep restfulness or peace that occurs while meditating.

Wachholtz, et al, (2005) found that significant interactions occurred for the Spiritual Meditation group when compared with the Secular Meditation group and the Relaxation group. The Spiritual Meditation group had greater decreases in anxiety and more positive mood, spiritual health, and spiritual experiences; they also tolerated pain (hands in ice-cold water) almost twice as long as the other two groups. Mystics usually practice meditation to facilitate mystical experiences, and well-being is important to mystics since they often seek to marginalize them-selves in non-mystic communities. As an aside, Perle Besserman, a direct descendant of the Baal Shem Tov, wrote that a Jewish mystic, when in deep meditation, could be pierced with a knife and not feel it (Besserman, 1994, 1999).

Paul-Labrador, et al, (2006) showed that, for participants with coronary heart disease (CHD) who were divided into two groups (Transcendental Meditation (TM) group and Active Control group) for a 16-week clinical trial, the TM group had beneficial changes in blood pressure, insulin resistance, and heart rate variability when compared with the control group. Advanced mystics who often have difficulty remaining in their bodies or who have health issues find that meditation helps regulate their bodily functions so that they may continue their work in the world.

Wood, et al (2007), in a study by an Office of Naval Research, used meditation as a treatment method for a volunteer male corpsman diagnosed with chronic PTSD and

other co-morbid depressive and post-concussion complications (due to a combat explosion beneath his Humvee in Iraq). During ten 90-minute sessions he was introduced to and taught the process of meditation as an intervention in order to facilitate emotional, cognitive and physical relaxation. The patient also experienced virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET) simulations on two computers while undergoing measurements by apparatus with a third computer. Measured were skin conductance, finger temperature, respiration rate, and heart rate. The patient had a general trend across time of decreased arousal in the recovery stage after the mild combat simulations, and he effectively managed to have his diagnosis reduced to a less critical level of PTSD. In another portion of this paper, the author shall discuss the hypersensitivities that often accompany spiritual giftedness. Meditation helps to maintain equilibrium for mystics. The following paragraph also supports this idea.

Carlson, et al, (2007) studied the ongoing effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction in a program to improve quality of life, symptoms of stress, mood and endocrine, immune and autonomic parameters in early-stage breast and prostate cancer patients. The patients experienced relaxation, meditation, yoga, and daily home practice; they were measured at pre-test and at both 6- and 12-month follow-ups. The researchers found that overall stress symptoms were reduced, cortisol levels decreased, immune patterns showed continued reduction in inflammatory cytokines (proteins secreted by regulatory cells of the immune system), systolic blood pressure decreased, and heart rate was positively associated with stress-reduction.

Phongsuphap, et al, (2008) studied two groups: one, a group of meditation masters who had achieved Samadhi states (one-pointed concentration; occurs at many levels from awareness to no awareness), and the other, a group of matched subjects with no meditation experience. The researchers found that meditation may have different effects on health depending on the experience and peak levels of the meditators. Heart rate revealed variability during meditation that changed from a normal state systematically. Other findings suggest that meditation may have health benefits: resetting baroreflex sensitivity (in the heart this regulates blood pressure by controlling heart rate, strength of heart contraction, and diameter of blood vessels), increasing parasympathetic tone and improving efficiency of gas exchange in the lung. Mystics often enter altered states both spontaneously and voluntarily, so increased efficiency of both heart and lung functions could assist them in maintaining health and life-functions while undergoing these experiences. Notice that more experienced meditators had more noticeable responses to the tests than less experienced ones; this could also be true for mystics.

MRI Research and Meditation. Brain activity of meditators has been studied using MRI. Here are a few of the many research results, and these may also point us in the direction of what might happen in the brains of some mystics.

Wang, et al, (2011) measured with fMRI scans both cerebral neural activity and blood flow in ten meditators at baseline and during both focus-based and breath-based meditations. The findings showed effects in frontal regions, anterior cingulate, limbic system and parietal lobes with different cerebral blood flow patterns depending on which

of the meditations was being tested. There were strong correlations between depth of meditation and neural activity in the left inferior forebrain (e.g., inferior frontal cortex and temporal lobe). These findings correlated with the self-reports of the participants. For mystics, changes in similar areas of brain functioning might also be indicated by studies such as this one.

Luders, et al, (2009), were interested in meditation-induced psychological and physiological well-being. They used MRIs on 44 long-term meditators and found significantly larger gray matter volumes in the right orbito-frontal cortex, in the right thalamus and left inferior temporal gyrus. This means that these larger volumes might account for the participants' abilities and habits to foster positive emotions, retain emotional stability, and enter into mindful behavior. "Entering into mindful behavior" could also be correlated with the practices of mystics who facilitate their own mystical states not only by meditation but also by prayer or deep contemplation.

Beauregard, et al, (2009), were interested in brain activity during a meditative state in participants who had had near-death experiences (NDEs). The experimental group of participants did meditations in which they mentally visualized and emotionally connected with the "being of light" which they had reported encountering during their NDEs. The control group just meditated on the light of a lamp. The fMRI measurements of the experimental group showed that the meditative state showed significant locations of activation in the right brainstem, right lateral orbitofrontal cortex, right medial prefrontal cortex, right superior parietal lobule, left superior occipital gyrus, left anterior

temporal pole, left inferior temporal gyrus, left anterior insula, left parahippocampal gyrus and left substantia nigra. The EEG electrode sites showed greater theta power in some areas, higher alpha power and higher gamma power in various areas of the brain. They conclude that the specific changes in the brain areas are known to be associated with either positive emotions, visual mental imagery, attention or spiritual experiences. These, too, sound like what happens to mystics during their special experiences; note the reference to theta brain wave states. Some mystics have been reported to be almost dead physically when observed by others; for example, historical Buddhist and Hindu mystics have barely taken a breath during each hour of their continuous hours of deepest meditative states or states of Samadhi [“the highest stage of meditation in which one experiences oneness with the universe” (“Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary," 2001)].

Cahn and Polich (2006) reviewed neuroelectric and imaging studies of meditation. The neuroelectric studies included electroencephalographic (EEG), sensory-evoked potential (EP—automatic response), cognitive event-related potential (ERP—task-related response), positron emission tomography (PET), and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) research studies. They defined meditation as “describing practices that self-regulate the body and mind, thereby affecting mental events by engaging a specific attentional set....These practices are a subset of those used to induce relaxation or altered states such as hypnosis, progressive relaxation, and trance-induction techniques” (Cahn & Polich, 2006, p. 180). They wrote that there is a premise that

“different conscious states are accompanied by different neurophysiological states... [and that] meditation practice induces distinct states and traits of consciousness” (Cahn & Polich, 2006, p. 181).

Cahn and Polich (2006, p. 191) wrote that in the EEG meditation practices there were increased power in theta and alpha bands. For mystics, this could also be a possibility since mystics often have visions that could be compared with brain states during the dreaming states of non-mystics which occur during observable alpha wave increases correlated with REM (rapid eye movement) stage of sleep. Cahn and Polich did compare sleeping dream-like stages with some meditation practices and found this to be consistent in the results of some studies, and they also found a suggestion that there was another level of meditation like a “twilight condition between waking and sleep” (Cahn & Polich, 2006, p. 188). This, too, corresponds to reports of mystical experiences that occur in the “between” states of sleeping and being awake. The Hindu mystics also report another state called “Turiya” which is a state that few Westerners experience; this state is having a full awareness in all states of consciousness including advanced meditation and the deepest sleep at theta and delta brain wave levels (Chandrasekharanand Saraswati, 2000-2011).

Cahn and Polich (2006, p. 196) also showed that, although there were a variety of effects for the EP and ERP studies, Cognitive Negative Variation (CNV) task effects suggest that changes in attentional resource allocation may occur during meditation. This would fit with the basic understanding among meditators and mystics that one of the

main points of meditating is to learn to put down sensory input of the body in order to quiet the brain functions, including not only touch, vision, hearing, taste and smell, but also the use of the intellect, for the purpose of receiving better and deeper awareness of what is beyond the body and mind. Some of what lies beyond regular sensory input for mystics are a few of the many are the supra-sensory experiences that have been discussed very briefly in the next portion of this paper. These studies may project us into theorizing that mystics might also experience physiological symptoms, effects, changes and processes not only when meditating but also during other types of mystical experiences occurring in altered states of consciousness or during their everyday activities.

Mystics' Bodies

Mystics' bodies and Sensory Processes

Body, for the mystics, is a tool which aids them in their extraordinary experiences. Of particular note is the function of the senses. In non-mystics, senses plainly are sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell; these occur through the sensory processes of the relevant organs in coordination with neurological functioning of the physical brain and central nervous system (CNS). Mystics not only experience these five senses, but they also have supra-sensory experiences that cannot be measured objectively by scientific methods (unless you want to consider fMRIs of meditating monks, who might also consider themselves mystics, that show unusual brain activity). These include visions (not hallucinations), auditory voices (not the same as those in psychopathology such as schizophrenia), smells that have no physical or environmental sources, touches from beings or objects not actually in the world or touches from subtle energies

(emanating from other persons and from objects or places in the near or distant environment) that they feel with their hypersensitivities, and tastes of food, drink or substances within the mouth not materially manifest. Often these kinds of experiences occur spontaneously. [These supra-sensory experiences may be an aspect of the “overexcitabilities” described by Dabrowski in another section of this Chapter.]

Mystics as Facilitators of Altered States of Consciousness

Another way mystics use their bodies is to facilitate altered states of consciousness during which mystical events can happen. Examples of these practices are yoga posturing (Hindu), self-flagellation (Christian), breathing practices (across religions), listening to certain kinds of music (e.g., Hindu rajas, Jewish niggunim [chants—usually with wordless syllables], Buddhist temple drums and horns), singing or chanting, dancing (e.g., Native American Sundances, Sufi whirling dervishes), fasting, gazing into flames or fires, prayer, contemplation, meditative positions, special walking, directed silence, or by locating themselves physically in certain places (e.g., cathedrals, temples, ashrams, synagogues, monasteries, convents; gravesites of saints or sages; sacred cities such as Jerusalem, Benares, Mecca; sacred ruins such as Machu Picchu; sacred mountains such as Mt. Fuji, Mt. Nebo, and Mt. Navaho; or sacred rivers such as the Ganges and the Jordan). Not only do mystics facilitate their bodies into mystical states during their waking hours, but mystics also have conscious awareness while in their dreams; in this way they are experienced lucid dreamers.

Paranormal Experiences vs. Mystical Experiences

Technically, there is a similarity between paranormal and mystical experiences, and that is that both are outside normal, everyday experiences. However, beyond this technicality, there are great differences between these two types of experiences.

Paranormal experiences are related to the occult, astrology, and magic (Reber, 1995, p. 538). Some paranormal experiences include psychic phenomena such as telekinesis, telepathy, clairvoyance and poltergeists [poltergeists usually happen around disturbed adolescents] (Wulff, 1997, p. 622). The field of parapsychology researches experiences such as this. The paramount difference between paranormal experiences and mystical experiences is that mystical experiences as selected for the topic of this paper, take place within the sacred or divine.

Paranormal experiences do not have reference within the sacred but are usually found at lower levels of consciousness where ego dominates the world of the person having these experiences. Within sacred mysticism, one of the effects of spiritual and personality advancement is the loosening of ego-dominance within the individual (Edinger, 1972; Hawkins, 2008). Hood (1994, p. 279) wrote that the “understanding of self has been intimately related to the understanding of God.” Hood, who has studied the psychology of mysticism in depth, insists that both introvertive and extrovertive mysticism as described by Stace necessitate a loss of self. Within introvertive mysticism, there is pure consciousness without any object (Hood, 1994, p. 282). In paranormal experiences such as telekinesis [e.g., teleporting an object from afar through space by

mental manipulation without any known mechanical means (Reber, 1985/1995, p. 787)], the person performing telekinetically is consciously focusing on that object without any conscious connection or intent with the sacred.

Harrigan (2006, p. 99), as a result of her ongoing research with participants in different levels of Kundalini process across spiritual, religious and non-religious traditions, separates non-ordinary experiences into two categories: Paranormal Phenomena and Spiritual Experiences. She lists Paranormal Phenomena as: “prophetic visions, precognition, telepathy, clairvoyance, psycho-kinetic experiences, increased synchronicity, past lives recall, ability to heal or to balance disturbed energies in self and others, ability to see auras, feeling able to influence another’s mind or know the contents of their mind, intuitive awareness, encounters with nonmaterial entities (the deceased, lower astral beings, aliens, spirit guides), channeling, out of body experiences, astral/time travel experiences, near death experiences [NDEs], creative inspiration, receiving inner instruction, communion with nature and animals.”

Her list of Spiritual Experiences includes: “Divine altered states, experience of deep unitive and expansive consciousness, all sense of separateness disappears, profound feelings of connection with a spiritual source, expanded comprehension of reality, illumination experiences, holy trances, receiving instructions from the divine; sacred visions (of deities, angels, saints), feeling the presence of a saint or deity, visions of light, floating in the light, visions of glowing geometric shapes, sacred auditions (of teachings, mantras, music), tasting sacred nectar (amrita), feeling sacred touch (wind, presence,

touch), insightful comprehension of scripture, prophetic revelations of new spiritual wisdom, feelings of connection with a spiritual guide or lineage, deep intuitive knowledge of self and others; inspired creativity, powers of spiritual oratory and composition, increased experience of unusual synchronistic events, greater incidence of prayers being answered, spontaneously going into a deep meditative experience at regular times or when inspired” (Harrigan, 2006, p. 99).

However, it must be said that both paranormal and non-ordinary experiences could happen to advanced mystics. Some of these events could be side effects of the mystical experiences and not intended at all. The mystic in sacred traditions avoids any self-aggrandizement associated with any paranormal or non-ordinary effects because, were the mystic to do so, he or she could be caught in the ego trap and lose all credibility with his or her students and lose the level of selfless consciousness that he or she has attained. An example of one of these unsought effects is that the bodies of advanced mystical masters in deep meditation sometimes lift of their own accord from the floor and float in mid-air as witnessed by the Hindu Yogananda (1946/2005) and the Tibetan Buddhist Bhakhang Tulku Rinpoche (2009).

Mystics and Health or Disease

Mystics and Health Practices

Because mystics are in their bodies in so many different ways during their lives, they are conscious of health and disease in a different way. For instance, many mystics are very careful of the food and water they intake. Most Hindu and Buddhist mystics are

vegetarians and respect living beings too much to kill them for food. For Hindu masters, even the choices and combinations of foods and their seasonings are relevant to their spiritual health. Jewish mystics usually observe the laws of Kashrut (kosher) or are vegetarian. The preparation of the food in these cases is also important—both in harvesting the food, preparing it in traditional sacred ways and in blessing the food before (and after) it is eaten. In these ways mystics and other devoutly spiritual people raise the food up to sacred levels so that the food will be of better service to their bodies, to their spiritual growth, to the world, and to the Divine. For Jewish mystics, this is part of their work in the world of raising the divine sparks in Malkhut back up the Tree of Life to the Ein Sof.

Mystic Bodies and Subtle Energies that Affect their Spiritual and Physical Health

The tissues of the bodies of mystics are purified and energized over time so that the mystics may be able to support the different energies that they are receiving by being vessels of the sacred. Supporting that purification process involves being more careful of what they eat and drink. For example, in the Kundalini process of Hindus, not only is the mystical process evolving, but also the body changes to support this process. There are subtle, sacred energy centers in the body that are developing. There is a myth that the more saintly a person becomes the more perfect his or her life and health become. The truth is that the more evolved the saint, sage or mystic, the harder it is to maintain and stay in the body. One Kabbalist compared an evolved being as being “a thousand watt light bulb which, when plugged into a 100 watt circuit, will blow out that circuit and any

lesser wattage bulbs also in that circuit.” The evolved beings receive greater sacred energies, so their bodies must be pure enough to hold those energies or these beings will sicken and possibly die (Harrigan, 2006; Hawkins, 2008).

Kaplan, in his edition of the classic Kabbalistic text, *Sefer Yetzirah* (Kaplan, 1997, p. 150), writes that “the soul also refers to the body; everything found in the body is found in the soul—the body is a microcosm of the supernal “Man” (e.g., Adam Kadmon). Kaplan also writes of the dangers to both body and soul if Kabbalistic practices are done incorrectly or prematurely in the mystic’s development. In symbolically laying the Tree of Life over the human body, we see the head (upper body as Chochmah [Divine wisdom] and Binah [Divine Understanding] consciousness) as fire emanates fire energy, the lower body (belly as Netzach [Eternity] and Hod [Reverberation] consciousness) as water absorbs energy, and the middle chest (Chesed [Mercy] and Gevurah [Judgment] consciousness) in which the heart (Tiferet [Beauty]) is the king over the soul. These energies in both the Universal macrocosm and the embodied microcosm are always in motion and are affected particularly by thought, word and deed of the Jewish mystics –especially during their intentional practices.

Some particular examples of how saints and sages suffer physical difficulties come to mind. For example, St. Teresa of Avila, a 19th century Christian nun who founded the Carmelite order, experienced sickness off and on from the beginning of her life in a convent. She was a Spanish mystic who is famous for her writings about her *Interior Castle* (Antier, 2007; Peers, 1944/1989) which describe the mystical levels of her

growth and understanding of God. Her health was precarious and painful for many years as she struggled with her mystical development and her striving for spiritual perfection, her worries of being caught in the Inquisition because of her unusual experiences that others might think the work of the devil, her determined efforts to found her own discalced [without shoes] order of nuns, and the constant demands she placed upon herself to write this journal of her work at the request of her superior P. Gracián. She died at age 65 of a broken body after suffering years of intense pain (Walsh, 1956/1991). Another earlier 12th century Catholic mystic who had terrible illness and pain, especially migraines, during her life was St. Hildegard of Bingen (Flanagan, 1999).

Another example is Sri Ramana Maharshi (Osborne, 1962), a Hindu saint, teacher and mystic who died of cancer in 1950. He told his followers not to mourn because he wasn't going anywhere—a typical response of a mystic since reality has different meanings to advanced mystics. Maharshi had his “first death” when he was a young man. As a result of that experience he came back into his body as an enlightened being. So, for him, the second death was as nothing.

In the traditions of Shamans in Native American and African cultures, the initiation process for becoming a Shaman (both mystic and healer) sometimes begins with a severe, life-threatening sickness called “initiation illness” (Eliade, 1966). During the fevered, near-death illness, the shaman-to-be experiences visions and voices that teach and lead the persons to know that upon recovery their lives take a totally different trajectory into the healing arenas.

Many advanced, enlightened mystics in Hindu, Tibetan Buddhism and Zen have known ahead of time the exact day and time they would die (Blackman, 1997). Usually their devoted disciples were at their bedside to celebrate the passing. Many mystical experiences occurred and were witnessed during this opening of the window between life and death during the dying of these masters. This is common across Eastern religions.

Chambers (2000, p. 93), a Christian Kabbalist, writes that disease is a distortion of Divine will as it is expressed through humans who hold “inappropriate concepts” in relation to their stage of evolutionary growth. [Development of mystics and higher consciousness will be discussed in another portion of this paper.] The disharmony is between the Divine will in a person and the choices the person is living out physically (conscious or unconscious). However, lessons can be learned due to illness. She says that as pain is a symptom of disease, so is disease a symptom of disharmony and imbalance. Disease can occur at three levels (aspects of the levels within the kingdom called Malkhut): the personal within each individual, the personal in relation to planetary balances or imbalances (planetary disease such as ecological damages), and both of the previous two in relation to the cosmos. In other words, personal consciousness affects the body and all external layers of the kingdom (Chambers, 2000).

Chambers (2000) gives global influenza as an example. Look at the symptoms of influenza: diarrhea, vomiting, aches and pain, congestion, and fever. The disharmony in each is: diarrhea is a purging of what a person has previously ingested and assimilated; vomiting is a purging of something not able to be ingested or assimilated; aches and pains

are a resistance to growth [of consciousness]; congestion is an obstruction to the truth and the higher reality of one's being; and fever is an incoming of the Divine energies for the promotion of growth. If a person uses this knowledge for restoring harmony, then healing occurs. Otherwise, the ill person could sink into despair and mortal fear; getting trapped deeper and deeper in this, the person is further distorted and may even find death as the only way out of this pit (Chambers, 2000).

Jewish Views of Illness and Disease

Disease and suffering to Hindus and Buddhists can be due to a person's present or past karma (Sanskrit word for moral causation; every action brings an equal action or consequence). The Jewish view is different and is based upon what is written in the *Torah* (the first five books of the Christian Old Testament). The first disease in the *Torah* is leprosy. Both Moses and Miriam had mystical experiences with leprosy. God gave them leprosy on their arms when they complained too much. God was stricter with his Tzaddikim (righteous ones) than with the average Hebrew person in the desert with them. Here are those stories as they have been written:

Moses responded and said, "But they will not believe me and they will not heed my voice, for they will say, 'HaShem [God] did not appear to you.'" HaShem said to him, "What is that in your hand?" and he said, "A staff." He said "Cast it on the ground," and he cast it on the ground and it became a snake. Moses fled from it. HaShem said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp its tail." He stretched out his hand and grasped it tightly, and it became a staff in his palm. "So that they shall believe that HaShem, the God of their forefathers, appeared to you, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." HaShem said further to him, "Bring your hand to your bosom," and he brought his hand to his bosom; then he withdrew it and behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. He said, "Return your hand to your bosom, and he returned his hand to his bosom; then he

removed it from his bosom and behold, it reverted to be like his flesh.
Exodus 4:1-7 (Stone Edition of *Torah*)

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses regarding the Cushite woman he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. They said, “Was it only to Moses that HaShem spoke? Did He not speak to us, as well?” And HaShem heard. Now the man Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth! HaShem said suddenly to Moses, to Aaron, and to Miriam, “You three, go out to the Tent of Meeting.” And the three of them went out. HaShem descended in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance to the Tent, and He summoned Aaron and Miriam; the two of them went out. He said, “Hear now My words. If there shall be prophets among you, in a vision shall I, HaShem, make Myself known to him; in a dream shall I speak with him. Not so is My servant Moses; in My entire house he is the trusted one. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles, at the image of HaShem does he gaze. Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moses?” The wrath of HaShem flared up against them, and He left. The cloud had departed from atop the Tent, and behold! Miriam was afflicted with tzaraas [the skin disease leprosy], like snow! Aaron turned to Miriam and behold! She was afflicted with tzaraas. Aaron said to Moses, “I beg you, my lord, do not cast a sin upon us, for we have been foolish and we have sinned. Let her not be like a corpse, like one who leaves his mother’s womb with half his flesh having been consumed!” Moses cried out to HaShem, saying, “Please, HaShem, heal her now.” HaShem said to Moses, ‘Were her father to spit in her face, would she not be humiliated for seven days? Let her be quarantined outside the camp for seven days, and then she may be brought in.’ So Miriam was quarantined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not journey until Miriam was brought in. Numbers 12:1-15 (Stone Edition of the *Torah*)

In the *Torah*, during the desert years of the Exodus, leprosy affected not only humans but also fabrics and houses. A person with this disease had to remove himself from the community until he was relieved of the disease. Otherwise, if not cured, the person was permanently separated from the community (Achtemeier, 1971). In the passage cited above, Moses prayed for Miriam to be healed. This prayer for the sick is one of the earliest prayers recorded for bringing about healing (Encyclopaedia Judaica, p. 1496). These accounts in *Torah* precede any written accounts of medical experience in

the world as we know it today; the first written medical accounts separate from the *Torah* occur in Egyptian papyri in 1900 B.C. and 1600 B.C. (Clendening, 1942).

Goldberg (1996), in her book, *Crossing the Jabbok: Illness and Death in Ashkenazi Judaism in Sixteenth- through Nineteenth-Century Prague*, wrote about several issues that pertain to this topic. Visiting the sick is an important mitzvah for both visitor and the sick person. She quoted a famous rabbi-doctor from Italy who wrote about two kinds of remedies for the sick: “real” medication and “segullah” (treasure buried within the soul) (p. 156-157). The segullah work on principles that intellect cannot grasp and are made from herbs, animals, poisons, metals or excrements, for example, that occur naturally in nature and “work on the principle of love and hatred, by sympathy and antipathy (p. 157).” Physicians might use both treatments, depending on the severity of the illness, and sometimes the patient might refuse either or any treatment. Goldberg explained that filth, bad odors, empty houses and dark corners were inhabited by evil or demons. Angels also could spread illnesses as divine punishment. Some illness was believed to be created by sorcery or evil dead spirits. The only remedy in those cases was for the Creator to cause healing (p. 152).

Another treatment, according to Goldberg (1996), was to change a man’s name by choosing a Hebrew name that indicated health (e.g., Alter, Baba, or Haya so “that the fatal decree should not be placed on the new name” (Goldberg, 1996, p. 132). Each person is accompanied through life by a “tutelary Angel” (Goldberg, 1996), and when the soul is “disencumbered” of the body at death, this Angel stays by his side, “he sees the Angel of Death who fills his eyes” (p. 109). The Shekhinah’s [the feminine Presence of

the Divine in the world (Samuel, 2007)] light and glory is also seen. This is to remind us that, since we no longer reside in Gan Eden [Garden of Eden] we have partaken of the knowledge of good and evil. The duality of good and evil is experienced as long as we live in our human bodies. When the Messiah comes, everyone becomes One with God and the duality no longer exists; therefore, death and separation of souls from earthly bodies no longer would happen. A Biblical example is that of Elijah, a 9th century prophet who did not die and leave his body behind but who, while walking with his student Elisha, went up to heaven in a fiery chariot that had appeared and in a whirlwind—with no body left behind, and he was never seen again (Wigoder, 1991b). Advanced Jewish mystics know that when man and woman lived in Gan Eden, they inhabited only energetic bodies, and that *Torah* says they donned their human skin as they were leaving the Garden. When humans learn to overcome the duality of good and evil, they will no longer live in the form we now inhabit and will return to Oneness.

“And HaShem God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them. And HaShem God said, ‘Behold Man has become like the Unique One among us, knowing good and bad; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat and live forever!’ So HaShem God banished him from the Garden of Eden, to work the soil from which he was taken. And having driven out the man He stationed at the east of the garden of Eden the Cherubim and the flame of the ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the Tree of Life.” Genesis 3:21-24 (Stone Edition of *Torah*)

For Jews, if the 613 laws of Moses are observed, then they are considered by God to have performed “mitzvot” (plural of “mitzvah” which means “Divine Commandments”). This is a way to attain holiness (also known as Tikkun).

Jewish Mystics and Body

Man, according to Judaism, was created by God on the next to last day of creation. He was made of clay [earth] and God's breathing into it. Kabbalists believe, therefore, that humans have two basic kinds of souls in them: the animal soul that is related to the earthly part of man, and the divine soul that comes from the breath and spark of God. The manifest kingdom, Malkhut, contains everything material in the world which operates and is maintained because of Divine plan—including the human body. [See Sefirot.] The earthly body of humans returns in death to earth and the Divine soul leaves the body and does not decay like the mortal body. The Jewish mystics believe in reincarnation. The body in death only changes form; its materials originally made from earth return to earth. The mystics' soul, depending on its level of advancement in a specific body, does not change form; it returns to earth to join a body who is struggling in order to help him or her in a new body where the mystic can resume learning and doing spiritual work (Gershom, 1992; Head & Cranston, 1977; Kaplan, 1979/1989; Samuel, 2007). The Sanskrit word is "samsara" and the Hebrew phrase is "gilgul neshamot" which means "incarnation of souls"; the idea of the transference of souls was suppressed during early Medieval times but re-emerged in Jewish literature in the 12th century (Greenberg & Witztum, 2001; Samuel, 2007, p. 115).

Religious Advancement and Body

So to reiterate, mystics have an unusual relationship with their own bodies. They also have an unusual relationship with, and understanding of, the human body in general.

Because of these situations, they also have different ideas of illness and disease. These ideas or beliefs affect their perceptions, understandings and experiences of the body and its health or illness states. A difficulty with answering this original question is that there are many different definitions of mysticism. This point will be discussed in another section of this dissertation. Briefly, mystical experiences might include experiences that seem similar to paranormal or psychic experiences (but these experiences by the mystics include the divine in which the mystics have their beingness) and clearly include sacred experiences of the Divine. Awesome experiences of nature could fall into this category along with visitations by other-worldly beings. Experiences in altered states might also be considered mystical experiences such as those occurring in meditation, dreams, drugged states or “flow” experiences if these experiences also occur in the Divine. Rather than going into all these perspectives of mysticism and body, this author has very briefly written about health and disease as they might relate to the types of mystical experiences included in this research—sacred mysticism. There is the conception that religious advancement and perfection is thought of as relating to a healthy body, but perfection is really not body-consciousness at all.

The more advanced a level of consciousness a mystic has developed, the harder it is for that mystic to remain embodied on earth (Hawkins, 2007). In these cases, the body is only a vehicle for the spirit to remain for performing certain functions and tasks that would better the development of mankind. For example, in the advanced process stages of spiritual development during Kundalini process as studied intensely by Hindu mystics and saints, the body often deteriorates. Usually these physical issues seem “cause-less”

and often undiagnosable and untreatable via modern medical practices (Harrigan, 2006). It has been documented that at these levels of development the mystic just has to wait it out as the body purifies itself at the cellular levels in order to hold or maintain the more highly advanced being (Harrigan, 2006). This topic of mysticism as it relates to body is fascinating, and, of course, research about this is on the cutting edge of science and consciousness studies today.

Conclusion

In order to understand the body as a mystic knows it, one must compare and contrast the mystic's body with the non-mystic's body. The mystic develops skills such as meditating in order to facilitate the reoccurrence of mystical experiences, and these practices have been shown in scientific studies to affect and to sometimes change the physiology of the Central Nervous System along with heart rate and respiration. Mystics often suppress their everyday bodily and mental functions in order to facilitate or enhance supra-sensory, mystical experiences. The mystic's understanding of body is that it is a vehicle for remaining on earth in order to do his work in elevating the consciousness of himself and everyone else in the world. A mystic finds it more and more difficult to stay in his or her body the more advanced he or she becomes. For Jewish mystics, disease began as leprosy as reported in *Torah* which is opposed to the Divine purpose of humans being created to be at one with God. Body is an important aspect of mystical experiences and is a vehicle for finding, understanding and loving the Divine until the mystic can return to his Source in death.

Other Types of Psychology and Mysticism

Psychoanalytic Psychology

Biographers of Freud and his works have debated the amount of influence his father, Jakob Freud, had on his son's religious development. Bakan (1965) writes that Freud's father and A. E. Waite (1960/1969), who wrote *The Holy Kabbalah: A study of the secret tradition in Israel as unfolded by Sons of Doctrine for the benefit and consolation of Elect dispersed through the lands and ages of the greater exile*, were good friends and discussed Kabbalah in depth and probably did so in the presence of son Sigmund. Yerushalmi (1991) argues that this may not be the case and that Bakan made excessive effort to link Freud with Kabbalah. Yerushalmi suggests that this connection should be pursued in greater detail by finding primary, instead of secondary, sources that Bakan had relied upon too heavily.

Freud's obvious and verbal rejection of the influence of any Jewish spirituality or religiosity on his concepts, especially those which might have had to do with mysticism, is questioned. Scholars now doubt that Freud was completely honest about his familial background. An example is that Freud said he had never learned Hebrew; however, there is evidence to the contrary (Yerushalmi, 1991). Bakan (1965) wrote that Freud, due to the anti-Semitism in Vienna at the time, probably concealed any connection with Judaism or Jewish mysticism because he did not want to be accused of borrowing any insights from Kabbalah. Jewish mystics, however, can recognize some of the ideas in Freud's work that sound a lot like Kabbalah—such as the “unconscious” (Wulff, 1997) as something that comes from beyond everyday consciousness or awareness—that is hidden from man.

Personality Psychology

There are two points from the Psychology of Personality that specifically relate to mystical experience and mystics. First, Keirsey (1998) credited the understanding of the patterns of temperament among personality types as evolving from Plato and Aristotle to Galen and then to Fromm and others in the 20th century. Among those who have had a greater influence on personality types is C. J. Jung. This became important when a layperson, Isabel Myers studied Jung's book, *Psychological Types*, and developed, with her mother, Kathryn Briggs, "The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator" that was a questionnaire designed to identify each of the sixteen types of personality that Jung had reported (Keirsey, 1998). Myers renamed the sixteen types as four-letter groups that represented combinations of four pairs of words: Extraverted (E) or Introverted (I), Sensory (S) or Intuitive (N), Thinking (T) or Feeling (F), and Judging (J) [having a scheduling nature] or Perceiving (P). The Myers-Briggs questionnaire is commonly used today as a tool for clinical, counseling, educational and vocational psychologists, for example, to understand and better serve their clients and students.

One type of the sixteen personality types determined by the Myers-Briggs Questionnaires is represented by INFJ, or the introvertive, intuitive, feeling, and judgmental type. Myers wrote that the NF's were the people who contemplated ways to give meaning to their own and others' lives. For Myers, these were the "humane, sympathetic, enthusiastic, religious, creative, intuitive, insightful and subjective" (Keirsey, 1998). The Introvertive and Judgmental NF's, or INFJ's, she called the "introvertive- intuitives," or "Idealists." The INFJ's could function, typically, as

Counselors, Teachers, Healers or Champions (of others' causes); examples of this personality type are Joan of Arc and Ghandi (Keirsey, 1998). Within Keirsey's description of the idealistic orientation of the INFJ's he writes:

“Some idealists attribute cause of unhappy events to some power above...to more esoteric mystical causes...but they will also search for causes in...cabalistic [Kabbalistic] writings, and in various arcane, metaphysical systems, theosophy...transcendentalism, spiritualism, and the like” (Keirsey, 1998, pp. 134-135).

Keirsey even cites Jung as one of these Idealists. The INFJ's are “altruistic...mystical, situated on pathways...and base their self-image as being...authentic...they are often seen as the most poetic, even mystical of all the types” (Keirsey, 1998, pp. 152-153). So, for the purposes of this paper, there is a real basis among personality psychologists for recognizing the mystics among us. The mystics in the current study will have developed themselves and their skills to a finer degree than most INFJ's or than any of the other personality types.

The second point regarding Personality Psychology has to do with advanced personality development that has been researched by Dabrowski (Dabrowski, 1967, 1970, 1973) which will be discussed later in this chapter as it relates to the topic of spiritual giftedness. Maryam Smith (Smith, 2007) did an empirical study about the *Psychological Correlates of Mystical Experience: Personality, Absorption, and Dissociativity*. She measured her participants, who came from San Francisco, on the NEO PI-R measure of the Five Factor Model of Personality, on Hood's Mysticism Scale (M scale), on the Tellegen Absorption Scale (TAS), and on the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES)—all in relation to the mystical experiences of her 102 volunteer participants (66 females and

34 males). [Absorption and dissociation are linked to altered states of consciousness.] The participants were of mixed races and mixed (or non-) religions, had education ranging from high school through doctorate degrees, and ranged in ages from 19-79 years. The participants self-defined regarding their form or type of mystical experiences.

The purpose of this study was to see the degree of relationship between personality characteristics and the conditions measured by the test instruments. She was also interested in the meditative or prayer practices and whether or not the participants considered themselves spiritual or religious. Smith found that the absorption scale best predicted the scores on the mysticism scale. The most important personality traits that showed up in the NEO PI-R measures that predicted higher scores on the mysticism scale were: Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. Using stepwise regression analysis to compare the personality traits test with the absorption scale, Agreeableness and Neuroticism were the best predictors for the mysticism scores and Extrovertiveness, and the Religious Interpretation factor with Absorption was the best predictor for the Introvertive factor. When comparing the absorption scale with the dissociative scale, the absorption scale was the best predictor of the mysticism scores (Smith, 2007).

Smith (2007) also validated that Introvertive and Extrovertive mysticism are different aspects of an individual's mystical experience. Those with high scores on the mysticism scale were more altruistic, agreeable and open to experience, and less anxious than non-mystical experiencers. Her results also pointed to the idea that spiritual and/or religious practices may more likely be associated with mystical experiences. From her

research, we can see that the participants in the current study probably will be more likely to talk about their openness to new experiences both mystical and non-mystical, to be more unselfishly humanitarian, and to have less anxiety (which might also be correlated with their possible regular use of meditation and/or prayer practices).

Humanistic Psychology

The Humanistic Psychologists historically have come closer to exploring sacred mysticism than most of the other fields of psychology. The discipline of Humanistic Psychology generally contains three fields of study: Existential Psychology, Transpersonal Psychology, and Phenomenology.

Existential Psychology. Among the Existential-Humanistic Psychologists are Frankl (1959/1984, 1969/1988), who found meaning beyond the inhuman treatment he suffered in the Nazi death camps, and Yalom (1980), who understood that, although death is the destructive end of life, death forces us to face live and life it authentically (Schneider, Bugental, & Pierson, 2001, p. 172). This type of psychology is about the most universal of all psychological concepts: meaning-making—understanding the purpose of human existence. Mystical experiences not only enhance the meaning of life for the mystics in sacred traditions, but living in life-and-death circumstances on a daily basis can bring about mystical experiences. For example, many Hasidic Jewish prisoners who survived the Nazi concentration camps reported, years later, of mystical dreams, visions, auditory “voices,” and unbelievable “coincidences” that gave them hope, knowledge, survival techniques, imaginary yet non-existent food that truly nourished, and even a miraculous return from death (Eliach, 1982). For Jewish Kabbalists, there are

kinds of dying that happen as one moves into advanced altered states, such as the release of levels of ego as one approaches God, which feels like a form of death.

Transpersonal Psychology. Transpersonal Psychology is nicely and simply defined as ("Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary," 2001, p. 2012):

“A branch of psychology or psychotherapy that recognizes altered states of consciousness and transcendent experiences as a means to understand the human mind and treat psychological disorders”

Mystical experiences definitely are transcendent experiences and involve altered states of consciousness that are extremely powerful when one has an “encounter.” Elkins in Schneider, et al, (2001, p. 209) writes that mystical experiences such as the one experienced by Moses and the burning bush or by Paul on the road to Damascus are rare, usually destroy the old life, and are a call that brings new life to the individuals going through such potent experiences. Elkin writes that there is a gradation of sacred experiences: of low intensity are the “poignant moments,” of average intensity are the peak experiences, and of high intensity are mystical encounters. This author, in choosing this research topic, wanted to understand how mystics in the Jewish mystical traditions live their everyday lives while having such recurring, high intensity, and life-transforming and transcending events.

Among the classic humanistic psychologists who helped create the field of transpersonal psychology is Abraham Maslow (1964/1970, 1968/1982, 1971). Maslow is famous for his “Hierarchy of Needs” in which he diagrams and describes all human needs in levels from the lowest and basest physical needs to the highest and most abstract, the need for self-actualization which comes only after the other needs are met. But relevant

to this study, Maslow researched “peak” experiences which were part of the self-actualizing process. Instead of the previous versions of psychology which focused on psychopathology and dysfunction in the mentally ill, Maslow sought to discover the whole, healthy person who could go to the “highest reaches” of human experience and lifestyles. This author considers the process of mystics in the Jewish sacred traditions as presenting a variation of the kind of self-actualized lifestyle than Maslow imagined.

Phenomenological Psychology. Phenomenological Psychology is often considered within the category of Humanistic Psychology because it is concerned with the deeper meanings of the phenomena of everyday existence. These phenomena cannot be examined without considering the context or situation in which behaviors or thoughts occur (Schneider, et al, 2001). Phenomenological Psychology will be discussed in the Methods Chapter of this paper since it has been the method of choice for this research.

Psychosocial Psychology

Erik Erikson (1950/1989), psychoanalyst, wrote in his book *Identity and the Life Cycle* about the psychosocial development of an individual in which his last and eighth stage was called Integrity vs. Disgust/Despair. In this stage, which occurs late in the life of an adult, the older adult addresses his mortality with his earned wisdom and often turns to spirituality in order to alleviate the despair that comes with the breaking down of career generativity, the completion of family life with children, and, sometimes, the death of a spouse or personal, physical disability.

Erikson, in his subsequent book *The Life Cycle Completed* (Erikson, 1982/1994, p. 61), writes that during this stage there is not only wisdom but also there can be a state

of “being finished, confused and helpless.” In the return to the innocent hopefulness like that usually experienced as a child, the older adult can find enrichment in bodily and mental experiences, or mastery, while his physical and sexual energies decline. This author found this work disappointing because its suggestion that the last stage of a person’s life in which development of spirituality occurs is very belated, timing-wise, and irrelevant for the spiritually gifted. As we shall see, some people enter this stage during childhood instead of at the end of life—especially the mystics. There are a couple of reasons for this that we shall address later in this paper.

Developmental Psychology

Although Jung was a psychoanalyst and a contemporary of Freud’s, he also was very interested in the ego and its development in a person’s life. So we shall examine briefly this development. Jung described the everyday ego self as “self” with a small “s.” The journey of someone who was growing or maturing into a fully-evolved type of an adult was about going through the process of “individuation” which has the goal of redemption, by determined conscious realization, of the hidden Self with a capital “S.” For Jung, the individuation process was similar to an encounter with Divinity (Edinger, 1972; Jung, 1957/1958). Jung’s individuation process probably is very similar to the development of mystics over time as they incorporate their everyday experiences of living with mystical events into a new, integrated whole way of living as they become more and more centered in the Divine lifestyles that have been described by the great, historical mystics of all spiritual traditions.

For Developmental Psychologists, the goal for humans is to reach a level of healthy functioning in the world, society, and close personal relationships. The person develops over a lifetime through many kinds of theoretical and observed “stages” such as those described by Freud (psychophysical), Erikson (psychosocial), and Piaget (Cognitive) (1969). But the ultimate development of humans, as this author sees it, is the evolutionary, conscious development that happens in achieving self-actualization, individuation and enlightenment.

The mystic personality, as suggested in the Myers-Briggs’ personality typing, may have a jump start on having the temperament and intelligence that could lead to development into full-blown mystical lives. In her bracketing interview, this author stated that being able to receive mystical experiences was a “gift” of some kind that she was born with. She envisioned the possibility that some of the participants in this study could use the same terminology about having a gift of some kind. In the following sections of this chapter, this researcher would like to present the idea of spiritual giftedness as a possible psychological factor involved in the everyday lives of her participants as they narrate their stories. The bracketing interview included qualities of development of mystical experiences over her lifetime, so it may be that the participants will do so, too.

Psychology and Spiritual Giftedness

Finding information about spiritual giftedness that has to do with mysticism took a long time. In checking out spiritual giftedness (or mysticism) within the field of Special Education and Gifted Education, this author found nothing (Colangelo & Davis, 1997; Sternberg & Davidson, 1986; Whitmore, 1980). Neither was there any information

available in any of the doctoral programs within the sub-category of Giftedness training within the fields of Special Education. In exploring the field of Psychology of Religion (Wulff, 1997), mystical experiences and spirituality are explored, but nowhere is spiritual giftedness mentioned.

Spiritual Giftedness as a Type of Intelligence

The first surge of real interest in spiritual giftedness came when this author discovered multiple intelligences that Howard Gardner (1983/1993), a developmental psychologist who became an education psychologist, had discussed in his book *Frames of Mind; The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. His original list of types of intelligences included the following intelligences: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic and personal. The personal intelligences about which he theorized were “intrapersonal” (“access to one’s own feeling life”) that he links with “interpersonal” (“ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals”) (Gardner, 1983, pp. 237-276). He wrote that these two types of personal intelligence are important in all societies globally but are neglected, ignored and minimized. He notes that these intelligences are developmental and evolutionary for all humans. In conclusion he wrote:

“Perhaps it makes more sense to think of knowledge of self and others as being a higher level, a more integrated form of intelligence, one more at the behest of the culture and of historical factors, one more truly emergent, one that ultimately comes to control and to regulate more ‘primary orders’ of intelligence” (Gardner, 1983, p. 274).

Gardner wrote that he had defined intelligence in 1983 as “the ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued within one or more cultural settings.” He

revised his definition in his second book, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (Gardner, 1999, pp. 33-34). The new definition states that he “conceptualizes an intelligence as a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture.” His emphasis is that intelligence is not about things that can be counted but is about potentials. Then Gardner included “spiritual” or “existential” intelligence in his theory—also noting that things of the spirit did not fit well with academia and science, especially as this relates to biology and cognition.

Gardner (1999) said that art, mythology and religion all demonstrate this kind of existential intelligence in which questions about who we are, where we come from, and what gives meaning to us are addressed. Content of these studies mastered by a “spiritual knower” seems clearly about realms, values, truth and limitation but are much more complex, problematic and controversial in practice. For the other types of intelligences, “knowing how” and “knowing that” are straightforward. However, in spiritual intelligence, this is not always the case. Related to this is his idea that spirituality is an “achievement of a state of being” that usually does not accompany other types of intelligence (Gardner, 1999).

There are eight criteria, according to Gardner (1999), that should be addressed when evaluating a participant for existential/spiritual intelligence: “the capacity to relate oneself to the furthest reaches of the cosmos—the infinite and the infinitesimal--and the related capacity to locate oneself with respect to such existential features of the human condition as the significance of life, the meaning of death, the ultimate fate of the

physical and the psychological worlds, and such profound experiences as love of another person or total immersion in a work of art” (Gardner, 1999, p.60). This domain of intelligence is one that separates us from other animals. He mentions that mystics and gurus can control their psychic states in order to be able to enter altered states in which they transcend ordinary being-ness. He concludes by suggesting that calling this type of intelligence “existential” rather than “spiritual” may be more effective when dealing with future research. Gardner said that there is a paucity of research about this type of intelligence, and this author found this to be the case when she searched PsycInfo, Medline and Eric databases for several years about anything related to this topic of mysticism as part of this category of spiritual giftedness.

Dorothy Sisk (2002), in her book with Torrance, *Spiritual Intelligence: Developing Higher Consciousness*, wrote that the foundations of spiritual intelligence could be found in the fields of Psychology, Eastern mysticism, Science (e.g., physics, neurobiology, brain research, geology and symatics), Sacred Geometry, ancient wisdom traditions and the stories of specific individuals who have been exemplars of spiritual intelligence in their lives. Sisk agrees with Howard Gardner (see above) that there are skills related to spiritual intelligence such as meditating, entering trance states at will, envisioning the transcendental, or having access to psychic, noetic or spiritual phenomena. But she and Torrance add two more skills: intuition and visioning. They write that spiritual awareness is first a deep self-awareness not only of self but also as body, mind and spirit—insisting that mind alone cannot produce the information wanted or needed and that, for the spiritually gifted, the need for intuition becomes accelerated

(Sisk, 2002). Also for Sisk, spiritual intelligence is an inner knowing, a deep intuition, oneness with nature and the universe, and problem-solving related to seeing the “big picture” so that the result brings meaning to life.

Core experiences of spiritual intelligence, according to Sisk (2002, p. 210), are: “an awareness of ultimate values and their meaning, peak experiences, a feeling of transcendence and heightened awareness.” She lists likely traits of spiritual intelligence: “uses inner knowing; seeks to understand self; uses metaphors and parables to communicate; uses intuition; sensitive to social problems; sensitive to their purpose in life; concerned about inequity and injustice; enjoys big questions; sense of Gestalt (the big picture); wants to make a difference; capacity to care; curiosity about how the world works/functions; values love, compassion, concern for others; close to nature; uses visualization and mental imagery; reflective, self-observing and self-aware; seeks balance in life; concerned about right conduct; seeks to understand self; connected with others, the earth, and the universe; peacemaker; and concerned with human suffering” (Sisk, 2002, p. 211). If we take this list of traits and think that they describe other kinds of people, then we must also realize the intensities in which those with spiritual intelligence approach and experience these characteristics. Keep in mind that this kind of intelligence probably is of the sort to be included in Dabrowski’s “overexcitabilities” which he has found in advanced personality development. As a matter of fact, Sisk refers to the works of Frankl who wrote about man’s search for meaning and of Dabrowski, Maslow and Rogers who wrote about many humans who had a need to search for identity that had a large part to do with their individual achievement and fulfillment (Sisk, 2002, p. 212).

She adds that attention must be given to feelings, emotion, inner imagery and inner knowingness because spiritual intelligence is not wholly an aspect of intellectual abilities.

The Self: Falling Apart

In the book by Pollio, Henley and Thompson, *The Phenomenology of Everyday Life* (1997), there is a chapter called “Falling Apart,” developed from a dissertation by Bruce Seidner, in which the experience of falling apart can happen to adults. These individuals have a dissolution of the everyday self which is accompanied by anxiety, personal confusion and feeling lost. This experience is usually seen as detrimental by psychologists, but Seidner found that this experience can be an important part of growth and development of the self. The participants in Seidner’s study resolved this dilemma naturally by reconnecting (e.g., with family or friends) and re-establishing control (through cathartic acts such as crying, entering treatment, or rejecting uncomfortable relationships) (Pollio, et al, 1997). This author considers this as an experience that non-mystics might experience in their lives. However, for spiritual development, this “falling apart” is only a minor version of what mystics experience during their life-spans. This “falling apart” experience is a mild existential crisis compared with the struggle of mystics, sometimes life-and-death, with all the major paradigms in which they have been embedded socially, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually (i.e.. within formal religious structures).

Advanced Personality Development and Giftedness

It was quite by accident that this author visited the website of the Gifted Development Center in Denver, CO, where she was looking for information to support a

friend of hers who was highly gifted and falling through the cracks of academe and considering dropping out of graduate school. This author realized that many of her friends were in the margins of university life because they did not fit well with the limitations of developing intelligence and skills that did not include the whole person—especially in the area of the effects of spirituality and highly developed emotional abilities. On this website was mentioned the work of Kazimierz Dabrowski, a Polish psychiatrist and psychologist. However, Dabrowski’s book on *Mental Growth through Positive Disintegration* (Dabrowski, 1970) was no longer in print nor available as a used book. During a trip to this Center in Denver, this author obtained a photocopy of this book from one of the counselors there.

Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD) is a theory, later supported by research, of paradox in that growth occurs from disintegration of the personality. This development is consciously chosen by individuals, found to be true by them and individually developed. Dabrowski (1970) and his students who became fellow researchers have found this theory to work out—especially among the gifted population. Development occurs through the following five levels and stages: 1) Primitive or Primary Integration, 2) Unilevel Disintegration, 3) Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration, 4) Organized Multilevel Disintegration, and 5) Secondary Integration.

Dabrowski’s first stage is where most humans live, and at this level living is automatic and determined by primitive, innate drives. The second level in which disintegration begins to occur is related to the “psychoneurotic traits, or sensitivity, “which are acted upon by very strong positive influence of a highly developed

environment” (Dabrowski, 1970, p. 21). This first level of disintegration is neither controlled by intelligence nor innate drives. In the second level, the structures, or paradigms, in which the person has lived at the Primary level begin to loosen. Sensitivity to external stimuli increases. At the third level of disintegration, the person becomes more conscious of differentiating himself from the mainstream and begins to seek “something higher” (Dabrowski, 1970, p. 22) in his external environment and himself. This third, spontaneous level is crucial to the positive developmental transformations beginning to occur in the individual. The fourth level of multilevel disintegration is one in which more tranquility, systemization and conscious transformation is potentially available. In this stage, the ideal, new personality begins to manifest. At the last stage of secondary integration, a new organization and harmony of personality happens. Dabrowski writes that “the main dynamisms active at this stage are: autonomy and authenticism, disposing and directing center on a high level, a subtle highly refined empathy, [and] activation of the personality ideal” (Dabrowski, 1970, p. 22).

Of particular interest is Dabrowski’s view of the essential “hypersensitivities” that accompany his THD. Hypersensitivities are also called “overexcitabilities” (OE) and include a higher than average capacity for experiencing internal and external stimuli based upon a higher than average responsiveness of the nervous system (Mika presentation on Dabrowski, 2002). Some of these hypersensitivities include those that are psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual and emotional. Inner tensions of neurotic qualities can facilitate positive disintegration in the gifted. Mika (2002) says that Dabrowski considers possible origins of OEs are “genetic (brain dysfunction), history or

prenatal and neonatal trauma (mother's illness, fetal poisoning, FAS, esp. in ADHD, tics), severe illness in childhood (e.g. meningitis), abusive or neglectful caregiving in early childhood, and environmental conditions – no opportunity for appropriate physical release” (Mika, 2002). These neuroses and illnesses can facilitate emotional development and giftedness during the Positive Disintegration process.

Possible Triggers of the Development of Spiritual Giftedness

With some archival research related to Dabrowski, this author found the works of Michael Piechowski, Ph.D., one of Dabrowski's protégés, who has expanded Dabrowski's work to include “spiritual giftedness—the special affinity for inwardness and a natural aptitude for spiritual awakening” (Piechowski, 1997). Dabrowski's theory had addressed emotional giftedness and also could explain the process of self-actualization (and individuation), so Piechowski moved the TPD into the realm of spirituality where transformation of another kind takes place.

With an abused child, there is the rare occurrence that the child realizes the abuse is undeserved and unjustified, and, in this gifted child, he or she has an awareness, sensitivity and compassion for victims of injustice that facilitate “emotional survival against all odds” (Piechowski, 2000). These children feel different and marginal, they “dis-identify from the family” and grow toward well-being by finding alternative avenues of support. This “sense of marginality had developed in them a tolerance for loneliness” (Piechowski, 2000). Piechowski extends emotional giftedness to include spiritual giftedness. Spiritual intuition is present early in a child with these abilities. He cites many

cases of adults where abuse and hardship (including a Holocaust victim) helped shape spiritual giftedness in their lives.

Another important aspect of budding mystical development in children is that the child often experiences the death of a close, nurturing and loving parent, grandparent or guardian (Piechowski, 2000). In both the situations of abuse and of death of a close, loved one, the child turns inward for solace and comprehension of the meaning of these happenings. These children who have overexcitability (OE) and hypersensitivities find these experiences of death and/or abuse terrible to fathom—hence a “glitch” in the normal, everyday development of children as Erikson has described. For these young children, an existential crisis of this great magnitude may propel them into the realms of spiritual development and mystical experience (Piechowski, 2000).

Piechowski’s (2000) contribution to Spiritual Giftedness is reported in his research with children who have had authentic spiritual experiences. He takes the position that spiritual intelligence sets the groundwork for recognizing spiritual giftedness as a distinct and separate type of intelligence. He found four things of importance: “1) that children are capable of spiritual awareness and of having profound spiritual experiences; 2) that spiritual experiences come to children unbidden, or as a result of focused effort, or both, when a technique is found to repeat the experience at will; 3) that the taboo on spirituality isolates them and forces them to hide their experiences; and 4) that spiritual giftedness presumes spiritual intelligence” (Piechowski, 2000, p. 82). For the purposes of this research, this author expects to find references to these experiences

from her adult participants who in all likelihood may express some of these kinds of experiences.

Piechowski (2000, pp. 83-85) cites previous research by Emmons in 1999 that human spirituality correlates positively with “psychological health, resilience and positive self-regard.” Piechowski also wrote that Emmons had used Gardner’s eight criteria and concluded that there are five parts to spiritual dimensions: “the capacity to transcend the physical and material, 2) the ability to experience heightened states of consciousness, 3) the ability to sanctify everyday experience, 4) the ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems, and 5) the capacity to be virtuous.” Piechowski, in the same article, stated that Nobel in 2000 added two more parts to Emmon’s list: “6) the conscious recognition that physical reality is embedded in a larger multidimensional reality with which we interact, consciously and unconsciously, on a moment-to-moment basis, and 7) the conscious pursuit of psychological health, not only for ourselves but also for the sake of global community.” Piechowski noted that “achievement” as measured in other kinds of intelligence is not an appropriate way to view spiritual intelligence/giftedness because there is no way to judge this other than understanding the life and character of the spiritually gifted—and only the person him-or herself knows the truth within his or her own life. Sometimes, later in the lives of these gifted individuals, their works, if available to the public, might be judged as evidence of spiritual giftedness, but we cannot count on that alone due to the self-chosen isolation of many spiritually gifted adults. Inner transformation in these cases is a developmental process that is underpinned

by a “different order of reality,” and this kind of giftedness relies upon the open reception of the spiritual inflow upon which everything else is built (Piechowski, 2000, p. 87).

Laurence Nixon (1990) wrote an important psychological dissertation titled *The Mystical Struggle: A Psychological Analysis*. In this text, he analyzed the lives of some historical mystics for evidence and understanding of the mystical struggle that occurred in their early lives and then he tried to find any factors that predisposed some people for that struggle. Nixon suspected that the process of personality development was not like that taken by the average person. He studied a wide range of mystics including theistic and non-theistic mystics and celibate and non-celibate mystics. He said that he was not aiming to generalize to all mystics. He wanted to understand the struggles, or conflicts, which were a part of mystics’ lives and how the mystics strove to decrease the internal conflict through meditative or ascetic practices.

Nixon said that Dabrowski and William James thought the mystical struggle was solely related to temperament and that they had not considered environmental factors that may have contributed to facilitating the mystical life. Nixon posits that mystics enter a struggle early in their lives that have been reported in their personal documents or manuals. Nixon chose for the purposes of his study this definition of a mystic:

“those persons who have had at least one mystical experience and who undertook a disciplined way of life, involving ascetical practices and meditative exercises, in order to realize a transformation of themselves in the direction of greater conformity to what they perceived to be ultimate reality” (Nixon, 1990, p. 10).

Some of the mystics Nixon examined were the Buddha, Sufi Al-Ghazzali, Hindu

Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, St. Augustine, Teresa of Avila and even the Jewish Hasidic

mystic Nahman of Bratslav. Nahman said that everyone on earth could reach the highest levels if he or she chose; Nahman also said that his achievements were not inherited but “came through good deeds, struggle and worship” (Nixon, 1990, p. 25). Nixon (1990, p. 49) found, in his search for mystical “struggles” that the themes of inner conflict were multidimensional:

“concerns for religious and ethical goals, personal competence and the achievement of a unified state of consciousness...and distinction can be made before and after the point of commitment to a mystical path....Psychotic experience can also be seen in terms of oscillation between good and evil.”

Nixon (1990, p. 95) cites Dabrowski as saying that there are three environmental factors in positive disintegration of personality that facilitate higher levels of functioning of personality; these are direct stimulation, peaceful conditions, and guidance from an advisor, counselor or therapist. Nixon also says that Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration and his concepts of overexcitability fit very well with the struggles of developing mystics because mystics go through stages of adult personality development beyond maturation, they go through a disintegration process in which the struggles occur, and his ideas of overexcitability are important dispositionally not only for advanced personality development but also for mystical development (Nixon, 1990, p.112).

When Nixon (1990, p. 142) analyzed for predispositional factors of a mystical struggle, he found five that were important but not necessarily the final answer to his search. He only proposes a model based upon his findings that should suffice only as a starting point for future research and thought. He gives a caveat that not all of these five factors might apply to each and every mystic.

The first factor is one of temperament and consists of emotional sensitivity and heightened ability for imaginative participation similar to Dabrowski's oversensitivities. The second factor is that of a childhood loss that results in insecurity; these losses could be separation from mother, death of a parent or sibling, grave illness, war, migration or drastic poverty—losses felt more extremely due to hypersensitivities (Nixon, 1990, p. 143).

The intense pain can cause the young mystics to be more vulnerable, not to rely on the world, and to look elsewhere for fulfillment. If the mystic is to develop further, he or she becomes involved in personality transformation that means understanding an ultimate reality (Nixon, 1990, p. 144). The last three factors are predispositional for successful seeking: emotional support (from family or dear friends), family training and modeling (in science, humanities or religion that give a paradigm of meaning and potential plans of action), and institutional support (e.g., universities or monasteries in adolescence or adulthood). For mystics, their original search for security becomes a search for truth and understanding. Often someone at an early age tells the young mystics religious stories and teaches devotion. Communicated in this way are polarities such as world vs. spirit, good versus evil, or self-discipline versus wild and dangerous passions. Nixon (1990, p.144) says these lessons often set up the ground for future mystical struggle.

Mystics seem to see themselves as having “peculiar” temperaments. Nixon cites an example of this with Swami Vivekananda explaining that:

“There are two sorts of persons in the world—the one strong-nerved, quiet, yielding to nature, not given to much imagination, yet good, kind, sweet, etc. For such is this world—they alone are born to be happy. There are the others, again, with *high-strung nerves, tremendously imaginative, with intense feelings*—always going high, and coming down the next moment. For them there is no happiness. The second will have to run between ecstasy and misery. But of these alone geniuses are made. There is some truth in a recent theory that genius is a sort of madness. Now, persons of this class, if they want to be great, must fight to be so—clear the decks for battle. No encumbrance—no marriage—no children—no undue attachment to anything except the one idea, and live and die for that. I am a person of this sort” (Vivekananda, 1953:165).

Nixon’s work goes further into these factors, but this author will stop here. The relevance to the current study is that the participants to be interviewed may talk about themselves in ways that may divulge some of the characteristics and factors mentioned in Nixon’s analyses of the struggles of the mystics whose lives and texts he had reviewed. However, there are other ways mystics develop. Specifically, the next portion of this chapter looks at the changes in levels of consciousness that happen as people, and mystics, evolve.

Consciousness and Developmental Levels as Indicators toward Mysticism

David R. Hawkins, psychiatrist, psychologist and mystic, developed over many years his research in which he found that the method of kinesiology was more than a local phenomenon but was a way to test for levels of consciousness and truth versus falsehood universally. After many years of practicing psychiatry, he did his doctoral dissertation in psychology on *Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis and Calibration of the Level of Human Consciousness* (Hawkins, 1995). Hawkins speaks to the idea that human experience not only occurs in the Newtonian, cause-and-effect sense but also in the quantum physics realities described by Bohm in which all “potentiality and infinite

energy” take place (Hawkins, 1995). Hawkins writes that, as in Chaos Theory, these energy levels are non-local and can indicate hidden patterns. He shows that these patterns “determine whether kinesiological response [of the human body] is positive (muscles go strong) or negative (muscles go weak). His insight about the use of this method of testing was that when truth is spoken, the muscular response is strong (powerful), and when a falsehood is spoken, the muscular response is weak. He found that this happens in all individuals.

With this method, Dr. Hawkins spent years testing in many projects to find out what is true without the participants having to reflect to come up with answers or solutions to questions put them; their bodies responded naturally to truth or falsehood. Over many years, he discovered through his research that there are many levels of consciousness. Later Hawkins was recognized as a leader in this field of kinesiology. Of particular interest for the purposes of this dissertation is his own spiritual development as an advanced mystic and how spiritual development relates to consciousness studies. His research method is unique in that it bridges the imaginary line between science and spirituality in a way that appeals to scientists.

Hawkins, with the kinesiological method, has mapped the levels of conscious using a logarithmic scale. Consciousness at the lowest level is 20 and the highest level is 1000. The levels of consciousness (Hawkins, 2006, 2008) above 200 are levels of Truth; levels below 200 are levels of Falsehood. People who dwell predominantly in shame, guilt, apathy/hatred, grief, fear, desire, anger or pride live, think and function in the levels of Falsehood. Beginning with level 200, which is courage, consciousness raises

algorithmically. At level 250 is a neutrality of trust and empowerment; level 310 is of willingness, optimism and intention; level 350 brings one to acceptance, forgiveness and transcendence; And level 400 is that of reason, intellect, abstraction and understanding. A large leap is required to move into levels 500 and above. Level 500 is about love [unconditional], reverence and revelation; level 540 is joy, completeness, serenity and transfiguration; level 600 brings peace, bliss and illumination, and levels 700-1000 are the ineffable states of pure consciousness and enlightenment (Hawkins, 2008, p. 367).

Hawkins describes intellectual advancement as occurring in the 400-499 level; at this level he has found the giants whom we admire such as Einstein, Freud and Newton. Hawkins found that the kinesiological response “occurred along a gradient that was aligned with the level of energy of a stimulus....A spectrum of responses appeared concordant with the quality of the stimulus” (Hawkins, 2007, p. 25). To review the methodology used specifically for these three men, Hawkins had developed a mathematical scale of calibrated levels of consciousness. For him, “the kinesiological response was related to the level of consciousness” (Hawkins, 2007, p. 25). With kinesiological testing across multiple participants, the participants’ bodies were strong, for example, such as when Freud’s, Newton’s or Einstein’s names were tested at the levels of 350, 400 and 450. But when the experimenters tested the consciousness of each of these men at level 500, the participants’ bodies went weak. So then the experimenter would back up and test the participants (Freud, Einstein or Newton) at 475, 480, 490, 495, 496, 497, 498 and 499; in these cases the bodies stayed strong. In this way, the calibrated level of consciousness of Freud, Newton or Einstein was determined to be at

499. So, for Hawkins, “the level of the 400’s represents intellect, reason, logic, science, and the Newtonian paradigm....For most educated spiritual seekers, the 400s represent a springboard but also often a great barrier, and it is notable that Einstein, Freud, and Sir Isaac Newton all calibrated at 499” (Hawkins, 2007, p. 26).

At levels 500 and above are found different kinds of consciousness such as the spiritual reality(s) experienced by mystics. Bohm, the quantum physicist mentioned above, was tested to have slightly above the 500 level. Hawkins describes level 499 and below as linear consciousness and levels 500 and above as non-linear consciousness. With the linear consciousness occurs the understanding and positions of duality. In the spiritual, non-linear levels of consciousness occur the states of non-duality. This could explain the vast differences in the thoughts and experiences of the spiritually gifted, and, by extension, the mystics—especially the advanced mystics-- who fall in the non-dual, non-linear categories. Hawkins also describes the levels above 500 as stages of spiritual development.

So Hawkins explains that people experience reality in different ways depending on their levels of consciousness. He says that below level 200 are found people such as Hitler and other despots and murderers, for example, along with people with psychological dysfunction such as extreme shame, fear, anger and guilt. Among the lowest levels of consciousness are found the sociopaths and psychopaths. These people live in levels of non-truth compared with the levels above 200 in which truth such as courage, willingness and acceptance occur. A person reaches the 500 level of consciousness when he or she experiences the state of unconditional love. Jumping from

below level 500 to level 500 or above signifies the leap from linear, dual thinking to states that are totally different—such as where timeless and spaceless mystical experiences can happen. Although the findings of this research sound fantastic, Dr. Hawkins has shown that the human intellect cannot differentiate between truth and falsehood but that the energetic field of the human body can be used by kinesiologic methodology to do so. The implications of this research are astounding.

Summary

For the purposes of this dissertation, the writings of Erikson, Pollio, et al, Gardner, Dabrowski, Piechowski and Hawkins address the idea of spiritual giftedness, spiritual development and spiritual consciousness. Erikson said that at a late age will a person begin to think about the spirituality and meaning of life as he faces mortality and diminished functioning. Pollio addresses the “falling apart” of the self for non-mystics, and although this can produce growth, this is not at all like the existential crises that mystics comprehend early in their childhoods. Dabrowski has researched this “falling apart” as approached in Pollio, et al, and he has developed and tested the Theory of Positive Disintegration to explain that some people experience this as the self-realization process. Not all of the stages of disintegration are experienced by everyone undergoing this process, but those who make it through the final stage of secondary integration have reached their full potential as human beings. Piechowski develops TPD even further to address the advanced spiritual experiences of mysticism and performs preliminary research to understand that experiences of abuse and death of a loved one during early childhood may assist in shaping the rare mystics-to-be. Hawkins explains the various

states of consciousness using the kinesiologic method, and he adds that mystical experiences (and he, himself, is an advanced mystic) happen for those rare humans who have made the advance from linear duality of thought to non-linear, non-dual states of consciousness. This author expects to find that at least some of her participants will describe their mystical abilities as gifts. There is much more to say about this topic, and this will be addressed more fully in the Discussion chapter of the dissertation after the results are analyzed.

Psychopathology of Mystical Experience

There is some discussion of psychopathology of mystical experience, however only a brief note will be included here because this researcher is primarily interested in interviewing whole, fully integrated mystics. But psychosis can happen, such as when someone is not prepared for a mystical experience or doesn't have a paradigm in which to place it after it occurs. Drug-induced altered states might also produce mystical experiences. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV-TR (DSM-IV-TR)* published by the American Psychiatric Association (2000), is used as a reference manual by psychiatrists, psychologists, hospitals and health insurance companies as a standard for diagnosis of mental disorders. This fourth version has included a new class of disorder that has never been recognized before and that is called "Religious or Spiritual Problem" (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 741). The brief description that stands alone under this heading says:

"This category can be used when the focus of clinical attention is a religious or spiritual problem. Examples include distressing experiences that involve loss or questioning of faith, problem associated with

conversion to a new faith, or questioning of spiritual values that may not necessarily be related to an organized church or religious institution” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 741).

The Grofs (1989) and Bragdon (1990) have written about Spiritual Emergencies which are about the difficulties that can happen during spiritual awakening both in the body and in the mind. One of the main points of these books is that professionals in psychology and psychiatry have not been trained to differentiate between symptoms that are psychotic and symptoms that are evidence of spiritual awakening. They can seem similar when externally observed, but internal states may vary widely between the spiritually evolving humans and those who are not. Their works have been instrumental in the addition of the “Religious or Spiritual Problem” category in the *DSM-IV-TR*. Personal crises, often with proper assistance, can lead to transformation. Without knowledgeable care, spiritual emergencies are often diagnosed as psychotic breaks, for example. Six spiritual emergencies, according to the Grofs (1989, pp.27-45), are: opening to a life myth with powerful archetypal images, beginning a Shamanic journey, Kundalini awakening, emergence of a karmic pattern, having a psychic opening, or experiencing possession. These can be traumatic ways to begin the transpersonal processes. Having proper support is crucial when any of these spiritual emergencies occur. Otherwise persons suffering from these experiences could be overmedicated, hospitalized indefinitely, and labeled schizophrenic, for example, when that is not the case.

Psychiatrists Greenberg and Witztum (2001), who treat the Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel, write that there can be dangers in mystical study for both individual and the

community. They cite the story of “The Four Who Entered Pardes” (already reported in this study) when telling of two patients who left secular lives to become masters of the return [to God through mystical works] and ended up becoming psychotic. Greenberg et al wanted to know three things: 1) did mystical study trigger illness or if it attracted the mentally unstable, 2) did local orientation toward mysticism affect the furtherance of psychopathology, and 3) how do the religious discern the mystic from the psychotic?

Since mysticism is not a normal part of Western Christian, Jewish and Islamic cultures and religious communities, Greenberg warns that there may be more of a risk for mystical practices than in communities such as Hindu and Buddhist communities where mystical meditations and mystical visions are common practice in everyday life and can occur across the lifetime of the individual as opposed to learning mystical practices later in life. Some concerns for beginner mystics is that they could suffer unusually high amounts of ecstasy and despair that come out of the altered states of expansion and contraction [remember Lurianic mysticism and “tzimtzum”; also consider the depression of the “dark night of the soul” that affects Christians in the West]. Both mystical and the mentally ill can suffer social withdrawal, delusions, hallucinations and weird behavior (Greenberg & Witztum, 2001, p. 181).

Greenberg, et al, (2001) also disclose characteristics that differentiate between the psychotic and the mystical states. First, mystical visions are predominantly visual where psychotic states are auditory; hallucinations of the mystic have benevolent advisors present while those of the psychotic contain aggressive enemies. Similarities are that both the enemy and the benevolent guides tell the person what to think or do. Secondly,

language spoken during mystical experiences such as in the Christian “speaking in tongues” usually is unknown to the mystic, but language spoken by psychotics is understood by the psychotic. Thirdly, a paranoid episode could include feelings of omnipotence and personal grandeur, but the mystic avoids self-flattery and is humbled by the experience of being a vessel filled by the divine. Fourth, mystics consider the experience as sweet and ecstatic while psychotics are terrified or indifferent of their experiences. Fifth, mystical experiences only last up to a few hours; psychotic states could last for years that flatten the affect, retain residual delusions and decrease abilities of social functioning. Sixth, mystics voluntarily and gladly enter mystical states often through inducement; psychotics have their experiences thrust upon them. Seventh, mystics, unlike the psychotics, enjoy sharing their experiences with other people. And last, the psychotics cannot differentiate between inner and outer worlds while the mystics can (Greenberg, et al, pp. 181-182).

Several observations and comments by Greenberg and Witztum (2001) about their patients who had experienced psychosis are notable. Great Jewish mystics were usually rabbis who were very knowledgeable and who observed prescribed Jewish rituals. Mystical absorption and study is acceptable and respected in certain Jewish communities. If a person involved in Jewish mysticism begins to neglect the rituals and personal habits, these can be a sign of deterioration and disturbance within that person. The two patients did their studies and performed their mysticism in isolation and without guidance; a healthier way would have been to remain in mystical study groups led by a sage who would have done normative study as compared to “folk kabbala”, given support to the

members and controlled the study content. The “hallucinations” of the Jewish mystic include cultural norms, whereas those of the psychotic are bizarre (Greenberg, et al, 2001). The participants in the current study are expected to be mentally healthy mystics and not to exhibit evidence of psychosis. However, it is important to be aware of the risks involved in facilitating mystical experiences. So, the classic rabbis of historical times seem to be wise in their advice about not actively pursuing Kabbalistic mysticism until one is 40 years old, settled in marriage, closely connected with *Torah* and *Talmud* sacred texts, and led by a respected mystical sage or rabbi.

David Lukoff (2006) has developed a course for understanding the new category of religious problems found in the *DSM-IV* handbook. He writes that definitions of mysticism “range from ‘upheaval of the total personality’ to ‘everyday mysticism’” (Lukoff, 2006, p. 36). He reports that the clinical view of the mystical experience is that it can be seen as “transient, extraordinary and marked by: feelings of unity, sense of harmonious relationship to the divine, euphoria, sense of noesis (access to the hidden spiritual dimension), loss of ego functioning, alterations in time and space perception, and sense of lacking control over the event” (Lukoff, 2006, p. 36). Some of the outdated clinical literature had used terms such as “ego regression, borderline psychosis, a psychotic episode, or temporal lobe dysfunction” to describe symptoms of mystical experiences; however most modern clinicians do not use these psychopathological terms in their diagnoses and treatment (Lukoff, 2006, p. 37).

There is a warning that sometimes mystical experiences can be disruptive or stressful—usually for people who do not have a strong sense of self—but a guide to

knowing how to assist clients is to pay attention to the content of the particular experiences, if schizophrenic symptoms are temporary or regular, and whether or not there is more than temporary ego-inflation that can occur in spiritual crises (Lukoff, 2006, pp. 38-39). Medical treatment and hospitalization are contra-indicated in the situations of acute mystical episodes. Correct diagnosis of mystical episodes and assisting the client in integrating the experience are more beneficial for treatment (Lukoff, 2006, p. 40). Lukoff (2006, p. 91) recommends educating the client about spiritual emergence as being part of a spiritual journey, suggests that the patient find a compatible spiritual path or religious community with an appropriate spiritual leader for support, encourages the client to begin spiritual practices that are in accord with his or her beliefs, and modeling the therapist's own spirituality if reasonable in the situation to give the client purpose, meaning and hope in the transcendent that is occurring.

Psycholinguistics and Mysticism

The relationship of language has been addressed in Chapter 2 of this study as it relates to the mystical experience itself. During mystical experiences, the mystic is beyond language. When the mystic leaves that altered state and returns to everyday consciousness, then there is the difficulty of describing the experience with language. Whatever position one takes in the debate between the Common Core group or the Social Constructionists, the situation of the language as it pertains to this study should be addressed briefly here.

The participants who volunteered for this study will be speaking English during the interviews. Some of the participants will not have had English as his or her mother

tongue, so the interviewer will ask those participants about any concerns they might have in using English during their interviews. This interviewer is taking the position that mystics the world over, no matter the language, share a commonality of understanding and an awareness that is beyond the everyday experience of language. Mystical experiences have a spiritual universality about them that is recognized among mystics of any religious orientation. If the post-mystical semantic descriptions differ slightly, there still remains a commonality of understanding among mystics that transcends the spoken or written word. This researcher is prepared, for the current study, to accept the words that the participants present for the use in her proposed thematic structure. English, if one looks closely at dictionary or etymological definitions, is made up of words from different languages, cultures and eras. The meanings shift regularly; see the creative use of slang, for example.

There is one area of language that is important in this study, and that is the problem of translations into English from sacred texts. If one is a mystic doing serious studies within his or her tradition, there comes a point when the mystic, if based in English as his or her mother tongue, must learn the original sacred language of his spiritual path. Those English-speaking Americans who have become advanced mystics in the Indian culture of Hinduism, for example, have learned Sanskrit (J. Harrigan & Chandrasekharanand, 1999-2011). If one is drawn to Middle Eastern Sufism, then learning Arabic is beneficial in the pursuit of advanced studies (Nicholson, 1914). For mystics who advance in Jewish mysticism, then learning Hebrew is an important step in that person's spiritual development.

When one is a developing English-speaking mystic who has not yet learned the sacred language of his or her personal path, hearing that sacred language spoken, sung or chanted can still induce altered states and mystical experiences. There is something in the resonance and the embodied connection while hearing that sacred language that transcends ordinary understanding. A natural desire, or calling, if you will, arises that “speaks” to the mystic who gets to a certain stage on the spiritual path. Even in silence (Wolpe, 1992), the reverberations of sacred language or letters experienced in the inner domains of consciousness appeal strongly to the mystic. A mystic on a Jewish spiritual path and another mystic on a Hindu spiritual path understand each other’s need to immerse him or herself in the pertinent sacred language even if each of those mystics converse with each other in English. One might say that there is camaraderie among mystics of different persuasions, at least in the United States, to share in the joy of connecting with the divine no matter what kind of language the mystic lives in during his or her everyday experiences in the world. When one conducts personal studies in the process of development within a particular mystical tradition, then zeroing into a particular sacred language becomes primary between teacher, student and the text of choice. Advanced mystics are comfortable with looking at languages of any kind as tools of communication and learning. However, language is only a temporary inconvenience for the mystic who knows that the true reality is beyond language. Human languages only separate us; sacred languages connect us and carry us to unitive experiences or direct contact with God where no language is necessary. Mature mystics are not reduced to the limitations of everyday languages.

CHAPTER 4

Literature Review of Everyday Experiences of Mystics

Everyday experiences of contemporary mystics have been researched very little. Most analyses have taken place on the lives and works of famous, historical, religious mystical figures. Some of these analyses have been based upon on their mystical texts or teachings and some based upon biographical events that were usually recorded by their disciples or peers. The only modern references to the psychology of everyday experiences of mystics that this researcher could locate are two. The first is a book by psychologist Marsha Sinetar (1986), *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics: Lifestyles for Self-Discovery* based upon her research, and the second is a dissertation by Pamela Porath (2006) titled *The Lived Experience of an Unexpected, Unintentional Mystical Experience* which is a phenomenological study. There is a third reference cited in this chapter that has to do with advanced kundalini process that is the life's work of Joan Harrigan (2008). It is very common for people in this kind of process to live their everyday lives with mystical experiences happening both spontaneously and also by being induced. She had addressed some of the requirements for people in advanced process that should be considered as very similar to the everyday lives of mystics in sacred tradition. Her work is with participants across religious traditions although the science of kundalini was developed originally in the Vedic traditions of Hinduism.

Non-Jewish Everyday Experiences of Mystics

Marsha Sinetar (1986, pp. 4-6) was interested in locating people who were self-actualizing or self-actualized. She wanted to know about their social transcendence or

self-transcendence that Sinetar described as a “daily awareness.” The people she sought had moved into the “wilderness of their own interior journey” noted by Thomas Merton, a modern Catholic mystic now deceased, but she wanted to interview people who had remained as functioning in the world and had not secluded themselves in separate spiritual communities such as monasteries. Through advertising in newspapers in assorted locations, she found thirty-seven volunteer participants who communicated originally by letter. These participants not only had detached themselves from society’s mores but also had begun to travel new inner journeys in response to the “call” (Sinetar, 1986, p. 5) which was like an “inner voice.” Both monks and mystics who participated had withdrawn from conventional life; it took several of these people years to create the new kind of lives they wanted to live.

Sinetar (1986, p. 75) wrote that “only in mystics do we observe the full expanse of mankind’s spiritual potential.” Their daily lives are constantly joined with spiritual issues. They delve into the deepest levels of their subjective selves. [Note that Dabrowski (1978) studied fully potentialized, evolved and integrated humans and determined that they had developed strong and equally balanced subjective and objective inner selves which allowed them to be fully present in both ways to the outer world—discerning truth and value in others and the world and, at the same time, being able to totally empathize with and understand the inner lives of others.] Sinetar says that mystics, no matter where in the world they live, have a mission to search to find a way to return to the Absolute from which they have come. She says the main difference between others is that they

have opened their “inner eyes” and awaken to a new way of “seeing” and being. But there are “costs” and “mini-deaths” along the way for mystics (Sinetar, 1986, p. 82).

These changes of the mystic’s journey also involves a new languaging that “contain[s] a unique ‘invitation,’ a way of utilizing words to point to the awe, thanksgiving, and worshipful awareness of his highest consciousness” (Sinetar, 1986, p. 86). The mystics find it difficult to be with other people when they are in these higher states. The mystics also experience more intense emotions than other people while, at the same time, make conscious choices to love people more deeply as if those people were the manifested Absolute. These paradoxes are common occurrences for mystics. These emotions and shifts in their views of the world and others destroy the old personality.

The mystics in Sinetar’s study had peak experiences [she applied Maslow’s terminology and model to her mystical participants] in which they “left their senses” and had “full, pure awareness” (Sinetar, 1986, p.93-101), but, because mystics enter unknown regions of inner self, they also experienced abysses and distress beyond the usual everyday ways of non-mystics. [John of the Cross, a 16th century mystical cohort of Teresa of Avila wrote about this awful and painful time of his development in his book *The Dark Night of the Soul* (Walsh, 1956/1991). These stresses come with the letting go of the inner relationships with the past, with others, with possessions, with embedded cultural standards and expectations, and with aspirations. Grief ensues as these choices and actions are done. [The losing of self in this process is a multilevel disintegration such as Dabrowski (1970) has studied.] Even the previous thrills from experiences of the Absolute and the accompanying ecstasy must be released. Sinetar says that the anxieties

that accompany this part of the journey are so intense and so dangerous [to sanity] that non-mystics rarely are able or willing to go there. At the same time, the effects of journeying through the “dark night” are that faith is deepened (Sinetar, 1986, p. 113). There are physical effects experienced by the mystics in Sinetar’s study that medical personnel were unable to identify or relieve.

Sinetar had three case studies in this research that exemplified the mystics’ consciousness. One of her participants described, in answer to Sinetar’s (1986, p. 117) question, the personal attributes which had “helped [him] “to be happy, productive and contributive.” The participant answered: “Acceptance, Creativity, Perseverance, Inspiration, Hunger for the Divine.” These three participants were a male researcher/bibliographer who was a hermit in the woods, a housewife and mother who lived in a large home and taught yoga weekly, and a male writer/poet who lived in a studio room in a home with friends.

Each of these three hungered for the Divine, each lived daily with the unitive consciousness, each had generally destroyed the fear of death along with other fears, although each life was unique. Some of the mystics in her study participated in structured religions and some did not; however, each maintained an individual awareness and practices separate from the organized religions. The point of all the lives of her mystics was to live a life of wholeness as it was inspired from inner drives and callings. This developing wholeness was dependent upon, and required, much solitude and silence which the participants obtained by re-organizing their lives specifically for that purpose. They weaned out of their lives unnecessary people (sometimes including partners and

families) and activities both inner and outer. Although the mystics have choices, because they know deeply that “what we seek, seeks us” (Sinetar, 1986, p. 174), there actually remains no choice for those already on the committed path. Again, there is that comfortable living with paradox.

Pamela Porath interviewed for her dissertation, *The Lived Experience of an Unexpected, Unintentional Mystical Experiences* (2006), nine participants, including herself, who were neither engaged in any specific spiritual practice at the time nor were expecting any unusual experiences of the mystical nature. These college-student participants had had some early training in Eastern traditions were not actively practicing any at the time of the study. Porath was examining phenomenologically : “1) specific elements of the experience, 2) the meaning-making processes in which participants engaged to interpret the experience(s), 3) the dynamics of self-disclosure in potential for stigmatization, and 4) the effect the experience(s) had on the participants’ beliefs as well as career and lifestyle choices.

Porath’s first thematic structure for the specific experience included: “Initial sense the encounter came from outside oneself, Timelessness –time stood still, Awareness of immediate surroundings, Limitations of language, and Physical sensations.” The second thematic structure for the intersubjectivity was: “People noticed in the moment, Cautious self-disclosure, and Fear of stigmatization.” The third thematic structure concerning the meaning-making process was: “Writing as a way of knowing, Artistic expressions, and Other ways of making sense.” The fourth thematic structure about the effect of the

experience was: “On world view or sense of reality, On religious practices, and On lifestyle and/or career changes” (Porath, 2006, p. 154).

Regarding the actual, unexpected mystical experiences, Porath (2006) found that her thematic structure was like the scholarly books and articles had described. This author will not go into that here. Her participants described their experiences of the mystical as having come from outside themselves, and this was in agreement with some of the philosophical debaters such as Forman and Stace who wrote that experiences of this nature are a connection with the holy or divine. Some of these participants noted the change in their awareness of self and the divine other. Also, the experience of timelessness had been commonly described in mystical literature. Regarding their sense of their surroundings, some of the participants lost that sense and some retained it. During the interviews, some of the participants became silent and found a difficulty with language in describing their mystical experiences. This, too, is in agreement with James’ ineffable characteristic of these experiences. Most of the participants experienced physical changes such as vibrations of energies flowing into their bodies. Polgath’s participants experienced self in a way not common to scholarly writings about mystical experiences such as wanting external validation of the experiences and that they had no context for first-time experiences.

For Porath’s (2006) second thematic structure about the intersubjectivity of their experiences, some participants did self-disclosure after the experiences and some did not; however, caution was used by all in determining with whom they would disclose their mystical experiences. The two chief concerns about self-disclosure were that the

participants might overwhelm others or that others might not understand the depth of the experiences. There was also a fear of stigmatization although that word was not used; “inappropriateness” was the word used. One participant had been fired from a job because she had revealed to a co-worker her experiences. Another participant said that these types of experiences had been “cultured out of me” (Porath, 2006, p. 177). Some of these unexpected mystical experiences happened in community gatherings and some did not. One of the participants felt that the power of her experience was directly affected by the presence of the community.

Porath’s third thematic structure had to do with meaning-making. Six of her participants wrote about their experiences such as in a journal, with an online community, or in books that a participant had written and published. Writing seemed to remove the discomfort that the participants felt after the mystical experiences. Another way of making meaning was by the use of metaphors (Porath, 2006, p. 181) either in words or by expression in pottery-making or other non-verbal means such as making drawings. Other participants read religious texts, explored traditions of religions other than their own, attended workshops that resonated, or talked with clergy or mental health professionals (Porath, 2006).

The last thematic structure was about the effects of the experience. Were these experiences life-changing as had been reported in mystical and scholarly texts? Porath (2006, p. 185-192) found that all of her participants “had a shift in either their worldview or sense of reality.” Some of the participants realized there was a difference between being spiritual and being religious. Some realized that Western, mainstream religion was

no longer the same for them as it had been and that they would no longer limit themselves in their maturing process to only one religious tradition. Many also changed their lifestyles, work and careers.

Porath's study has similarities to the current study in that it encompasses descriptions of mystical experiences by individual participants and exploration of their lives after the mystical experiences. Her thematic structures are mildly relevant; however there is a huge difference in the participants themselves between these two studies. The participants in Porath's study are primarily beginners, or, rather early-stage in their development as mystics as compared with the participants in the current study who have been sought out primarily because they have been living their whole lives as mystics in the Jewish traditions. The second thing to note as a primary difference with Porath's study is that her participants did not have an abiding commitment to mysticism as a lifelong journey such as the mystics being interviewed in this current research. Other comparisons will be presented in the discussion section of this paper.

Joan Harrigan, in her psychological research and text, *Kundalini Vidya: The Science of Spiritual Transformation* (2008) has described the four ways that people who have reached advanced levels of kundalini process (spiritual process of development of adepts—often as mystics) as leading to four primary lifestyles of these realized beings:

“There are realized ones who have a mission and travel about teaching and giving spiritual guidance. There are also realized ones who will teach and guide only if someone comes to their door and they agree to accept them. Then there are those who live in the world as if they were ordinary people. Finally, there are the hermits who hide themselves away and spend their days in Oneness” (Harrigan, 2008, p. 176).

Clinical psychologist Harrigan (2008), along with Swami Chandrasekharanand Saraswati, has interviewed, studied and counseled all kinds of people, especially those who reside in the United States where people do not usually have access to guidance in their advanced spiritual development. In her research, Harrigan found that both mystical and other kinds of extraordinary experiences occur that have not explained by Western psychology, medicine or other sciences. Harrigan has written that, in order to support healthy, spiritual kundalini risings, one is advised to include the following in their everyday lives:

The experiencer is advised to accept that the process is a part of everyday life in order to have a positive outcome of deeper spiritual awareness and transformation no matter how strange or uncomfortable the experiences.

To have a philosophical structure in which to place these experiences is helpful.

Spiritual guidance both in the inner and worlds can be comforting and instructional to learn better skills and to obtain protection for harm.

A spiritual lifestyle and environment should be based in awareness of self, others and world so that one may create a calming, creative, contemplative and positive home, associates, and work.

Avoiding certain things such as negative people, too hard work or stress on the body, and unhealthy food or drugs is essential.

Being ethical in all thoughts, words and deeds helps keep the body and mind free of harmful or unhealthy consequences.

Taking time to rest is important because the energies of the physical and subtle bodies are more active in the spiritually advancing people and need time to be revitalized.

Healthy nourishment for the body is essential.

Purification of physical and mental toxins that are common in our modern environments aids spiritually advancing beings in health, energy levels, creativity and productivity.

Breathing practices, body and energy work, psychological inner work, and meditation are some of the recommended practices.

Perseverance and faith are important since spiritual development involves ego work and holy process, for example, that bring about changes such as humility, gratitude, and learning to trust the internal, divine process that is in charge once the spiritually advancing person gets to a certain point in the process (Harrigan, 2008, pp. 179-195).

These processes may show up in the current research project as aspects of the lives of everyday mystics in the Jewish traditions of Kabbalah. However, there has been no psychological research that this author has found on the everyday experiences of contemporary mystics in the Jewish traditions.

This author also wishes to examine briefly the ways that her participants live in the four contexts of existential being according to Merleau-Ponty: Body, Time, World and Others. Porath addressed these issues in an unaware way as exemplified by some of the points discovered in her thematic structure. Some comparisons of her study and this study in this regards also will be addressed in the discussion chapter herein.

Jewish Everyday Experiences of Mystics

This author was unable to find any references to the phenomenology of contemporary, everyday experiences of mystics in the Jewish traditions, so there is a need for such a study in the field of psychology.

CHAPTER 5

Methods

Phenomenological Philosophy

Phenomenology, or the study of phenomena, historically originated in the field of philosophy. Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (2001) describes a phenomenon as: "1) a fact, occurrence or circumstance observed or observable: to study as in nature..., 4a) in philosophy, an appearance or immediate object of awareness in experience, and 4b) in Kantianism, a thing as it appears to and is constructed by the mind, as distinguished from a noumenon [a thing/object being perceived], or thing-in-itself." The etymology of the word "phenomenon" (Barnhart, 1988) shows in 1625 C.E. that it meant a fact, occurrence or manifestation as used by Bacon. Prior to that, the word had Greek and Latin roots meaning "to appear" or "is seen."

Philosophy and Phenomenology

According to Audi (1995), in his *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, phenomenology as a philosophy began in the 1700's with Kant and Hegel, but it was not until the 20th century that phenomenology was founded and developed by Husserl as a movement that has spread in many different directions of interpretation and usage. Phenomenology may be thought of as an analytical, existential and direct way of understanding consciousness (Audi, 1995, p. 578). Audi states that there are six important points to consider about philosophical phenomenology across all the various types of phenomenologies:

- 1) Phenomenology is different from the natural and usual philosophical points of view because Husserl focused on epistemological [knowing-ness] issues and Heidegger mainly addressed ontological [being-ness] concerns.
- 2) Philosophy and science are inter-connected in that each acts in a similar way as foundational to the other.
- 3) Traditional philosophy is based on reductionism and interpretation in order to find meaning.
- 4) Phenomenologists abide by the idea of intentionality or consciously being in the world; this varies from the cause-and-effect ideas or deductions that underpin science and logic.
- 5) Phenomenologists address a specific type of subjectivity as important whereas philosophy and science focus on objectivity.
- 6) Phenomenologists accept corporeal, primordial intuition as a valid aspect of experience (Audi, 1995, p. 578)

While holding these general considerations of phenomenology in mind, let us very briefly address the high points of the philosophical phenomenologies of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty since these philosophers have had such an impact on the practices of psychological phenomenology.

Phenomenological Philosophers

Edmund Husserl (1965), who started out as a mathematician and then moved into studies of logic followed by theories of knowledge, wrote that philosophy had striven to be a rigorous science that was purely rational but that this had failed often because philosophy could not leave out humanity and its epistemological complications. Husserl realized that objects, words, symbols, etc., as reduced by science and logic could not include states of mind, intuition or perception that were directly connected with the

human experience of those objects. He used the term “intentionality” (Audi, 1995) as most important when naming, describing or perceiving a material object because using language in this exercise implied human intention that may or may not have been purposeful. [Also of interest, according to Audi (1995), Husserl was of Jewish ancestry.]

Husserl thought that philosophy should evolve to include the considerations of the effects of language, perception, intention and intuition in its methodological analyses in order to get to the intentional character of objects. He wrote that the experience of time also has effects on perception, intuition and intention of objects (Audi, 1995). Audi (1995, P. 349) said that Husserl noted differences between the “psychological ego” that is active in the world and the “transcendental ego” that not only is active in the world but also can transcend the world regarding the person doing an analysis because the latter was better suited to finding truth than the former type of ego. This point may apply to the current research project since mystics are not only in the world but also transcend it during their mystical experiences. This transcendence can also effect changes in the everyday lives of mystics.

Martin Heidegger wrote in his book, *Being and Time* (1953), that human beingness in the world was a concrete state that could be described as a pre-reflective embodiment in time and place. Heidegger wrote about the importance of returning to experience as in pre-Cartesian times—before mind and body had been separated and objectified both philosophically and scientifically. Heidegger studied the everydayness of human experience in which we often act without reflection in thought or body. Heidegger also wrote that in our everydayness we are tending toward the future—that each action is

intended for moving ourselves forward in as meaningful and as comfortable a way as possible. Heidegger said that we are embedded in our cultures and languages. His definition of phenomenology was “to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself (Heidegger, 1953, p. 30). So, phenomenology is about any experience as it is embedded in time, space, language, culture, and body only as a state of pre-reflective being-ness.

Merleau-Ponty, in his book *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962/1981, p. ix), wrote that phenomenology is the study of essences of perception or consciousness. He said that “to return to the things themselves is to return to that world that precedes knowledge.” He said that we cannot comprehend existence without experiencing it first prior to thinking about it. He wrote that “the real has to be described, not constructed or formed” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1981, p. x). For him, “perception is not a science...it is the background from which all acts stand out” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1981, p. xi). He wrote that existence is both a mix of random events, is a transformation into the rational (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1981, p. xix) and that phenomenology unites “extreme subjectivity and extreme objectivism” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1981, p. xix). “Phenomenology, as a disclosure of the world, rests on itself, or rather provides its own foundation” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xx). Merleau-Ponty wrote that all cognition is only a figure upon this ground of phenomenological existence.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) expressed the grounds of our existence as being Body, World, Time and Others. He says that body is understood phenomenologically if we do

not separate it as the Cartesian and Kantian philosophers have done but include it in the wholeness of experience. Body is the spatiality of the self and contributes to the essence of consciousness such as in its movements, its relation to other humans such as in sexual encounters, and in its expression through speech. Merleau-Ponty describes bodily experience rather than explaining it; explanation brings one into a cause and effect positionality that is not the goal of phenomenology because that separates the figural experience from the field, or ground, of existence and, thus, destroys the meaning of the experience.

World, according to Merleau-Ponty (1962), is not made up of objects separate from human experience. World and the objects within it are part of the whole perception by humans of their daily existence. World is a ground of experience since a person lives within that context; the meaning for that person is wholly embedded in the physical world in which he resides, lives and breathes. The life of a person cannot be taken out of context of the physical environment in which self and body are located. All sensory abilities are engaged in lived experience, and those senses function as a connecting and constantly interacting aspect of the whole, undivided human experience. So world is a large part of the essence and ground of human consciousness and perception.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) says that Time, or the temporal portion of existence, should be considered equally with spatial existence. The spatial include Body and World. The person perceives time as the experience of ongoing change in the sensory perception of the environment. Each moment in time is a truth of that moment. The next moment brings its own truth of perception. An awareness of past and future reside in the

perception of changes perceived within the present moment. Bodily movement through World/space is similar to Bodily movement through Time. So time also is one of the grounds of our existence.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes that his early childhood experiences were happy and bound up with his “thrownness” not only into Body, Time and World but also into his family of Others. His ongoing perception of himself was directly founded upon his historical experiences in his childhood (which he said lasted until he was 25 years old). After he obtained “independence” from his childhood, he wrote that one could never separate himself or herself from perceptions of relationship which had occurred—that perceptions of relations with others affect perceptions of others whom one meets throughout life experiences. To totally separate oneself from perceptions of what Others, World, Time and Body are like would leave one lost—or ungrounded. To be separated from any of these four grounds of existence would be like free-floating in outer space where nothing is there to sustain life. For Merleau-Ponty, both Figure and Ground of perception are inseparable in experience and constitute the whole essence of being.

This author would like to make the distinction that advanced mystics across spiritual domains, and potentially, the research participants in this study, do learn through their practices and mystical experiences to decrease their sensory perceptions of Body, Time, World and Others in order to focus on and grow toward making direct contact with (or sometimes union with if other than Jewish mystical experiences) the Divine. Only those evolved mystics who have both a strong sense of self and of the Divine can withstand the special “loss of self” that occurs during their mystical experiences.

Otherwise, as discussed previously, a spiritual emergency or even a psychotic break could occur. This psychotic break with Self, Body, Time, World and Others probably is like the “lostness” described by Merleau-Ponty that would happen to a non-mystic if the context of his or her everyday-ness disappeared, dissolved or became no longer present.

Hermeneutics

The method of interpretation used in both philosophical and psychological phenomenology is hermeneutics. Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (2001) defines hermeneutics as “the science of interpretation, especially of the Scriptures... [or] the branch of theology that deals with the principles of Biblical exegesis [critical explanation or interpretation of a text].” Etymologically, the word hermeneutic derived from the Greek word “hermeneus [an interpreter]” which then derived from the Greek “Hermes,” or, in English, Hermes—the mythical messenger of the Gods who carried communications to and from humans (Barnhart, 1988). For the subject matter of the current study, this method is very relevant and appropriate since this study is about sacred mysticism and how it is experienced and interpreted by the participants.

Hermeneutics and Philosophy

Hermeneutics acquired an extensive significance over the years until it not only became a form of interpretation for philosophers but also became a philosophical position in the 20th century (Audi, 1995). There are two types of philosophical use of hermeneutics: first is the position that sees interpretation as a method for historical and human sciences which includes rational rules and criteria for what the author meant, and secondly is the method following Heidegger in which hermeneutics is an “interaction

between interpreter and text that is part of the history or what is understood” (Audi, 1995, p. 323). This Heideggerian type of hermeneutics “focused on the interpretation of ancient texts and distant peoples, cases where the unproblematic everyday understanding and communication cannot be assumed” (Audi, 1995, p. 323). This methodological type of hermeneutics is important because it encompasses the situated-ness of a text within the time, place, culture and language of the author of each text. This type of interpretation is called “the hermeneutic circle” [by Schleiermacher] because “the relation of each part is dependent upon the interpretation of the whole”—therefore resulting in circular clarifications and explanations (Audi, 1995, P. 323).

Hermeneutics and Psychology

The traditional, empirical science of psychology is wonderful for objectively understanding human and animal behavior. However, for studying inter-subjective and subjective phenomena, observational psychology cannot suffice. Kurtines, et al, (1992, p. 25) agree that “hermeneutic methodology thus offers the potential for enhancing the consensual validity of knowledge in the domains of subjective and inter-subjective phenomena.” Within the Kurtines’ book, Tappan and Brown point out that, in order to be ethical, developmental psychologists, there must be both an ethic of interpretation and an ethic of reading. Within developmental psychology, there is value in the descriptions of research participants that is difficult to work with using straightforward empirical methods. This issue is related to similar concerns of some philosophers, so, like philosophers who use the Heideggerian interpretive methods, these psychologists also

find an ethical answer by using hermeneutic interpretation of texts from dialogues of their participants.

Phenomenological Psychology

Steele (1989, p. 223), a psychologist of women's studies, wrote that his "concern is to make visible what training and custom has rendered invisible." He said that, for empirical psychologists, psychoanalysis, for example, seems problematic and foreign because it is involved with dreams, repressed sexuality and fantasies. Another area of difficulty for empirical scientists is that studying emotion in women is "in male-authored works" in medicine, psychology and literature where the psychology of women has been labeled "crazy" because it is out of the "norm" of previous, un-feminist, male-dominated fields of research and writings (Steele, 1989, p. 225).

Steele wrote that phenomenology and science have been embattled because scientific methodology has left out the important area of comprehending subjective states, both unconscious [and conscious], in addition to objectifying research subjects. He added that "science and scientists create the world they see and describe...by reducing the multiplicity of being into a schematically ordered, often mechanical representation" (Steele, 1989, p. 230). However, Heideggerian-like psychologists have found that the method of phenomenological investigation deals significantly and rigorously with the concerns of Steele and others about the shortcomings of empirical science when dealing with the inner mind, psyche and spirit of humans. Since Kurtines and Steele put forth their ideas of psychology and phenomenology, two decades have passed in which psychological phenomenology has become a standard form of qualitative research that is

quickly being picked up by other disciplines. Phenomenology can get at the essence of subjective experience where empirical psychology cannot.

Churchill (2006, pp. 81-82) wrote that “making conscious experience accessible to investigation is the hallmark of the phenomenological method [in psychology].

Clinical psychologists find that by asking the question “what are the ‘horizons’ of perception and cognition that make possible the forming of clinical impressions” that the answer can be addressed in the best way using the phenomenological method. This view corresponds with the philosophy of the hermeneutic circle—analyzing through interpretation not only the parts but also the whole of an individual as he or she exists within self, relationship, culture, language, time and place.

Relating additional support for the phenomenological method as it is applied to the field of psychological research could make another lengthy dissertation possible. However, let us take both the above-noted foundational understanding of philosophical phenomenology a step further. Phenomenological psychologists have applied these principles as a way of finding meaning in the experiences of others. Two primary methods of psychological phenomenology are those used by Amedeo Giorgi and Howard Pollio.

Giorgi Method of Phenomenology

The Giorgi method of psychological phenomenology has been developed and taught at the University of Duquesne; this branch of phenomenology is called the “Duquesne School.” The other method of phenomenology has been taught and developed at the University of Tennessee by Pollio; this branch of phenomenology is called the

“Tennessee Group” or the “Tennessee Model” and will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

Amedeo Giorgi (Giorgi, 2009), psychologist, wrote that modification of the philosophical method has been necessary in order to apply it in the field of psychological research. The first modification is that he wants to “operate at a scientific level of analysis and not at a philosophical one”, and the second is that he wants “the analysis to be scientifically sensitive, and again, not philosophically so.” In the Giorgi method, one obtains “concrete descriptions from others who have lived through situations in which the phenomenon that the researcher is interested in have taken place” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 96). He calls these descriptions “raw data”; the phenomenologist then analyzes this “within the phenomenological reduction with a psychological attitude and with special sensitivity to the phenomenon being researched” (Giorgi, 2009, p.96). For Giorgi, “the analyses, meaning discriminations, and intuitions into eidetic data [with vivid visual imagery] take place in the consciousness of the analyzer” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 97). Giorgi [at least in the understanding of this author] wrote that there are different levels and kinds of reduction but that he uses the Husserl-type of scientific reduction in which “is not as radical as the ‘transcendental reduction’” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 96). With training, an analyzer, by him- or herself, can reduce each text in a “case study” way. This “case study” method of psychological phenomenology, along with the Husserlian approach, is one of the main differences between the Giorgi and the Pollio methods.

Pollio Method of Phenomenology

Howard Pollio, cognitive and humanistic psychologist at The University of Tennessee, has developed an applied method of psychological phenomenology that differs in several ways from the Giorgi method. The Pollio method (Pollio, et al., 1997; Pollio & Ursiak, 2006; Thomas & Pollio, 2002) begins with the bracketing interview. [For the schematic of the Pollio Method of Phenomenology, see Figure 2, p. 226 in Appendix.] In this case, the researcher/interviewer is interviewed on his own topic by another trained phenomenologist. The purpose of this interview is to “bracket” (as introduced by Husserl) the intent, possible biases, projections, assumptions or presuppositions that the interviewer might bring to the research that could influence or drive the interviewees or the analyses during the study. Then the researcher collects data by interviewing his participants.

The interview is open-ended since the interviewer usually instructs the participant to “Describe in as much detail as possible your experience of _____ (topic of choice),” for example. Then the interviewer records the interview while listening without interruption unless clarification is needed. The interviewer not only listens, but also notes emotional and bodily behavior during the interview in order to get the whole experience of the participant. The participant talks until he or she is completely finished—taking as much time as the participant wants. Interviews typically could last only 45 minutes or could go for two or three hours. At the end of the interview, the interviewer summarizes the main points, carefully using the words of the participant, and then asks the participant if he or she is satisfied or if he wants to change or add anything.

After the interview, the transcript is typed and brought, confidentially, to the weekly phenomenological research group for the first phase of analysis in which they read the interview word-for-word, stopping regularly to discuss in depth the content of the protocol in the hermeneutic tradition. The analyses are read for meaning within and across the interviews. The members of this group come from many academic disciplines, levels of education (undergraduate and graduate students and faculty), international cultures, and, sometimes, languages. Members are of both genders and of varying ages (Thomas and Pollio, 2002). Respectfully, these group members examine the protocol and find themes that present themselves within the interview.

Once the researcher has completed the number of interviews necessary to get a full range of experiences (he knows this when he starts hearing the same thematic structures appearing again and again), he does the second phase of analysis in which he compares and analyzes within and across the interviews to find the universal, overarching thematic structure. (The thematic structure has also been determined for the researcher's bracketing interview.) Finding the themes within a protocol is not about performing a frequency count on particular words used, but is used to find the "patterns of description that repetitively recur as important aspects of a participant's description of his/her experience" (Thomas and Pollio, 2002, p. 37). Metaphors are descriptive words that participants often use, and these metaphors are retained, along with specific adjectives, by the interviewer to support the final thematic structures. The themes for the global thematic structure must appear in at least 50 percent of the interviews (Thomas and Pollio, 2002). Once the thematic structure is determined, the interviewer once again

returns to the interviewees for confirmation of the final thematic structure of the phenomenal experience.

The Pollio phenomenological method also may be used on written texts such as essays and narratives that previously have been solicited about a general topic and collected (Pollio & Ursiak, 2006). Reading the texts over and over, the researcher(s) make a list of categories of specific situations that appear and then find the thematic structures within and across each experiential situation. Interrelationships are notable across the thematic structures that occur across categories. [This author may want to cite this particular study in more detail later.] There is a difference in this method of phenomenological analysis and that used by philosophers; the researcher is looking for psychological interpretations and not philosophical ones.

Comparing and Contrasting Giorgi and Pollio Methods

Pollio and Giorgi both agree that the phenomenological method originated by Husserl is relevant in the field of psychology. However, Pollio also considers the whole person's experience in a slightly different way that leans toward the more specific methods of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Pollio appreciates going to "the thing itself"—to the actual words of the participants as expression of being-ness that precedes cognition and reflection. Giorgi is not as strict in this way.

Giorgi's method is a case-study method in which one interviewer is also the one analyzer of the transcripts. In the Pollio method, the Group participates in analysis because what is figural within an interview may stand out in different ways across the group and may occasionally be missed by the researcher. Sometimes the interviewer as

analyst also may miss something during the determination of the global thematic structure that the group may notice; Group feedback and suggestions are always appreciated and instrumental in making meaning of the experiences of the participants.

Pollio has said that he “modeled his method after that of a Jewish Yeshiva” [either an Orthodox school for either children obtaining both a religious and secular education or an Orthodox school for older students studying for the rabbinate ("Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary," 2001)] in which the rabbi facilitates a group of students who read sacred texts hermeneutically and interpret all the various types of meaning perceived from the texts. However, Pollio said that he is “not the rabbi” in the phenomenological analytical group; each member is not led to think like the facilitator—unlike what happens in a rabbi-led yeshiva group (Pollio, 2011).

When this author asked Pollio about what he saw as the main difference between his method of phenomenology and that of Giorgi, Pollio said that Giorgi’s method was “much more formal” and that Giorgi has a more “philosophical origin that is more abstract” (Pollio, 2011). Pollio thinks that Giorgi’s method “ends up being a 3rd person analysis: person/participant, interviewer as original researcher, and a case study.” Pollio added that his method is a “more human one.” Giorgi is Catholic, according to Pollio, and has “a more formal way—his [Giorgi’s] ability to understand is more spiritual” (Pollio, 2011). Pollio comes from a “Jewish tradition of scholarship which is a vague model [as compared with Catholic scholarship], is a group model, and his [Pollio’s] method is a group response” (Pollio, 2011). When Pollio said that he was “not the rabbi,” he added that he “is not the ultimate authority, the text is!” (Pollio, 2011).

This author also found no mention of Giorgi's using a bracketing interview in his method in his book *The Descriptive Phenomenological Method in Psychology: A Modified Husserlian Approach* (Giorgi, 2009). In the Pollio method, the research does not begin until the researcher has, through his bracketing interview and subsequent analysis by the Tennessee Group, become aware of his own perceptions, assumptions and pre-conceptions of his specific topic. However, both methods of phenomenology seek to understand the universal thematic structure, and, hence, the essence of experience.

Body, Time, Others and World in Psychological Phenomenology

Pollio (1997) and many of his doctoral psychology students researched the phenomenological meanings of the four grounds of everyday life for contemporary humans as they were presented philosophically by Merleau-Ponty (1962): Body, Time, and World and Others. Pollio found that the thematic structure of the lived Body is about the experiences of: Engagement (body as vitality or as activity), Corporeality (body as instrument or as object), and Interpersonal Meaning (body as appearance or as expression of self) (Pollio, et al, 1997, p. 76). The themes of Time in lived experience across a lifetime, according to Pollio (1997, p. 106), are: Time as change or continuity, Time as now or never, and Time as limits or choices. The experience of Other people, as researched by Polio, et al, (1997, p. 145) has as the thematic structure: Relationship (proximity, connection or synchrony with others), Comparison (similarity or differences with others), and Benefit (utility, satisfaction or annoyance with others).

Pollio did not include his research of World in this text (Pollio, et al, 1997, p. 362-363), however, he did discuss the importance of the natural world as it, too, significantly

contextualizes the lived experience of humans. Pollio notes that the world that physical science presents to us is only being objectified; in doing this, World is removed from context and, in so doing, is removed from human experience—an actual impossibility since scientists, themselves, are experiencing the world that they are seeking to define and objectify. The perceptions of scientists influence their judgment and understanding of the world.

Thomas and Pollio (2002, pp. 205-213) related the abstract scientific meaning of World with the disciplines of scientific study such as: geology (earth), geometry (space), geography (locations), physics (the matter of the universe including), and biology (plants and animals), etc. In contrast, the meanings of the lived world relate to the orientation of the human body with space or place, for example, with the center location of the world occurring physically within each human body. Thomas and Pollio cited two phenomenological studies about experiences of the lived world. The first was by Peacher (1996 cited in Thomas, et al, 2002), who found the thematic structure of the meaning of “special places” to be: Identity, Connection, Security, Possibilities, and Beauty and Awe. The second study by Thweatt (2000 cited in Thomas, et al, 2002) was about the experience of “being lost.” Thweatt found that the participants reported three kinds of situations in which they were lost: when spatially disoriented, when interpersonally dislocated, and when spiritually lost (Thomas, et al, 2002).

In the current study, the thematic structures of Body, Time, World and Others that have been understood by Pollio and Thomas relating to the lived experiences of non-

mystics probably will not be the same as the thematic structures of Body, Time, World and Others as experienced by the mystic participants.

***Psychological Method of Phenomenology as Applied
to Everyday Experiences of Mystics in the Jewish Tradition of Kabbalah***

This author has found the Pollio method of phenomenology to be the best way to do qualitative research on the everyday experience of mystics in the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah for several reasons. First, the experience she seeks to understand is subjective and has value that empirical psychology could neither address, measure nor observe. Second, she wants to go to the experience itself—the essence. Third, the mystic is “thrown,” unbidden at first, into his or her life of mystical experiences usually from early childhood—reminiscent of the difficulties that developmental psychologists have. Third, using other qualitative measures might not get at the deeper and richer meanings that an undirected, open-ended narrative such as that within applied, psychological phenomenology allows.

This researcher did a bracketing interview with an experienced Pollio-trained phenomenologist that took approximately three hours to complete. Fifth, of particular interest to this author is the fact that Pollio, her chief advisor on this project, is Jewish and that the “yeshiva model” of Group participation could help her understand this difficult topic because it is easy to get caught up in the participants’ mystical experiences and possibly overlook the everyday experiences that might or not include the mystical events. Sixth, the assistance of the Tennessee Group would increase the significance and variability of understanding the meaning and themes in the interviews and would give a

non-mystical perspective that the researcher lacks. So questions and discussion within the Group would be meritorious. This author has had the increased benefit of having studied Giorgi's phenomenological method with Chris Aanstoos, a clinical psychologist who was one of Giorgi's Duquesne School protégés, while she was working on her Master's Degree with him at the State University of West Georgia before moving to study phenomenology with Howard Pollio at the University of Tennessee.

And last, this author particularly likes the idea of having a Jewish professor as consultant on this project on mysticism in the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah because Pollio is embedded in the culture, language, history and being-ness like many of the participants. This added a dimension to the study that could not be obtained in the Giorgi method with Giorgi's protégés—fulfilling the promise of the hermeneutic circle which includes not only the participants in their parts and wholeness but also Pollio, the Pollio method, the Tennessee Group and all their parts and wholeness. This study aims to include the richness of the lived experiences of everyone involved with this project.

CHAPTER 6

Results of the Phenomenological Analyses

The current research was approved by The University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board and met all ethical standards of the American Psychological Association. The purpose of this study was to seek to understand through phenomenological interviews the meaning of everyday experiences in the lives of contemporary mystics who are currently found within the Jewish Kabbalistic traditions. In this chapter, the results of the analysis of the bracketing interview are reported that include both Ground and Themes for the researcher's everyday experiences. Then the demographic information of the participants will be presented. Following the demographics is located the Global Thematic Structure including the Ground and the Themes of their everyday lives. Following that presentation will be a report of the many thematic subcategories that were reported by the participants.

Researcher's Bracketing Interview

The first interview analyzed by the Phenomenological Lab Group was the Bracketing Interview in which this researcher was interviewed with her own research question as noted above. The interviewer was a Pollio-trained phenomenologist. This interview took about three hours and was recorded and transcribed for presentation to the Phenomenological Research Group at the University of Tennessee Department of Psychology. The Thematic Structure for the Bracketing Interview was as follows:

Bracketing Ground

The Ground for the researcher was clearly about “Awareness” because the researcher was consciously aware of herself, others, her environment, and energies during states when she was awake, dreaming, or meditating. She defined energies in various ways such as seeing “the subtleties of light” in an inner vision not available to the regular vision of the eyes or such as feeling “coolness and tingling on her hands” when she spontaneously entered an altered state during the interview while remembering a previous mystical experience.

Some of her statements about awareness are:

I’m aware of seeing energies.

My body prepares to...it becomes more aware of what it’s receiving, which is more real.

The more you live the life trying to integrate being a mystic in the everyday world, the more aware you are.

One way of understanding this type of awareness is comparing it with “hyper-vigilance,” a psychological term sometimes used by clinicians that refers to an intense state of alertness that abused persons learn to develop in order to be heedful of, and to protect themselves from, any potential danger or threats in their physical and relational environments. Another view of this kind of awareness is described by Dabrowski, Piechowski and Nixon as being about “overexcitabilities (OEs). For the mystics, awareness can be as intense as this, but there is no danger or threat involved. Instead, the hyper-alertness is about being intensely open to very subtle experiences throughout their everyday lives that non-mystics may not have experienced, noticed or thought important.

Bracketing Themes

A choice was also made not to delineate the types of mystical experiences that the researcher or her participants experienced that were like the ones discussed in Chapter 2, the philosophical debate, about introvertive or extrovertive experiences. Neither did she sort out the different experiences that were deep and very sacred from those that were almost like the psychic, paranormal type experiences such as the one in which she unintentionally baked a cake that usually would take 45 minutes to an hour in only 10 minutes. So the thematic structure became similar in some respects to the formats that Merleau-Ponty and Pollio had taught in which Body, Time, World and Others were understood as the four existential grounds of human experience. However, for the researcher, these four grounds of existence were no longer in the ground of her experiences but became figural. For example, Body became a vehicle for experiencing spontaneous and induced mystical experiences. Body was not only a sensory “mechanism” that oriented the person in the world but also was an intentional launching place or a receptacle for supra-sensory experiences.

The six major themes of the researcher’s experiences were:

Divine/God/Sacred

Body/Practices/Energies

Levels/Shifts/ Realities

Lifetime Development

Choosing/Struggling

Divine/God/Sacred. For the researcher, all of her experiences were centered in the Divine or God. There was difficulty in deciding between naming the Divine as Ground or naming the Divine as Theme. This researcher chose to leave the Divine as a theme since there was a conscious, strong calling from and a strong intent toward God in her life. Obviously, at the time of this research, the author had not progressed into a permanent state of non-duality but was still vacillating between duality and non-duality types of experiences. In other words, God ideally permeates and contains the whole of the mystic's life—in which cast God/Divine would be both Ground and Theme. In the case of this researcher, although she was aware that the Divine flowed through her and all of creation, she still reflected sometimes on God as object—hence the Divine as figural. Also, the researcher had a strong conscious intent to connect with God over most of her lifetime. Here are some quotations from the researcher's interview to support those themes:

Divine/Sacred/God

And that's the willingness to live in the sacred. The higher up you go in consciousness, the more sacred you live.

Because the stream of the world is the emanation and creation of God into the material [and into me].

Body/Practices/Energies. For the researcher, Body held the practices, senses, supra-senses, and the subtleties of energies that could manifest in multiple ways or in specific kinds of awareness by the self or within the self.

Body/Practices/Energies

I intensify my focus on the energies; energies are just subtleties of light.

The more I try to live as a full-blown mystic in the mystic ways of sacredness, when I step out of that, the greater all the consequences to my body.

Levels/Shifts/Realities. The World for the researcher was represented as the everyday world of non-mystics and as the world that she experienced within varying realities and levels of energies.

Levels/ Realities

I had an understanding of something very deep, very important, and so real that it was beyond the real of every day.

I became comfortable in a different reality, and then that reality became natural.

There are just different levels of being—sort of events that are out of the norm—or out of the real—of other people's reality and [of] my mostly everyday reality.

Lifetime Development/Time. Time, in the bracketing interview was experienced differently during mystical experiences and in everyday life. There were shifts and distortions in her perception of time that non-mystics rarely report. One instance that a non-mystic might experience time differently is during a serious auto accident or during a cave-in while working in underground mines (Pollio, 1982).

Developing/Transformation/Time

And as the mystical stuff evolves and develops, that [discerning] gets easier.

I had been through that transformation in the summer and realized that something I could not conceive of before...that I could make something happen. I pictured in my mind, instead of water in the swimming pool, that I pictured that it was just a different form of air, that the molecules that I breathed in the air were the same as the molecules I breathed in the water.... So I swam eight laps underwater breathing water as air....

There have been distortions of time; I'd baked a cake in 10 minutes...L witnessed it.

Yeah. That's the thing and discerning. Recognizing when the answers come. That those are the answers. How to sort all that out. And as mystical stuff develops, that gets easier. It becomes more clear.

Choosing/Struggling. The researcher pointed out that her life had been a Struggle and very hard at times when she was younger and learning how to survive in the world. Her life was also a life of Choosing among the many paths that lay out before her. Her struggles and choices were prioritized differently than the ways most other people around her were doing. For the author, this feeling like a misfit in the world was offset by the awareness and the choice of the Divine in her life. This awareness, although scary, was important no matter the costs and repercussions with her Body, her Time, her World or Others in her life.

Choosing/Struggling/Flowing

I chose to come here to be with this family...that it was not my job to interfere but to let life flow in the stream that it was flowing in...in the direction that it was already going.

I was just tired of the struggle and tired of the outcome and tired of myself and tired of not having the knowledge to make good decisions and not wanting to go back where I came from and not wanting to go forward.

The researcher spoke of childhood abuse, but she was not sure if that would be relevant to the study. So that was bracketed as something that needed to be restrained during interviews and analyses. Another issue was about the types of mystical experiences that the researcher reported, so again, it was noted that varieties of mystical experiences for the future participants was not the main concern but that they were incidental to how the mystics would integrate or not their everyday lives with their mystical experiences. A third area of interest was that the interviewer would be interviewing both Jewish and non-Jewish mystics. She was concerned that, as a convert to Judaism that she wanted to pay close attention to Jewish culture and religious languaging and traditions during the interviews with the Jewish participants. She resolved this by first interviewing the non-Jewish mystics and then, after more experience and more time to become more educated about Jewish mysticism, history, religious lineages and traditions, she would be better able to listen and to understand the Jewish participants.

Participants

Selection

Eight adult participants were found as originally planned through various networks such as Kabbalistic study groups, religious organizations (with referral from members), internet resources, written reference materials such as newsletters, books or newspapers (either written by Kabbalists or referencing them in texts), and conferences or workshops where Kabbalists might have been teaching or attending. Once the potential participants were found, this researcher contacted them by telephone, e-mail or in person.

The number of participants was expected to be six to twelve in number, so this goal was met.

At the first contact, the research project was explained and the participants selected when they were asked if they defined themselves as mystics in the Jewish traditions of Kabbalah. Those who did were asked to volunteer for this study. Ten volunteered, and appointments were made for the interviews. One participant, during the interview, actually said that she did not consider herself a mystic after all, and the recorded tapes of another participant were damaged and could not be used. So, the final number of interviews was eight.

This author traveled to several states in the United States to meet the participants and perform the interviews. The states were (in random order): New York, Colorado, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Georgia and South Carolina. A note of interest is that almost every participant took some time interviewing the researcher before the interviews began. Based upon the nature of the questions and discussions prior to the interviews, the researcher thought that the participants wanted not only to connect with the interviewer but also to see if she could follow the participants and understand what they might be saying. Once satisfied, the interviews were allowed to continue.

Each of the participants was briefed and signed an Informed Consent Form before beginning; then the interviews were tape-recorded. The participants were debriefed after each interview during which time they were allowed to address any additional questions or concerns. A few questions about the demographics of the participants also were asked

at this time and recorded. The interviews ranged in time from about an hour to three and a half hours each.

The following verbal instruction was given to each participant: “Please define in as much detail as possible your everyday experiences as a mystic in the Kabbalistic tradition.” The transcribed interviews, including the researcher’s bracketing interview and the participants’ interviews, were analyzed confidentially as planned at both phenomenology research groups at The University of Tennessee: 1) The Phenomenology Laboratory at the Center for Phenomenological Research in the Psychology Department, and 2) The Phenomenology Research Laboratory at the College of Nursing. Both of these Research Groups were trained in the Pollio method of phenomenological analysis.

Participant Demographics

There were two females and six males in this study. They ranged in ages from 37 years to over 60 years. There were four Jewish participants and four non-Jewish participants. Of the Jewish participants, two were from an Ashkenazi Orthodox background, one was from a Sephardic background, and one was from the Jewish Renewal background. The non-Jews were from Christian heritages. Three of the participants were married, and five were single (single, divorced or widowed).

Their careers were: graphic artist, author, businessperson, retired psychologist, school principal, attorney, counselor, and professor. Two of these participants were also rabbis and one was a minister. Regarding language, English was the mother tongue of six of the participants, and Russian and Hebrew were the first languages of the other two participants. The interviews took place either in the homes or private offices of the

participants. The participants often had lived in other states or other countries before residing in the states where the interviews took place.

Table1. Participant Demographics

P. #	Name (Alias)	Gender	Age	Marrital Status	Profession	Religious Background	Mother Tongue
1	Ari	Male	46	Single	Author Lecturer	Christian	English
2	Baruch	Male	52	Married	Graphic Designer	Christian	Russian
3	Chavvah	Female	37	Single	Business Owner	Catholic	English
4	David	Male	52	Married	Attorney Mediator	Ashkenazi Orthodox Jewish	English
5	Ellie	Female	60's	Single	Minister Teacher Healer	Christian	English
6	Frank	Male	55-60-ish	Single	Retired Psychologist	Ashkenazi Orthodox Jewish	English
7	Gershom	Male	50	Married	School Principal Rabbi	Sephardic Orthodox Jewish	Hebrew/Arabic
8	Hayim	Male	40's	Single	Professor Rabbi	Ashkenazi Renewal Jewish	English

Participants' Interviews

The interviews of the participants were very informative and rich in experiences. The researcher ended up with participants from various socio-economic, cultural, lingual, familial, geographical, educational, spiritual or religious backgrounds and covered a wide range in age—however the youngest mystic interviewee was 37 years old—almost and accidently in keeping with the requirement that mystics in the Jewish traditions should be

at least 40 years old. The degree and uniqueness of mystical development varied across participants, but each was mature spiritually in his or her own right.

The participants, on the whole, had a global thematic structure similar to that found in the Bracketing Interview. The primary themes appear below; there was some variation of themes, so the themes that prevailed in the majority of interviews were used. Many sub-themes appeared in the interviews and will be discussed in the last part of this chapter.

Short Vignettes about Each Participant

Ari. This first participant was a very intellectual, thoughtful and articulate male. He came from a Christian background but identified himself as a mystic in the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah. He had lived in different parts of the United States and was living, at the time of the interview, alone in a solitary house in the rural mountains of Massachusetts where he was writing a book and doing regular and various practices related to his spiritual advancement. He had learned many kinds of spiritual traditions which he discussed during the interview, and he came across as a very committed and determined seeker.

When this author met the participant for the interview, he wanted to take a few minutes to talk first. During the preliminary discussion, Ari picked up a book and said that he has recently purchased it; the interviewer also said that she has recently purchased this book. During the interview that followed, this incident came up. He said that:

“There are kinds of mysterious coincidences or synchronicities...like the fact that you and I picked up the same book on Freud and Jewish Mysticism [by David Bakan]. In one sense, this maybe not such a

coincidence in that we happen to have similar interests in these things. But on the other hand, it's an out-of-print book that's fairly obscure, and I haven't seen it in a lot of bookshops, so, the fact that you and I both picked it up in a fairly short period of time without talking to each other about it seems significant. There's some kind of connection involved.... There's something in that.... And I think that the first few times something like this happens, in one light, there's a tendency to turn it into a sort of very mystical and kind of woo woo. And later on as experiences like this become more common, then it's sort of like, well, it's interesting, and you sort of note it and go on.

Baruch. This participant was a Russian-American who had lived in this country for almost 20 years and also had a Russian-American wife who, too, was a Kabbalist. These two were not Jewish and seemed dedicated to each other and to Kabbalah. We met in their residence in an apartment building in the New York area that overlooked the site of the World Trade Centers. Our interview took place less than two years after the Twin Towers had been hit and destroyed by terrorists.

During the interview Baruch revealed the importance of his seeking and learning when he told the following story of his life in Russia. He was talking about “books as friends that kept you from wasting a lot of time—that gave you a push in the right direction.” When asked, he gave this specific example that also demonstrated his determination to learn Jewish mysticism at any cost:

“Sometimes this friend [book] is trying to tell you something, but you are not quite ready to listen. That was the case when I was leaving Russia, and it was one of the roughest times of my life. And strangely enough, I was, uh, from the hands of the person I was leaving. That's my teacher. Without his realization, came a book. He gave it to me put it into my hands without realizing what he is doing. This was a special teacher [not a school teacher] because I am doing this kind of strange things since I am 18 years old. And my wife here is actually doing it from she is 6 years old....A teacher in let's say, occult teacher, put in my hands the book. And I can show it to you, this book of Halevi, of Warren's of Kabbalah. And it

was so strange, because this book was a really a rare thing in Russia. Only a few samples. [It was] in English in Russia, and it was definitely illegal at same time. This thing couldn't be bought on internet or in any store. It was smuggled forth came into the hands the cousin who taught me.

After the interview, the participant answered some demographic questions.

Among these it was noted that English was his second language and he replied:

“There are some things you cannot make clear in English, but a couple of things I was trying to make clear enough. I was trying hard to make sure that the other person understood me correctly, I am just making extra effort.”

When asked if there were any major cultural differences concerning this topic that he would like to talk about, Baruch said:

“Yes, there is. Actually it...one of the things, uh, which is very traumatic on one hand but, on the other hand, is very enlightening that we were actually kicked out from our culture. Yes, it took us 25 years in which it took us 20 more years about even to get some sense what with the person we are talking about this. For instance, back in Russia, we grew up so you can tell about Russians. When the person talks with him in language, you learn a lot from language. And that is the thing. When a person smiles in Russian mean absolutely different things. So it takes a lifetime just to realize that you feel something about the person without him talking telling you this. You know. Some body language.... Because in education how cultural differences uh, how important cultural difference is. As Kabbalists. What is behind it...the cultural appearance. ... It's so wonderful to learn the difference between the cultures.... We don't belong to any country here on earth. Our country or anywhere else. Because this is where we feel at home [in Kabbalist tradition], because we don't feel at home...neither in Russia nor in America or anywhere else...The past is done. Just smashed. And to do this...This fright has no comparison with physical danger....But here [in USA] you don't know how to do something. And that relates to this Kabbalistic experience, because you, by your experience, you know what worked for you. Because for some time you didn't have it. And you have to go inward.”

Chavvah. This participant was the 37 year-old female, self-employed business woman—youngest among the participants. She lived in a second-floor apartment in a house where her parents lived downstairs in the New York City area. She was not Jewish but came from a Catholic background. In her living room she showed me a large painting that she had created as a mystical, meditative practice. It was an ethereal Tree of Life in which each of the Sefirah hung like a lighted glass globe in the air. She explained that she got lost in the painting of it just as one would get lost in a good book. While being interviewed, this participant expressed in depth and detail her intuitive nature and knowledge and awareness of herself. She said:

“There was an exercise that I did last year and that was, um...I made a commitment to staying silent for one month. And so I only spoke only when it was absolutely necessary to do so in the course of business. It was a private exercise; it wasn't announced to anyone. So it was something that I really had to do internally. Um, and it was to maintain silence not only in communications with the outside world, but also in the silence of my own thoughts. And the only thoughts that I allowed myself to kind of, um, to continue to come back to, were received by me fully. And it was very interesting because rather than simply experiencing God above me coming through me in me; this was an experience of God in the world. And where normally my experience has been this energy coming through and flows forth, this was kind of allowing myself to be more of a magnet to receive the world as fully as possible. [She found] people would come up to me and talk to me. One day a stranger came up to me in the rougher neighborhood where I park my car. And rather than responding verbally, I really opened my thought to receiving them within me. And the words somehow didn't seem to be important...People very often can ask questions. Um and usually when they have the question they already have the answer. ... But in doing this exercise, I didn't say anything. And, within a moment of two, their answer was coming out...from the other person. So it was just the kind of way of experiencing the perfection in existence.”

David. This male participant was Jewish and originally from the northern United States but lived in a large southern city when we met at his home for the interview. He was an attorney who was married with two adolescent sons. He disclosed that he had studied yoga and Hinduism, along with other unusual traditions, and had lived in a Hindu ashram in this country when he had been younger. It was through Hindu mysticism that he returned to his Jewish roots and had then studied Kabbalah. He and his family were vegetarians. His wife, also Jewish but not a Kabbalist, supported wholeheartedly his learning and practices. His interview lasted several hours and included many of his wonderful mystical experiences in both Hindu and Jewish traditions that happened during his everyday. David said that he “could at any time access the realm...within activity, within...it doesn’t matter. He told this story of an experience he had with “one of his main spiritual teachers” who was an Eastern swami in the USA:

“There is just a quality...when you sort of enter the timeless zone.... And I’ve had these cave experiences where, I’ve never been over to see.... I’ve never been to India; I’ve never been in caves or anything like that. But there would be times when he would say: Come follow me. And he was gonna take me somewhere. And I’d just be walking behind him at a very fast, brisk pace. And I’d be walking behind him [such as the time when we were in a convenience store in an airport] just trying to keep up with him, and all of a sudden zoom! Again, there’s like this vortex. And I was no longer walking with him down the hall; I was walking with him in a cave. And he was no longer wearing a Nehru suit...he’s wearing a robe! And the robe is swishing! And I’m just following him through this cave; and all of a sudden, you know, it stops and we’re back in the convenience store again. I mean, and that was on the physical realm. Huuuh huuuh.”

Ellie. This participant was not Jewish, but she, an American, had spent many years when she was younger learning Kabbalah and also the Christian mysticism taught

her in India of the oral traditions handed down from Jesus' disciple Thomas. At the time of the interview she would not disclose her age but seemed at least in her 60's. She was vibrant, intelligent, well-spoken and very down-to-earth. She disclosed:

"It used to be that I didn't teach Kabbalistic healing for a long time because when I taught it years ago people were seeing results and frightened them! Someone had a dog whose throat was growing out to here with a cancerous tumor. They were going to take it to the vet the next day. And I said, 'Why don't you use your healing crystal and work with the energy,' which all the crystal does is amplify it--. Because we've got training wheels on the bicycle. One day we don't need the training wheels. But until then we use, you know, those tools which help us. So, they're sitting there and the vet had already arranged to have the dog brought back and in 20 minutes this tumor went to nothing. Frightened that person and not because they doubted it's a tumor—"I know it can't happen, but it did happen. Then, what other part of my life is not real?" That's the threatening part. Not the fact the tumor went down. It's the fact that, "Oh, my God. If this happened and logic says it can't, then what other else made my relationship with this person can do the same thing?" It doesn't – it threatens the entirety of that person's existence."

Frank. This participant was a retired clinical psychologist and professor who was divorced and lived in a huge home alone where we met outside in his beautiful garden at a picnic table for the interview. He had been born Jewish but did not get bar mitzvah'd until well into his adult years when he learned Hebrew and delved into his Jewish mystical roots. In his earlier years he had done psychedelic drugs and had spent time in Buddhism. He described one of his powerful life experiences in this way:

"I started to hemorrhage in my brain without any discernible thought; my brain just started bleeding. And I survived against what one doctor said were million-to-one odds. I had several brain surgeries. It was beyond belief that I lived. I had what's called a spontaneous subdural hematoma. Six centimeters inside the cranium, a pool of blood compressing the midline. ... I've rebounded from very painful losses and injuries. I not only survived as biological beings, I thought that once they saw after the

second surgery that I might live, they expected to put me in long-term inpatient rehab, but instead I was home in 8 days, and I was driving within 5 weeks, and I was going back to work for a few hours a day. And, uh, basically, uh I'm impaired in some very subtle ways, it's just not visible to people by and large. I can see it and my wife can see it, but... well, that had to do with the decision to pull my father out of my crown chakra, pull that agreement out. And it was so enmeshed in my tissue, that walls of the cells had no integrity and the blood was leaking out, and I survived."

Not long after this interview, a spiritual advisor of this participant told me that Frank had got rid of all his property both personal and real and had moved by himself to Israel (made Aliya) in order to learn with Kabbalists there and to write his book(s).

Gershom. This Jewish male rabbi of roughly 40 years of age had grown up in a Sephardic Kabbalistic family in Morocco and had shared many wonderful "spiritual manifestations" with them. [The previous Jewish participants had been Ashkenazi.] When interviewed, we met at his office at a Jewish school in the southern USA where he was the principal. His background was as an educational psychologist, and he spoke several languages of which English was not his first. He was married with five children. Gershom spoke of many dreams that had guided him throughout his life, but he also shared one of his "wilder adventures":

"I was on Martha's Vineyard where my sister has a place up on the coast that's called Indian Hill where they used to do pow-wows. I found that much later on. So I was there, and then it was Saturday... And she said to me, 'Why don't you go down the road and then ask the farmer there that we need some milk.' So we decided to take a walk about fifteen, twenty minutes maybe. So we went down there, and on the way there is a cemetery on one side of the road, and there is a church that's closed. It's called a church for praying Indians, and this is when the early settlers converting the natives, Native Americans to Christianity. And, there was a tomb, it was bigger ...and you can't recognize who was what because nothing was written, except you know that's the tomb. And it's describing it – it's the cemetery, yadda yadda, but nothing. And I'm looking at that

and there's a larger one – I assume it's probably somebody important—and so I said to my children who were with me and I say, 'You know we should, really, Shabbat, you know, it's, so we should at least pray in a sense that, 'Thank you for letting us.' I don't know what's underneath that tomb, but maybe one of them is a... I don't know that, but at least we passed by here, and it would be just a sign of...of respect just to say, 'Thank you for letting us go back and forth here.' You know, it was their place, uh, for many years, uh...hundreds of years.

So we did that, and then I went down to the farm and I'd seen the farm, you know. It was like a few ducks, you know, and a little pond. And I said, 'Whoa, the ducks are not doing well, you know.' There's still no water and he's not [well] and he sadly needs water. The farmer says, 'Yeah, we've had a drought, a severe drought in the last year and it's just awful.'

So I, sort of very jokingly said, 'Well, my friend and I, we'll do something about it,' (laughing) because we used to have a joke, whenever I went to see my father, which was about forty-five minutes from away from home, if it would be raining on Shabbat, would be to carry this [thought] and say 'Pray until – pray that it doesn't rain until we get to my father's house.' And we would do that, and, inevitably, inevitably – it was like...I would say ten time out of ten, it was just so uncanny—We'd get to the house -- Boom! The rain would come. So we had the joke, both of us, and you know, It was like, 'Okay...it's a joke, right?'

'Don't rain until we got to the house!' Oop! And it happened, but, you know, can't believe this quite that much...connection. But we were able to do that, so we laughed, and that was the end of that, so I went back up, and off at the house and then we ate, and time to go to bed, went to bed. And then, very early, early morning, around four, I wake up in torrential rain outside and thunder and lightning. So I'm in my t-shirt, and my boxer shorts, and I'm thinking, 'man, I'm going to go out and have a smoke out there,' you know? And I opened the door and I see this – you know, there's only one tree in the middle of this whole mountain. And, it was so beautiful, you know, it was beautiful to watch. And I said, 'Oh, forget this smoke. Can we just go outside?' because I wanted to experience the rain. But while I was waking up, while I woke up, which is probably the most important part of the story, when I woke up I was saying this Indian word, and I kept repeating those three words constantly and I'm said, 'What did I dream? What was that about? I mean, what word was this?' I didn't understand Indian; well, I mean Native American, right?

And I said ‘What? What is the dream?’ and I was trying to recapture why did I need to say those words because sometimes I would speak Arabic in a dream, or French, or Spanish, right? That’s not uncommon for – but Native American? I don’t know the language.

Okay. So, I let that go, and I go outside, and my sister comes out. ‘What are you doing here?’ I said, ‘What do you mean? What are you doing?’ It’s like, so early in the morning! She said, ‘Well, when I was, you know, the storm light went on and I was thinking about father and I thought I passed away and it was just—’

So, I mean, we both did –I was standing up in the middle of this rain and then I sat down on the ground, in a crouch, you know, with my legs all tucked in and I say, ‘He’s here.’ And that’s all I remember. And all I could see then was myself by the door of the cabin, which was about a hundred feet away, probably, like, quick, like thunder. And me there looking inside...the field. I was no longer on the field. But I was myself transposed in there and I was looking at the field. In the field was a circle of fire, and this Native was dancing, he was calling for the rain. And I was trying to get inside of his body, to keep up with his steps dancing. So I was in three places at once.

And each time he had this little..., you know, this little artifact with a bowl on the top and it’s pointing to him and... And he would say these same three words that I was saying when I woke up. And he hit the sky and when he would do that, lightning and thunder would come out.

I don’t know how long it lasted, but I know when I got back to the room...it was around six o’clock, I mean – it lasted maybe three minutes... but it was a few hours before I came down. And I started to say ‘Woof. What was that all about?’ [Later] I called up friends at the University until I got to the tribe that used to live along that area of Martha’s Vineyard, and I got hold of the librarian, and I said, ‘I’m Jewish. I have no clue what words go with ..., but can you tell me what it means?’ It could really be something real; maybe I made it up.

She called me back and said—that she said it means, ‘May it pour rain constantly and abundantly.’

Hayim. This man had grown up as a non-observant Jew, but he later became a rabbi in the Renewal movement and also was a professor in the western USA when we met. He narrated this powerful story:

And it happened when I was in my late 20's, actually – which was when I start to get really serious about Judaism – that I had run out of things to read. And I used to go, ah, all the time to a certain bookstore. I was living in Indiana at that time and, um, I – I literally ran out of things to read. Didn't know what to do. And that for me, at that time in my life, was very disturbing because I spent so many hours a day reading, I – I-- that it was – I could say it was my practice.

And so I did other things as well. I used meditating in that time, I always played music. uh Actually uh it was key to the moment that I had tendonitis at the time, I couldn't play the fiddle, see I'm a fiddle player. Uh And so I suddenly couldn't play music which was a big loss to me because my identity was very caught up in that at that point. So I needed even more to read something. I had run out of things to read. I went into this uh my neighborhood bookstore and walked around through all the shelves and I just couldn't find a thing to read and everything that I knew that I'd want to read I'd already read.

And I just couldn't find anything there that I knew that I'd want to read that I hadn't already read and I kept uh, while I was walking through that bookstore, I came to the section where they had uh Isaac Bashevis Singer's books. This was before he had won the Nobel Prize; he wasn't such a big name.

And every time I'd walk by that shelf I would see this book that was called *The Magician of Lublin*. And I kept being fascinated by that title--and drawn to it --but every time I'd reach for it, something in me would resist; that tremendous, like, resistance.

And this uh inner voice would start uh saying, 'How could you even think of reading a Jewish book? They couldn't possibly -- why would you want a book? You know that that can't be any good...and it's probably just gonna be nostalgic and schmaltzy and sentimental and you weren't --you know-- couldn't possibly-- why would you even think....that that's gonna be so interesting.'

And um and this happened a number of times, I don't mean just like once or twice, I mean I just kept circumambulating this place. If I were to find any (I. laugh.) other book that I could have felt a desire to read I would have taken it, but I couldn't I just kept being drawn back to this one uh title. And finally as I was going through this kind of uh inner battle, part of me wanted to take the book and the other part was trying to convince me I shouldn't, it was a real struggle. And finally uh the part that wanted it said uh, Look, it's only a cheap paperback. You got nothing to read, what could you-- if you don't like it you don't even like to finish it.

So I said to myself, literally, I said 'ok I'll take it' and I took that book down and I started reading. I coul—and immediately, like, from the first page, I completely identified with the character in that book. I was going thru this tendonitis problem, the main character was a person of Jewish uh descent who was kind of alienated from the Jewish community and was -- he was a magician and a he was, like, an acrobat and he could do these, -- so he had sort of an art. I was a musician. And he went through this identity crisis that followed upon an accident that he had-- and he wasn't able to do a certain trick. Which I immediately related to the fact that I couldn't play the fiddle... so that was the only thing that I prided myself in and the fact -- being able to do at the time.

But beyond that, there were so many-- even though it was a different time and place, there were so many similarities existentially to my state at that time. I identified very strongly with that book and uh --which gave me a sense of uh being a product of that ancestry, and being a prod --having—being related to that eastern European Jewish history and culture. In the end of the book, this character, uh, goes back to the Jewish community and he. --he has himself walled into this little building. It's a little building, structure built, and he's inside it and they just built around him. And he stays in that building and he becomes a Baal Teshuva [higher than a tzaddik—righteous one] He becomes a --penitent, the --and he's, and all and all he does is uh studies *Torah* and he prays. And he becomes a saint. And people come to him for blessings.

And I was just so touched by that book uh, and uh, I'm almost-- I mean I'm almost ashamed to say related to it, But the fact is I totally related to it, ah, and that's just the truth. And I know it may seem presumptuous to say that--but I-- I totally—I-- when I read that book, I-- I knew who I was.

Participants' Ground

The participants have as their ground an “awareness” which differs from the four existential grounds of Body, Time, World and Others that non-mystics experience. None of these four grounds is the primary context for the lives of Jewish mystics. Being Aware is what permeated their lives. They talked about Being Aware in ways that included the Divine in everything including their inner lives, other people, the world, and all of creation. This was the context, or field, of their everyday experiences. That Being Aware took place in all their states of consciousness such as while sleeping, being wake, participating in relationships or during their altered states whether or not those states were spontaneous or induced. In other words, the participants were paying attention or focusing on what was going on in their inner and outer lives. Some participants talked about being “awake” in the Buddhist sense or being “fully conscious.” So, the Ground of the participants’ experiences was BEING AWARE. Here are a couple of the many statements made, in their own words, during the interviews that support this view of their Ground of existence:

Ari: You have to just relax into pure awareness...and this [meditation] is done with the eyes open....kind of being aware of this being...this sort of being of higher consciousness in which the rest...the body and the emotions and the world as we know it all sort of are kind of a part...but only a part. And be a kind of pure consciousness or be connected with it....you bring that awareness even into the dream state....There’s this whole kind of field of awareness...the Source out of which all of this springs.

David: And when I say magic [the mystical experiences] happens, the connection—the conscious awareness and connections

with the Ein Sof [Godhead], walking in the world with one foot attached to the Ein Sof while one foot is attached to the material—expect world, walking in the world in that fashion creates magic. And the magic is providing insight and understanding on a very deep level of the phenomenal world that you would not have if you didn't have the one foot in the unmanifest realm.

Chavvah: Truly being awake in the highest sense of the word is being open to that every-present now.

Participants' Themes

By carefully analyzing the transcripts of the participants, the researcher, along with both the phenomenological research lab groups at the University of Tennessee, determined the following global themes which at least half (and usually more) of the participants had expressed in their own words:

Table 2. Categories of Participant's Themes (see Appendix 2 for a more detailed list subcategories of Participant Themes).

Theme #	Participant's Themes	Additional Words Used by Participants that were Included in Each Thematic Category
1	Divine/Sacred	Source, God Absolute, Ein Sof, HaShem, Creator, Eternal, Infinite, Providence, Void, Protection, Oneness, Heaven, Brahma, Krishna, Deity
2	Receiving/Calling	Gift, Spontaneous, My Path, Sudden, Rare, Profound
3	Knowing/Realizing	Realities, Recognizing, Dimensions, Energies, Levels, Paradox
4	Practices/Body	Skills, Purification, Meditation, Lucid Dreaming, etc.
5	Developing/Stages	Processes, Maturing, Transformation, Changes, Time, Lessons, Direction, Growing
6	Struggling: Self/Others/World	Hard, Painful, Sad, Inner Work, Work in the World, Relationship with Others, Choices

These eight participants spoke freely and in great detail about their everyday lives in a way that included a great variety of their mystical experiences along with how these mystics lived with, integrated, and sometimes struggled with how those experiences not only fit into their lives but also were central to the beingness of each individual's existence. These mystics made meaning of everything and everyone within the paradigms of the spirituality in which they lived. Other analyses could be made from these interviews, but this author will stick to the basics of the purpose of this study: to understand the ground and thematic structure of their everyday lives as mystics in the Jewish traditions of Kabbalah. Below are listed the themes that occurred across participants with an example or two of the narratives that were relevant to each theme. Following that is a diagram of the Thematic Structure along with a brief discussion about the interactions and categories that stood out within each theme.

Divine/Sacred. As predicted, the participants lived within a sincere connection with, and understanding of, the Divine or Sacred in their everyday lives. Many had studied across multiple religious traditions but finally had come to view their lives primarily in the Jewish mystical tradition(s) of Kabbalah. They used many of the names of God throughout their interviews. The most frequently used were: Source, God Absolute, Ein Sof, HaShem, Creator, Eternal, Infinite, Providence, Void, Protection, Oneness, Heaven, Brahma, Krishna, and Deity. The participants also talked about historical realized beings (e.g., Moses, Buddha, and Christ) and other saints and sages, but these will not be addressed here. However, the point of this theme was not about the selection of the names used but was about the participants living within and

understanding their existence as dwelling in a sacredness that permeated their beingness, thoughts, words and deeds. Here are a few examples of these this theme as it was described in the interviews:

- Chavvah: I get out of my car. I stop and speak with God....And so I guess this kind of becomes a constant dialogue back and forth.
- Frank: The most important accelerant was almost a year ago. My oldest son committed suicide. I was reading the *Torah* ...Exodus...and the plague...A writer online wrote that the Hebrew word plague has a better connotation in English as the word whack....God whacks you the way a Zen master whacks you with a paddle, to, uh, stimulate your system to jump to another dimension. And that's what happened, because I knew within a matter of hours that I was closer to God, by far, than I'd ever been. I was in a kind of anguish that was more intense than anything I had ever experienced, but I was totally alive in my anguish....It's the kind of lesson most people might, us, assume they'd rather not learn.
- Ari: The notion of, you know, of ourselves as kind of separate entities, is, to some extent, fallacious....What it comes down to basically is...trying to be open to that Source all the time, as much as possible.

Receiving/Calling/Gift. There are three parts to this theme. First, is the Calling. Many of the participants felt called or drawn to this life because of mystical experiences that began in their childhoods. They were deeply affected by those experiences and remained open to those and other experiences happening again. Some even said that they had not realized these experiences were out of the ordinary but were a normal part of human childhood experiences. The second part of this theme is Receiving. This is about what happened when they were open to those mystical experiences; the mystical

experiences just “came” or “happened.” These were the spontaneous experiences that began to shape their lives such as calling them to a journey or “path” that has taken a central position in their life decisions. As the word Kabbalah itself means “receiving,” these mystics voluntarily received experiences and even felt called to receive the divine presence and divine experiences in their everydayness whether or not they consciously or purposefully asked for this at any certain times during the days or nights. The third portion of this theme is that many of the participants considered their Receivings and Callings as related to the Gift(s) that they were given (by the Divine). Among the participants, Ari, Baruch, Chavvah, David, and Frank described their everyday experiences as a Gift. Here are a few quotations that were typical about this theme:

- Chavvah: Realization is that’s not something you created; it’s something you received....All I can do is receive.
- Hayim: I’m receiving teachings from all kinds of places all the time.... I was called or chosen to be—to be Jewish and—and I felt that, um, it was shown to me that precisely what my role was was to study the Jewish mystical tradition.
- Baruch: You can’t tell anybody [about powerful mystical experiences in my life] because nobody would believe it.... Somebody [other than me] has to run the country, or, ah, be...do something like that. But why should he [I] put effort into the thing to which is not exactly real. So, in a way, you have a gift and a curse at the same time.
- David: My direct experience is that there’s a part of me that has always identified with and connected with Ein Sof.... It may be a gift of mine, but I find abstraction very tangible.

Knowing/Realizing. This theme is about Knowing. This is a deep, abiding and solid position that forms a permanent, concrete stance upon which the mystics assert their

lives. This is a place of no doubt, no skepticism, no misunderstanding, no negotiation, and no compromise. This type of knowing is not that which is associated with the accumulation of information or data. This knowing runs deep within the psyche, body, heart, and mind of the mystics. They hold onto this knowing as the bedrock of their existence. However, this is not the same as the Being Aware that is the Ground of their everyday experiences. Being Aware connotes an openness and willingness to whatever might come no matter if that is a vision, a “coincidence,” a powerful dream, an auditory voice from the beyond, or a profound insight that comes when reading the sacred texts.

Knowingness is connected with each other theme and the Ground. There is within the mystic an innate recognition of the sacred or of truth; this recognition allows the mystic to sort out and reject redundant or irrelevant daily material that comes into his or her awareness or attention each moment. When a mystic receives something important, the knowingness within gives him a little poke so that he or she will pay attention to what is happening. This knowingness fell within their connection with and being embraced within the Divine or Sacred lives they have chosen. In this Knowing they experienced dimensions and levels of existence not usually discussed in the everyday lives of ordinary people.

The mystics knew and experienced “energies” that they “felt” and “saw” what was beyond the normal sensations of non-mystics and clearly could fall into the supra-sensory categories of experience as discussed previously in this study. These mystics realized over time that their mystical experiences and the effects of those experiences were rare, profound and outside of the experience of most other people. Another

condition in which the mystics often found themselves was living with paradoxes. Below are a few examples of this theme of Knowing/Realizing as told to this author:

- Gershom: I would always get those premonition type of dreams....And I would always wake up, and I would always know. I mean I would intuitively know, um, 'missed it' or 'wow, this is wonderful!' When you wake up, you know...Or while you're in a dream, you know.
- Ari: Of knowing...something you cannot verify...other things—through your experience—you recognize as being truth.
- Hayim: I was just so touched by that book..., but the fact is I totally related to it,...but I...I totally...I...when I read that book, I...I knew who I was.
- Chayyah: As you are creating something, to be truly conscious, okay, as best as I know it, and I'm sure people who have experienced it far beyond where I have, within the act of whatever we're in the process of creating, and we're always creating something, there is that knowledge that you will never fully express all that there is to express. It's just it's beyond! And yet we have to be content with that and so that's true: You can never fully express all that there is to express. And then, the other aspect of that, which is also true, is that It has expressed what It needed to express in that moment, in that time, and in that place.... It's a paradox! It's knowing that it's a paradox. It's existing within [that].

Continuing with the Knowing/Realities theme. Another part of the world is experienced differently from that of non-mystics because the mystics see and know subtle energies, realms, dimensions and various realities not experienced by non-mystics. These mystics are able to receive experiences and accomplish practices at different levels of reality and understanding. They can see, feel, know, and intuit the worlds within World. Sometimes they can experience an overlay of other places and times with lifelike sensual

input while concurrently experiencing the present time and place that non-mystics are enjoying.

- Chavvah: Mystical work is expanding the realm of reality.
- Chavvah: The idea of “seeing” is having the ability to see things at different levels. You could say that’s due a lot to your own work.
- Ellie: What you think, you think in that world...or, on that level, eventually becomes reality....We do, in a sense create our existence.
- Gershom: Two different dimensions: the personal to the public, personal domain to a public domain. And your relationship to God is both.
- Hayim: There’s all kinds of experiences I can still have...I think there a sta—there’s—you could say there’s a stage beyond the mystical.
- Baruch: I personally call it a kind of undertone of, um, reality. This was what lies behind all kinds of appearances. It is a realization that there is an unshakeable reality behind it. It’s not expectation; it’s not an idea. It is a certainty. Absolutely, indestructible, certainty. Actually, that’s only the only certainty you have...at least I have...which cannot be disputed. Everything else can be disputed. But this, not. The realization that there is a reality behind it—the idea is not a belief, it is actual knowledge. And whether or not you experience this reality, or not, that’s a different story. It’s like, uh, for instance, uh, you are, ...you are in the...there is an ocean, and you are swimming in the ocean. But maybe not. This time you’re on the shore and even a few miles away, but you still hear...the waves. This is what it is. This is a routine experience. And you are trying to make yourself always closer to this ocean. Not being too far away, and trying to meditate it closer to this beautiful and, um, immense ocean of reality. This, uh, is what it’s all about.

Practices/Body. The body is very much in the awareness of mystics since the body can respond to various divine and energetic experiences not in the awareness of non-mystics. The body offers the contribution of being a grand tool when put to the uses that facilitate spiritual growth; the mystics learn different practices and skills that they implement at various times for different purposes. The body is the ultimate container for lived experience and for receiving or facilitating mystical experiences. Sometimes the body is affected in unexpected, spontaneous ways during the everyday of the mystics. Or sometimes the mystics can induce their extraordinary experiences by doing many kinds of practices, such as meditation, or by being aware while lucid dreaming. These participants reported so many various practices that they deserve special mention as a subcategory and can be found in the Appendix of this study. Here are a few examples of this theme found in the participant interviews:

- | | |
|--------|--|
| Frank: | I meditate all the time....You start by doing a meditation...it does what it does...those are quite valuable...it is...in which there is less of a boundary between the meditative and the ordinary state. |
| Ellie: | I was stopped at a traffic light and I had someone with me and the light turned green....it was like I was paralyzed...I can't move...I was sitting there trying to figure out why I was paralyzed, a truck went through the red light....That happened twice....That's where the idea of...protection...came from. |
| Hayim: | I literally ran out of things to read. Didn't know what to do...I spent so many hours a day reading, I—I—that it was—I could say it was my practice....Part of me kept being drawn back to this book...about a saint...[he] studies <i>Torah</i> and he prays. And—I'm almost ashamed to say related to it, but the fact is I totally related to it...And it |

might seem presumptuous to say that—but I—I totally—when I read that book, I—I knew who I was.

Gershom: [I use this method]...by the tomb of some great sage—trance-like...focus...you peer outside because you are into that union.

Developing/Stages. The development of the mystics over time is important to them. There is also an awareness by the participants that non-mystics can neither relate to these experiences very well nor participate in discussions with the mystics. However, the mystics persevere in their own spiritual growth—finding a type of maturity neither available to nor sought by non-mystics. A developmental process unique to mystics is a lifetime journey. The mystics keep track and awareness of the milestones, accomplishments, unexpected mystical experiences, successful effects of their practices, growth of their skills and the special things that they learn both with and without contemporary human teachers. Over their lifetimes, a maturity comes to those who wait, watch, persevere and remain open. Here are some examples of *Developing/Stages* as told by the mystics:

Ellie: The process by where you reach that...aspect of mysticism within yourself and that divine life, it's just a beginning....The more you use it, the more you strengthen it...it's like developing a friend.... It's... like education; it's continuing it's...because life is part of the development of the mystical....It's a long process of psychological analysis of yourself...discipline of the conscious mind.

Baruch: We are actually coming to realization that what most people do is childish. There is no bitterness about it. There is no self-righteousness....It's an attitude...it's just emerging. At some point, you're looking at most of the people and you see children.... They cannot do anything else....Occasionally you are running into a person whom

you just see as an adult...Maybe I can talk with him or her. Because actually there's nothing much to talk about with other people. Because you might understand them; but they don't.

Hayim: I've reached the level [in my development] where it's clear—it's obvious and clear to me that there are many sources of truth.... There were, in my development, ah, some other traditions, like Buddhism, Sufism [that] played a -- a big role.

Struggling: Self/Others/World. Many of the participants in this study revealed the difficulties that they sometimes encountered in their lives that non-mystics don't experience. There seemed to be three categories of this theme: Struggling within him- or herself, struggling in relationship with other people, and struggling with living in the exterior world. This struggling could be painful at times. In this category this author has also placed the Work that the participants did within themselves, in the world or in their relationships with others; this work sometimes could be a struggling but at other times could bring happiness or satisfaction. An additional aspect of this category was the awareness of the intense responsibility of making Choices in their everyday lives. That awareness incorporated the resulting consequences both immediate and long-term and both intra- and inter-personally. These consequences were not only on the usual levels such as those of non-mystics in their everyday lives but also on deeper, inner levels or realms in which the mystics live most of their time. Here are some instances of this theme that were found among the interviews:

Ellie: You become a mystic...much the same way as you become a physician. It's a lot of work. It takes a lot of trust. It takes a lot of errors. But they're not errors; they're only ways of showing you a better avenue that you could have taken.

...I've been years and years working or teaching and counseling [Kabbalah]...Now I just say 'Whatever is there I'll do. It doesn't matter. And, you know, I find the greatest joy in that.

Chayyah: [In a chosen practice of a month-long self-induced silence I experienced] discomfort because I was doing something that I'm not used to doing. And so you kind of, you know, kind of have to re-orient yourself. I, I have to. I have to. It's like if I really look at this [her own hand-made painting of] this Tree [of Life]. Okay? And I can see that it's beautiful, and I can let it speak to me. But if I really try to sit here and say: I did this. There's something almost painful about it. And it's...it's pain that's feeling like you're going to burst. It's a pain that's feeling like.... Experience is important to mystics....With the experience, sometimes I'd have to stop myself from experiencing what I was experiencing. It is too much. My heart, my head, body. It's like every part of me is very painful.... Okay, let's try it taking the pain that most people can relate to in orgasm. Okay? That is a moment of bliss when having orgasms. Now prolong the orgasm for ten minutes, okay? Because a few minutes of orgasm seems like your body is spent, right? Now expand it for half an hour or an hour. That lift becomes so exquisite that it is painful.... Physical pain that you just cannot escape from, okay? And rather than fighting that pain rather than seeing it as something alien to yourself, accept it as part of your being and what you're going through in any given moment that time or whatever it is. And that pain will break into joy. That pain will release your ecstatic feeling throughout your body.

Hayim: Finally, so I was going through this inner battle that was—part of me wanted to take the book and the other part was trying to convince me I shouldn't.

David: In yoga there's a posture. The posture is an inner friction of fire that occurs, and it's sort of a painful process of inner transformation.

Baruch: It's actually hard very hard to know that only 'adults' [who are other mystics as opposed to 'children' who are non-mystics will help you in any way.... [In another kind of

experience] you are able to actually, this burden which you carry on your shoulders, you put down on the ground...and you feel light. Because you carry your psyche. You carry enormous weights.

Chayyah: We're in the world but not of the world. You have to be able to hold both within your mind within your knowing, within your being and still function. That's a difficult task. You have to know that there are no limitations while simultaneously creating the illusion of limitations. Because if you didn't, there would be no structure whatsoever.

Continuing with the Struggling/Work/OthersTheme. Other people are in the lives of mystics in different ways than they are in the lives of non-mystics. Mystics can realize the importance of people coming in and out of their lives as purposeful experiences of learning or of teaching. Note here that sometimes mystics in the Jewish tradition began their development in another mystical tradition such as the Hindu one mentioned by David. This is due to the fact that mysticism has not been taught in the West as it has been in the East, so many Jewish people having mystical experiences and who had not been brought up in Kabbalistic families often sought teachers of mysticism in other spiritual religious domains.

Others/Work as told by the mystics:

Chavvah: And when anyone starts to question whether anything can be imperfect or anything can be wrong, then you start to see people and events and activities in a particular way. Um, you start to see that, that person you were able to help in one way, you're grateful that you were able to help them, and in another way, the realization comes: My God, what a gift this person has been...for me! Because they allowed me to experience this aspect of myself. I think that's mystical. ...And your adversary is often your greatest gift.

- Gershom: My process: read the mezuzah and just take it up...from a person and look inside the text and get these intuitive feelings about something and felt this strong pain; that she had cancer.
- Baruch: After a while people become transparent psychologically. Uh, not that gives you a lot of advantage over them, but, with training, you just see the reasons why they are doing why they are doing what they are doing. It's not passing judgment. It's a bit sad.
- David: One of my spiritual teachers was this Eastern swami...who is quite accomplished...and I'd be walking behind him just trying to keep up, and all of a sudden zoom? Again, there's like this vortex. And I was no longer walking with him down the hall; I was walking with him in a cave.

Thematic Structure Diagram. The figure below of the diagram of thematic structure indicates in a small way the dynamics of the experience of these participants regarding their everyday as mystics in the Kabbalistic traditions. The Ground of the experiences is Being Aware. That awareness is the field while, at the same time, being in the experiences expressed as themes. Without this Being Aware, the experiences would be neither remembered, integrated nor used as stepping-stones for growth and transformation.

Also relative to each of the themes and linked directly with Being Aware, Knowing is ever-present in both mystical and non-mystical experiences of the participants. The realizations, or as at least one participant exclaimed, the 'Aha' moments, feed the joy and the motivations for the mystics to continue on their paths or journeys to the next experience, to the next teacher, to the next level. Within both the Ground of Being Aware and each of the themes, is the ever-present Divine that holds

center place in the consciousness of the participants no matter what ‘state’ of consciousness the participant is in at the moment. All experience as facilitated, sensed both in regular perceived ways and in supra-sensory ways of pure essence (as some participants described it) take place in the body no matter if the body is asleep, awake, or in altered states. And the body plays an integral part in the practices that the mystics perfect and learn during their whole lifetimes in a progression of growth-inducing choices of learning styles.

And lastly, the mystics struggle within themselves to perfect their skills, to broaden their understanding of what they are experiencing and what is expected of them by the Divine, to do what is best when they are in relationship with others whether or not there is a connection of love or pain with other people, and to figure out and act upon their responsibilities that are in relation to supporting the body’s needs and the needs for the physical world that is being mistreated by industrial societies in our lifetimes. Each and all of these Themes and the Ground are inter-linked and ever- flowing; this diagram cannot indicate the complexity of motion, the integration or the intensity of mystics in this study. For these mystical participants, their lives are truly ‘lived’ (to the fullest and at all possible levels) experiences.

Figure 2. *Thematic Structure of the Everyday Experiences of the Participants who were Mystics in the Jewish Traditions of Kabbalah.*



A Case Study

This author has selected one of the eight participants to demonstrate the Ground and the Thematic Structure that has been described. In this case study, Participant 7, Gershom, a Rabbi born in the lineage of Kabbalists and mystical rabbis, was chosen as exemplifying both the Ground and practically all of the Themes in the Thematic Structure.

For the Ground of Awareness, Gershom said:

“But as I said in talking, you’re very much aware of every little noise. I mean, it’s almost a contradiction. It’s actually aware of everything around you in a heightened sense, actually. Most of them before, but somewhere along the line, it has no...it has no bearing on where you are. And then something...inside you just starts coming out, this...this kind—of—a You...you – it’s only after the experience that you can verbalize what just happened. But no while the thing is going on.”

Gershom described the Themes in the following ways:

Knowing/Realizing:

“Mine [first mystical experience] was probably when I was about nine or ten. And I think it was probably one of my first dreams that told me something...like a more, I um, foretelling something. So...that was when my brother, uh, was wearing tefillin...which is, uh, described that we do not wear in the morning...as a prayer, a sign. Um, and it’s taught – and when I woke, I knew something was wrong...you know, you wake up with an intuitive feeling. Brother’s car actually blew up in a few days. When you wake up, you know. Or while you’re in a dream, you know.”

Receiving/Calling/Gift:

[Gershom didn’t use the word receiving or calling, but he did use some of the other words attributed to this Theme (see Appendix).]
“But basically, I mean, you know, it’s just having hundreds of

dreams that happened.” [This participant had said that his lucid dreams were the most powerful and most frequent of his mystical experiences.]

“It has happened to me a few times. Somebody gave me a mezuzah for me that I felt was theirs, and I – and he asked me to see if it was written properly. And so as I looked into it, uh...I said, ‘This is from a woman; it’s not yours.’ [Then Gershom began to describe the woman, her pain in her gut area, and that she had cancer—all from receiving what came from his holding the mezuzah.]

Divine/Sacred:

[There are] “two different dimensions: the personal to the public, personal domain to a public domain. And your relationship to God is both. It should be integral.”

[For Gershom, while growing up in a mystical, Kabbalistic family] “there was a very strong...or it was understood, the spiritual world; that it exists and it works with us...or not. I think, for me, on a personal level, having been raised in that environment, it’s pretty much natural that it would, somehow, something will strike...or will be part...of my context.”

Practices/Body:

“That’s what Kabbalah is, so formidable and so arduous because it deals with all those mental images. They’re not in writing; you’ve got to construct them in the mind. And so, there’s a lot of internal meditative practices that allows you to see words in different combination, constantly, constantly, and there’s creating other images. And you’re seeing these, um, as the written word and the words maybe that go with that. But the seeing –this other seeing that you’re talking about is the inner seeing.”

“Your body will tell much what it is that you say. But it will present another phase of you...a non-conscious thought and then you know what’s going on behind the person’s thinking because their body will tell you another story, but it goes along with this story.”

“I was really gone! [describing an out-of-body experience]. I had no...I had no...physical sensation of me. I could tell you that I [lay there] like a rag.... I did not feel anything until I sort of, you know, woke out of it.”

Developing/Stages:

“In many ways my life was transformed that way.”

“You know, the life thing. Um, when you want to...you want to think of it, in some way, as a blessing, you know? You don’t just – so as you’re growing, I think the growth is always because, you know, there’s a magnet somewhere.

“An certainly, you know, in prayer and in certain times, you know, on Shabbat...you know, that...that certain prayers are more significant for me, and, therefore, there’s more of a meditation to that. Certainly the way I think...or the way I talk...or –and, you know, these things I certainly prescribe not necessarily because it’s the mystical thing to do but because it’s what human beings of development need to know.”

Struggling: Self/Others/World:

“That’s what I was raised as. People looked at me like I was weird. You know, people just don’t want to hear that...because they’re not tuned to that. Okay, we don’t say that.” [His mother, his whole family shared mystical experiences and dreams, but this is what Gershom experienced when he tried, as a child, to talk to other people outside his family about his experiences.]

“And I woke up from that [foretelling dream about his grandmother warning him that his unborn fifth child would be hard for him –this child who later was actually born with Down’s syndrome]; I didn’t tell my wife. I said, ‘Oh no, what...what does that [dream] mean, it’s gonna be hard? What? You know, I’m going to have to have to deal with the drugs and the—who knows what?’”

With this case study, we have used the Giorgi method to support the methodology used by the Tennessee Group and to better understand and demonstrate the Ground and the Thematic Structure of the participants in this study.

Body/World/Time/Others

Concerning the four existential grounds of existence, the participants in this study did refer to these situations in their interviews. But sometimes the participants experienced these grounds in different ways than the non-mystics usually did. Below are some quotations from some of the participants related to their experiences of Body/Time/World or Others:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Body: | [See earlier in this chapter that this Ground became a Theme for the participants.] |
| Time: | |
| Chavvah: | Truly being awake in the highest sense of the word is being open to that ever-present now. |
| Gershom: | Sometimes in time, or not about time; not about sequence... Sometimes happens when in Morocco; happens in different time zones. |
| World: | |
| Ellie: | What you think in that world [of the mystical experiences]...or, on that level, eventually becomes reality.... We do, in a sense create our existence. |
| Others: | [This ground also became an aspect of the Theme of Struggling. Participant 2, Baruch, described this when he said that most other people seem as ‘children’ to him and only other mystics with whom he could truly talk seemed as ‘adults.’] |

In general, for the participants in this study, Body, Time, World and Others were experienced in a different way from that of the non-mystics. These four existential grounds became figural for the mystics, especially when the participants were in altered

states or when they were integrating their mystical experiences into their everyday lives. These differences of Body, Time, World and Others are what gave the mystics a different understanding of their lives and what made relationships with non-mystics difficult since the mystics were not able to discuss their experiences without being uncomfortable or labeled weird by others.

Summary of Results

To briefly summarize the results of this study, the analysis of the bracketing interview produced the Ground of the researcher as Awareness and her Thematic Structure as containing five themes: 1) Divine/God/Sacred, 2) Body/Practices/Energies, 3) Levels/Shifts/Realities, 4) Lifetime Development, and 5) Choosing/Struggling. The researcher successfully observed the constraints that were suggested based upon her bracketing interview as she interviewed her participants.

The results of the participant interviews produced the Ground of their experience as Being Aware and the six themes of the Thematic Structure as: 1) Divine/Sacred, 2) Receiving/Calling/Gift, 3) Knowing/Realizing, 4) Practices/Body, 5) Developing/Stages, and 6) Struggling: Self/Others/World. The similarities between the bracketing interview and the participants' interviews were the themes of Divine, Body/Practices, Developing, and Struggling. The participant interviews included two additional themes: Receiving/Calling and Knowing/Realizing (which included the Levels/Shifts/Realities that were in the bracketing interview Thematic Structure). Five of the participants described their everyday experiences as Gifts.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion and Implications

Discussion Relevant to Chapter One Literature Review

Definition of Mysticism

The researcher's choice of the definition of mysticism as a "direct contact with God" turned out to be a good one. Participant 4, David, used almost these exact words at least two or three times in his interview. Most of the other participants used expressions similar to this. Only one time or two did any participant talk about merging with God or having union with God.

Participants' Use of the Names of God

Also as expected, the participants had knowledge and experience of various mystical spiritual traditions and freely used many names of God in their interviews. Often repeated were the names that we had included in Chapter one of this study: Source, God, Absolute, Ein Sof, Creator, Infinite, Void, and Oneness.

Jewish Backgrounds of the Participants

Of the four participants who were Jewish, three were from Ashkenazi backgrounds [in the traditions of both Orthodox and Hasidic backgrounds] and one was Sephardic (and more in the vein of the Lurianic school). Of these, two were Rabbis with one being from a family rich in Kabbalistic history and the other who had entered the Jewish Renewal movement where he was ordained by a formerly Hasidic mystical Rabbi originally from Eastern Europe. The other two Jewish participants had gone an alternate route into their Jewish mysticism through Hinduism and Buddhism. This variety of

backgrounds added a rich and revealing component to the everyday experiences of Jewish mysticism as addressed in this study. The Jewish participants seemed to come from either the rational or the intuitive historical lineages. One of the formerly Ashkenazi participants had even attended a Yeshiva as a young person when he had lived in New Jersey with his family.

There were subtle differences between the interviews of the Jewish and the non-Jewish participants such as more references to Christian mystical experiences of Christ and of Paul as told in the *New Testament* of the *Bible*. The Jewish participants spoke more frequently of *Torah*, *Talmud*, and the Hebrew language.

Devekut and Kavvanah

All participants demonstrated strong cleaving [devekut] and intent [kavvanah] regarding the sacredness and meaning they sought and found in their daily lives, practices, mystical experiences. The personal application of this intent or cleaving, however, was unique to each individual and usually related to his or her lifetime learning of living their everyday lives more effectively based upon their needs, their callings to this life, the direction and goals they had found, and the meaning that they had made of the powerful mystical experiences that continually happened to them.

Tree of Life

The majority of participants referred to the Tree of Life, the Sefirot, the Lightning flash and, sometimes, the Four Worlds that were aspects of Kabbalistic Jewish mystical traditions. These participants, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, were very familiar with these terms and the details of these symbols. They gave the impression of having learned

both in scholarship and in applied practices the meaning of these structures and had incorporated them in their understanding of how the world functions. These references by the participants would be too numerous to mention here.

Discussion Relevant to Chapter 2 Debate

Common Core or Social Constructionist Experience?

The participants on the whole expressed their deeper mystical experiences that had occurred either spontaneously or were induced through their many practices as having taken place in the “beyond” where not language or consciousness was available to them. Several actually described their return from these experiences as sort of fumbling with the language to describe what had happened while they were in their altered states. However, at no time did these mystical participants feel separate from God during these experiences; on the contrary, they felt that their connection with God had been strengthened during these episodes. Many carried the glow or feeling of divinity with them for hours or days afterwards. So, to make the point, the participants in this study leaned heavily to the Common Core or First Cause position as discussed in the philosophical debate reviewed in Chapter 2 of this paper.

The use of language by the participants held some surprises. The participants seemed pretty clear about the use of language they used to describe their experiences; language was incidental to the experiences and had not shaped them. This was particularly clear in the interviews by two of the Jewish men who had come to Jewish mysticism after having spent years in Hindu or Buddhist studies and practices; they described their experiences in both Eastern and Jewish dialogue in which it didn't seem

to matter what tradition they were using. Usually the description was linked to the chronological time in their lives in which they had been immersed in one tradition or another at the time.

Also surprisingly, the lack of strong significance of language as shaping the mystical experiences was also clear with two other participants, one Jewish and one not, who did not have English as their first language. They seemed to shift across their languages when describing their mystical experiences, and the Sephardic Rabbi even had said that he dreamed in other languages such as Arabic or French (which he knew prior to his learning of English) but that these dreams were different from his powerful, lucid dreams in which there were Truth, teachings, or visitations from his dead grandmother who came in dreams to advise him. In his mystical dreams, he was aware in a different way during the dreams and he ‘knew’ when he awoke that they were different from his other, regular dreams. In the mystical dreams, language didn’t matter, except when his grandmother gave him, in advance of the births, the names in Hebrew from the *Torah* that he was supposed to name his children when they were to be born. This participant followed the direction of these dreams because he respected the teachings of the dreams and the divinity of the Hebrew names that came from *Torah*.

Stace and Hood had written a lot about the categories of Introvertive and Extrovertive mystical experiences. For the record, this researcher did not differentiate between these two types of mystical experience when conducting her interviews. The participants included so many of their mystical experiences in their interviews that both

kinds of introvertive and Extrovertive experiences were addressed by them as some point. But the deeper experiences that they reported seemed to be of the Introvertive type.

Hood and the psychology of mystical experience

Hood summarized the three major social-scientific, classical views of mysticism as being “mysticism as erroneous attribution,” mysticism as heightened awareness,” and mysticism as evolved consciousness.” For the participants in this study, none would fall into the first category. But all would fall into both the second and third categories because these participants always had a heightened awareness during their everyday and nights. But, if we take each of their interviews as holistic representations of the meaning of mysticism in their lives, we can say that the third category of mysticism as evolved consciousness was the primary position of these participants. The support for this comes from the narratives of the development of their personalities, consciousness, practices and skills, and interpretations that took place over the whole of their lifetimes. These mystical participants dedicated every day to this higher consciousness lifestyle.

Discussion Relevant to the Psychologies of Mysticism in Chapter 3

For the participants in this study, we could say they truly represented the type of mystical experience that Evelyn Underhill expressed when she stated that mystics have “an overwhelming consciousness of God and of [their] own souls; a consciousness which absorbs or eclipses all other centres of interest.” This was definitely true of every one of the mystics in this study.

As for the psychology of mystics and their bodies, the interviews by the participants were extremely rich in descriptions of practices and spontaneous effects that

they had experienced over their lifetimes. For example, David, Participant #4, described in detail his unforgettable experiences of Kundalini energies rising up his spine to his brain and of the energetic charge that opened a brain center located at the pineal gland in the center of his head. Other participants talked about being in deep meditative states where they were neither able nor willing to perform physical functions such as moving limbs or making speech. See the list of subcategories of the participants' thematic structure in the appendix of this study to get a grasp of the many practices related to body that were involved in these lives.

Regarding health and disease, some of the participants had actually funneled healing experiences to other humans, pets and to themselves that, to others, including medical professionals, seemed miraculous. This was not an expected result in the everyday experiences of mystics. Each of the participants also had expressed their attendance to the food they took into their bodies. Some were vegetarian, some observed the kosher food laws, and many ate primarily organic food. Much of this information was mentioned prior to or after the interview while talking with the interviewer who was often in their homes and saw the set-up in their kitchens as tea was made, for example. One of the Rabbis even was teaching students about how to live observant lives by integrating food, body, prayer, learning and meditation practices while the interviewer visited this class a day after the interview had been performed.

All of the mystics had been doing meditative practices over a long period of time in their lives. These mystics seemed to this researcher to be well-balanced, well-spoken, and consciously to be taking care that their bodies, their living environments, their

relationships, their time and their food were managed in healthy ways. On easy we might look at this is that the participants made a conscious effort to be harmonious with the four existential grounds of their existence. Body, to the mystics, was the primary vehicle and the vessel for their everyday lives and their mystical experiences no matter whether spontaneous or induced (such as in meditative practices). It would be interesting to be able to measure the fMIRs the brain activity of these participants during their mystical and meditative experiences in order to compare those results with those found in other studies of meditation.

This researcher found that Participant 7, Gershom, a Jewish rabbi who had been born into a Sephardic Kabbalistic family, seemed more at ease with his everyday life with mystical experiences—partly because he had grown up in an understanding, supportive and participating mystical family. Also, Participant 5, Ellie, who was a Christian minister, a Kabbalist in the Jewish tradition, and was the oldest of the participants, seemed more comfortable with her everyday experiences; she did not mention that her life was a struggle or hard. These two participants presented unexpected results in their development. So, looking at the everyday experiences of mystics in the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah, this researcher suggests that the development of mystics over their lifetimes may vary due to factors such as familial history of mysticism or the age of the mystic who might have integrated his or her everyday experiences in a more full way. Examining the development of mystics in the Jewish traditions would be interesting in light of Dabrowski's multi-levels of disintegration (and finally, integration) and in Piechowski's and Nixon's findings about early mystical experiences related to childhood

abuse or death of a loved one. Another area of developmental comparisons might include that of participants' Sephardic or Ashkenazi history or lineages.

As expected, the participants described their experiences as being sacred. Their everyday lives were focused on being aware that their lives centered in the Sacred and that their experiences came from the Source. This clearly shows that these experiences were not paranormal as defined by Harrigan.

Relating to the field of Humanistic Psychology, the everyday experiences of the participants fit well into the Existentialists because these participants sought and found deeper meaning for their lives as a result of having their mystical experiences. The participants also match the ideas of the Transpersonal psychologists because so much of their lives had to do with altered states of consciousness and transcendent experiences. One might also describe many of the ecstatic mystical experiences of these participants as being like the 'peak' experiences of Maslow. And, of course, the Psychology of Applied Phenomenology is the best fit for receiving, understanding and thematizing the descriptions of the everyday lives of mystics in any tradition.

As expected, Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of human existence does not fit well with the everyday lives of these participants. Instead of waiting until the end of their lives to seek a spiritual meaning to their lives, these participants lived everyday very involved with spirituality since it permeated their lives—usually since childhood.

The idea of spiritual giftedness came late in the literature review for this research. Prior to stumbling upon this information, this researcher would have been surprised to find this subject mentioned among her participant interviews. Since five out of eight

participants in this study described their everyday lives with mystical experiences as being “gifts,” this study supports the ideas of spiritual giftedness as written by Gardner, Piechowski and Hawkins. The definition of spiritual giftedness (see pages 99-103 of this document) by Gardner and Sisk included skills like meditating, entering altered states at will, accessing noetic or spiritual phenomena, evolving and advancing intuition, and visioning. They also said that the mind alone cannot produce the information accessed by the spiritually intelligent. Sisk added that core experiences of those with spiritual intelligence mean that there is a heightened awareness of higher values, peak experiences and transcendent feelings. According to all of these definitions of spiritual giftedness, the Ground and Thematic Structure for these eight participants offer evidence of the existence of spiritual intelligence. In addition, it would have been interesting to do kinesiological testing according to Hawkins to determine the calibrated levels of consciousness of each of the participants in this study to verify that each tested at the 500 level or above.

Discussion Related to Chapter 4

In the literature review of everyday experiences of mystics, Sinetar performed her study so that it was grounded in the works of Maslow. Of her 37 participants, most of them had broken from society’s mores, withdrawn from conventional life, and were traveling new inner journeys. Her participants were potentiating their spiritual lives and had found balance in both inner and outer worlds; they also experienced more intense emotions than other people. She wrote that these mystics experienced ‘peak’ experiences along with darker experiences of the abyss and distress. For the current study, some of

the mystics in the Jewish traditions had not withdrawn from conventional life, but the participants in this study had altered the ways they related to others and the world so that they could function as mystics while, at the same time, caring for families and/or careers. So on inner levels, the current participants had withdrawn from conventional life, but they had integrated this with being present on the outer levels of their existence. The current participants also addressed the struggles or the hardships in living their everyday lives as mystics; this might correspond to Sinetar's findings of "distress" in her participants.

Porath's study of college students who were not experienced mystics developed the themes of encounter from outside oneself/timelessness, Awareness of immediate surroundings, limitations of language, and physical sensations. Her participants also addressed the theme of fear of stigmatization. Another theme was other ways of making sense. Lastly, there were effects on her participants' sense of reality, on religious practices and on lifestyle or career changes. For the current study, the participants also experienced these themes. However, the newness for the mystics in the Jewish traditions had worn off long ago, and these experienced mystics had integrated these themes into their everyday lives in ways that Porath's participants had not.

Harrigan had addressed the commitment that the participants in her study had toward their spiritual seeking, their practices, their meaning-making and their development into more advanced levels of spiritual consciousness and experiences. Although her participants were selected for studying the science of Kundalini Process, there are some similarities in the experiences and everyday lives of her participants and

the participants in the current study. As a matter of fact, Harrigan did have some Jewish mystics in her participant pool. She wrote about the four types of lives that people with advanced spiritual development live [and there could be some overlap across these types]: those who have a mission and travel about teaching, those who stay at home and await seekers coming to their doors, those who live in the world as ordinary people (non-mystics), and those who leave the world and become hermits. Of the participants in the current study, Ari, Baruch and Frank lived as hermits; Chavvah, David, Gershom and Hayim worked in the world, and Ellie waited for people to come to her. Ari, David, Ellie, Gershom and Hayim sometimes taught select groups about Jewish mysticism and practices. Harrigan also wrote about the many experiences her participants described and the lifestyles they had chosen to support their Kundalini Process. The mystics in the current study also described many of the same types of experiences of energies, supra-sensory experiences, alterations of realities, etc., and they had lifestyle practices that supported body, mind and spiritual development and well-being. It was a surprise to find so many similarities among the mystics that correspond to Harrigan's research on kundalini risings.

Thoughts on This Research Project

This research project turned out to be bigger than anticipated in that this study was almost two projects in one: descriptions of mystical experiences and then the participants living everyday with them. The interviews with the participants took about twice as long as interviews which other phenomenologists who bring their interviews to our analytical research laboratories have taken. During the initial time that this researcher

spent with each transcript, it was very easy to get lost in the fascination of the mystical experiences themselves. A lot of mental effort and distancing was needed in order to step back from the mystical and find the everydayness of the mystical participants' lives.

This also happened in the researcher's bracketing interview which took over three hours to complete; as much time was spent describing the mystical experiences as describing the life that contained these experiences. This project was subjective and intuitive as compared with the objectivity and rationality that normal science demands. Since she had not talked about the mystical aspects of her own life prior to this research project, this experience, for the researcher, seemed analogous to the "coming out" that gay men and women must go through when they go public with their personal, sexual preferences.

Being let into the participants' lives at these deepest levels was powerful and transformational for not only the researcher but also the phenomenological analysts who helped hermeneutically review each transcript. Many of my lab partners wanted to discuss these interviews privately outside of the lab meetings because much information contained in these interviews were outside the normal experiences and academics of these psychologists, educators and philosophers in attendance. These reactions by the researcher's community were pleasantly surprising and rewarding. Of course, the names and lives of all participants have been kept confidential throughout this process.

If one really wanted to draw a picture demonstrating the Ground and the Thematic Structure for advanced spiritual development among mystics, one could describe it as a sphere of nothing but the divine as ground and as theme. Hawkins (2008) described the

goal of sacred development of spiritual consciousness is about the mystic no longer being aware of content (the figural) in his or her life but is about his or her becoming one with the field (or context or ground) of existence. In other words, this is becoming one with the Divine and experiencing a permanent loss of self (as described by Hood). However, this brings into question the difference among Jewish Kabbalists who are seeking a “direct connection with God” and mystics of other traditions who are seeking a union with God.

A difficulty for understanding the bracketing interview and, consequently, the participants’ interviews, was that of drawing a diagram or making a representation that showed the various levels of realities in which the mystics lived. At various levels of “reality” the Figure and Ground of an experience changed because the physical, mental, emotional experiences of self, body, time, others and the world changed.

There is another area of interest, and that is the position of the self, or the Self, during the everyday life of the participants. Not discussed in this paper is the wealth of information about the state of self during various kinds of conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious states like the ones that mystics often frequent. What is awareness? Who is aware? The intellect? The mind? The ego self? The “observer” self? The witness? The True Self? The Higher Self? This Divine that is within each of us and that composes us? The non-self? This might be a research project for the future. But in this study, sorting out this perspective of the mystics or the researcher was neither discussed nor differentiated.

Another way of separating the thematic structure for the researcher and the participants would have been to look at the themes differently. According to Jewish Kabbalistic traditions, there are two important aspects of a mystic's life: the Way, and the Work. The Way is the path, journey, learning, practices and teachers that are needed to grow and develop. The Work is what the mystic does in the world to bring about Tikkun—the repair of the world and everything in it and the return of all sparks scattered within the broken vessels to the Divine Source from which we came. However, this researcher has chosen to neglect this approach in understanding the themes of her bracketing interview and of her participants.

The One Who Refrained to Be Interviewed

The following information bumped the understanding of the everyday of Jewish mystics up a notch for this researcher:

This researcher was very naïve about Jewish mysticism when she began this project. At the very end of her search for participants, she found a classical male Jewish mystic who was the epitome of all the great Jewish mystics she had begun to read about during the course of this investigation. He was descended from a Jewish family that could trace its history through Rabbis and Kabbalists back to 15th century Spain. The family had been evicted from Spain with other Jews and Muslims by Queen Isabella when she decided to clear the country of infidels to the Catholic Church to which she dedicated her life. This Jewish family moved to Morocco, and after centuries, the teachings of this lineage was handed down to the son whom I finally met. When asked if he would allow

this author to interview him, he declined. Over several years, she discussed this with him, but he always gently and kindly declined to participate.

Through their communications by telephone and email, he finally told her the reasons why. First of all, he did not seem to like this research topic. He said that there is no such thing as mystical experience for true Kabbalists because their lives are not on-again off-again with special experiences that this author called mystical. Instead, Kabbalists in the classic tradition live with these experiences fully integrated and permeating their whole lives all the time. Another reason this Kabbalist did not particularly like this research topic is that it insinuated that the mystics lived in two worlds: the world like that the non-mystics experience and the world that involves mystics and their mystical experiences. This classical Kabbalists told this researcher that this indicated lives lived in the state of Duality; a true Kabbalist lives only in Non-duality.

But the main reason that this Kabbalist did not agree to participate in this research project is quoted below with his permission (he at last agreed to give in writing his reasons for not participating; any capitalization, quotation marks or underlining in the quotation below are from this Kabbalist; also please bear in mind that English is not his mother tongue):

“I simply and discreetly and quietly practice my Kabbalistic tradition, not to talk or speak to anyone about my spiritual experiences, because human nature tends to judge easily and react from emotion only, and take anything said from experience for granted, distorts it, and uses ONLY one small aspect of oneself. I call that limitation of being, “playing the violin with one hand” or using only the left hemisphere of the brain, thus, the

limitation of human ability to use properly the faculty of thinking with both hemispheres.

Also because the one who hear or read these experiences, cannot simply be in the shoes of the other, can take it out of context, using many non sequiturs, excuses and reasons to try to explain the experience. So, for my being, it is better NOT to talk about these spiritual experiences to anyone, not because of simply refusing, but mainly out of respect, and also to protect the other from causing harm, by understanding it in the harmful way, both to oneself and the others.

The key here is “to try to explain”, Authentic student of kabbalah does not “EXPLAIN”, one must learn to understand one thing from within the other, in order even to begin to think to study the Sacred knowledge of the Kabbalah. And since in “this world” word begets word, and we live in a time where the words and the verb itself have been profoundly abused, to cause harm to people, it is therefore, even healthy to refrain from granting an interview, because, from our nature of living in the dualities of matter, we will always use the word “WHY” without really meaning to be on the Quest rather than automatically abuse the word “why”.

Even if one do[es] talk about these experiences, and ONLY with a Kabbalistic teacher, or a student of Kabbalah who is dedicated and focused on preparing oneself to be a true student of this sacred knowledge, or those, who have experienced the same journey. And even then, one talks or writes about in with a certain code language, that is also learned, in order to conceal and protect the one and the other.

These words will be clearly understood when you can distinguish between “Information” and Knowledge”. In our perplexed time now, anyone who thinks that he or she is informed, they think they know, and confuse the real understanding between information and knowledge. It is good and very necessary to be informed about the Kabbalah, and there are thousands of books that one can learn information ABOUT the Kabbalah.

Again, the key word here is “about”. One can know and talk about Kabbalah, as thousands are doing now, but to acquire true knowledge, that is totally another unique and exploratory journey one must engage in deeply, that is, if one have graduated the “passing curiosity and superficiality”, and willing to leap to the practicalities of learning and applying the knowledge very carefully, and with deep dedication, humility and conscious clarity to what one is learning, and always being in the state

of focused preparation, one is also well equipped, informed and ready to learn to “swim” and “leap” unto that which humans calls the “unknown”.

By the way the word “mystic” is not the word to describe the Hebrew Kabbalist, this word was used in the Middle Ages, by some westerners who “studied” the Kabbalah and interpreted it from their narrow lenses of the Christianized Europe then. The authentic Kabbalah MUST be learned through the vessel with which it was, and is transmitted, and that is, first of all, the complete knowledge of the Hebrew Language.

In authentic Kabbalah there is no “mysticism”. Authentic Kabbalah has nothing to do with magic, amulets, tarots, red strings, or any tendencies to sorceries or shamanism, Christianity, Islam, or whatever the “New Age” collection of various thoughts and philosophies, that has nothing to do with the Authentic Kabbalah.

Authentic Kabbalah is learning the laws of creation, being close to this “Creator”, focusing on:

First, restoring the world.

Second, repairing the many flaws of the individual human character.

Third, mastering one’s thoughts to a great degree of perfection.

Fourth, practicing “conscious innocence” in order to freshly learn, the most easy and most difficult talks and practices deeply rooted in the Hebrew tradition.

Fifth, to unite in the universe and in oneself and all relationships all that is separated, or seem separated,

Sixth, one also must be profoundly imbued within the Hebrew-Jewish tradition of ancient times that was transmitted from family to family, from teacher to student in a certain way of learning, that is learned and mastered, while learning to use circle thinking. That is, one must find an authentic “Teacher”, which is an art unto itself.

This way of learning takes many years to prepare for true transmission to occur, and while learning the Hebrew language, especially the letters, and the way they are used in their unique codes, and until one is ready to

understand beyond understanding, developing one's self to be a pure vessel, ready to receive and use the knowledge in a unique way, especially not to cause harm to the "other".

Until here I used the words necessary to focus on what is needed to be said at this time and place. However, I thank you for asking me, but these words contain my answer."

Follow-up questions with the classic Kabbalist and his answers are quoted here:

Researcher:

Please send a list of the languages that you know, and please say which is the first language you learned (your mother tongue). You might list them in the order that you learned them if you are willing.

Kabbalist:

I grew up with Hebrew first, then Arabic, Aramaic of the *Talmud* and the *Zohar*. French, English, and Mime.

So after all the interviews had been done, this classic Kabbalist appeared and presented information that made this dissertation research seem amateurish because this researcher realized that the most advanced mystics had not been interviewed. These advanced mystics are extremely rare, hard to find and hard to interview once/if you find them. An example of this type of advanced mystic would be the Baal Shem Tov. So, we must consider the current study as a step in the direction of understanding Jewish mystics but not the final word on the topic. This researcher was humbled by this experience.

Implications

There are many implications for future research that have arisen from this study. First, to do future research justice, it would be better to select only Jewish participants

since there were some differences in describing the Divine and the connection with the Divine across the Jewish and non-Jewish mystics. Another area of future research that would be helpful to psychologists would be to explore more fully spiritual giftedness and spiritual intelligence. This researcher also resolved to seek a better understanding of the development of Jewish mystics across their lifetimes. There might be levels or stages to this development, and there might be variations in the types of mystical experiences that go with certain ages. Also, it would be interesting to look at the development of Jewish mystics in relations to the four existential grounds of Body, Time, World and Others across a single lifetime. The development of practices, seeking knowledge and finding teachers across a lifetime might also be important. And, of course, looking more closely at the struggles that a Jewish mystic faces during his or her lifetime would be a study unto itself. And most of all, to find a few of the most extremely advanced Jewish mystics who would talk about their everyday would give better results than presented here.

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APPENDICES

Figure 3. Schematic summary of interview process and analyses used in this study (Pollio, et al, 1997)

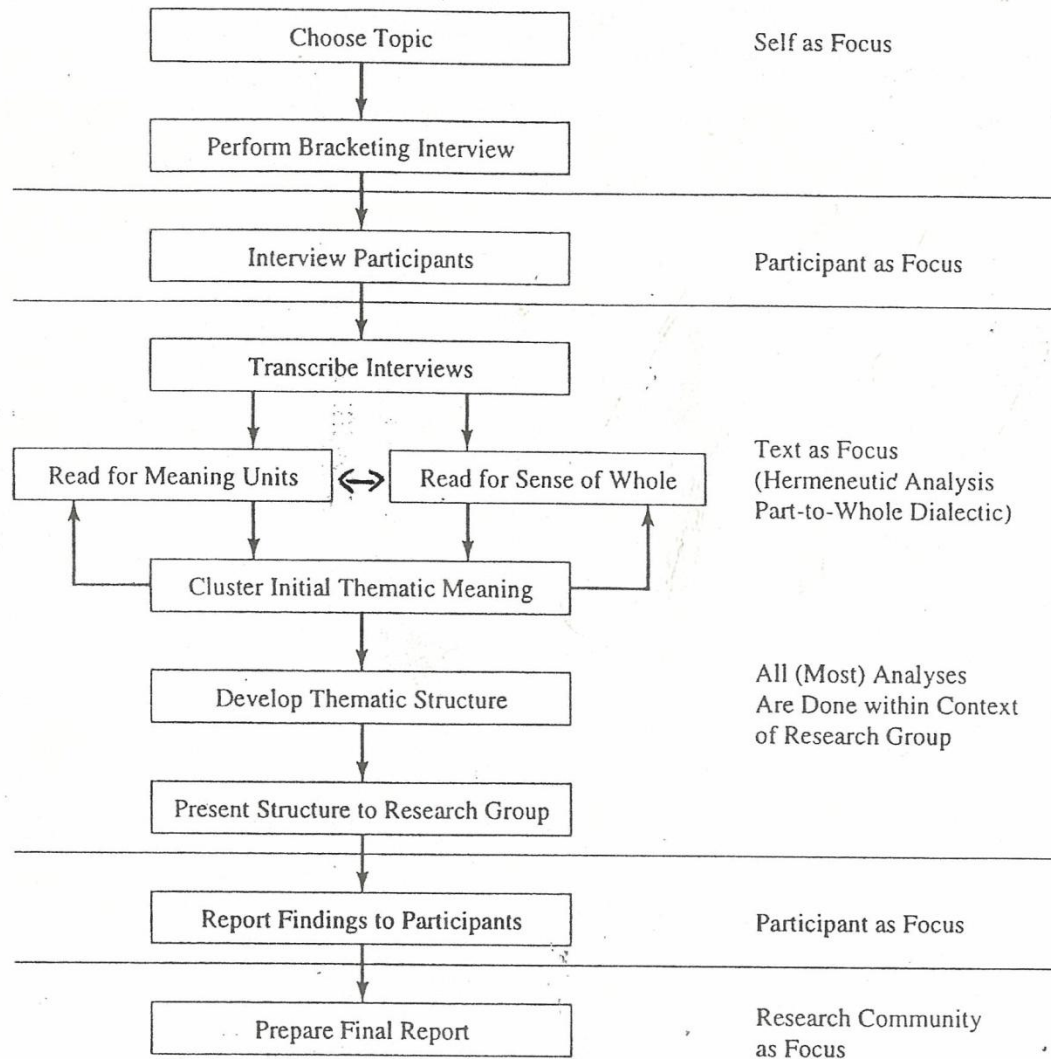


Table 3. A List of the Subcategories of the Participants' Ground and of their Thematic Structures.

	Primary Ground and Thematic Structures	Secondary Subcategories of the Ground and Thematic Structures	Items Within Each Subcategory
Ground:	Being Aware	Awake, Attention, Focusing, Consciousness	
Themes:	Divine/Sacred	Source	Source
			God
			Providence
			Guidance
			Protected/ Sheltered/Supported
			Inner Dialogue
			Emanates
		Names of God	Absolute
			Sacred
			HaShem
			Void
			Protection
			Oneness
		Saints/Sages	Moses
			Buddha
			Christ
			Historical Mystics across Religious Traditions
	Receiving/Calling	Receiving	Happened/Comes/Arises
			Surprised/Unexpected/Shock
			Absorbed
			Arises
		Mystical Experiences	Visions
			Teachings

			Inner Voice
			Lucid Dreams
			Books
			Messages
			Discovery
		Calling	Calling
			Chosen
			Committed
		Gift	
Table 3. Continued	Primary Ground and Thematic Structures	Secondary Subcategories of the Ground and Thematic Structures	Items Within Each Subcategory
	Practices/Body	Practices/Get Skills/Training	Reading/studying/needing books
			Meditation (many kinds across traditions)
			Music (Playing/Listening/Chanting)
			Prayer/traditions
			Finding teachers
			Silence
			Sacred or Special Places
			Mezuzah
			Gravesites
		Energies	Light/Dark
			Unstruck Sound
			Tingling
			In brain, heart, hands, etc.
			Centering
	Knowing/Realizing	Knowing	Recognizing
		Realizing	Aha
		Realities	Beyond
			Hard to describe
			Resonance
			Locking in Pieces to Puzzle
			Paradox
	Developing/Stages	Stages	Inner Adjustment
			Process
		Levels	Regularly

			Across Many Years
			Layers: Surface/Below. Inner/Outer
	Struggling: Self/Others/World	Hard	Disturbing/Discomfort
			Resistance
			Sadness
			Tensions/Anxieties
			Terror
			Danger
			Evil
			Surrender
		Higher Emotion	Joy, Goodness. Satisfaction
		Others	Adult/Child/Stranger
		Choosing	Consequences
			Responsibilities

VITA

Priscilla W. Levasseur was born in Boston, MA, and grew up in Charleston, SC. For her academic education, she completed her B.S. in Psychology at the College of Charleston in 1996, her M.A. in Humanistic Psychology at the University of West Georgia in 1998, and, with the completion of this dissertation, her Ph.D. in Psychology (Experimental). Her father was a physician and her mother a housekeeper; they are both deceased. She has four living brothers and sisters. She left her family home at 20 years of age—renouncing the world, school, possessions, job, friends, inheritance and family in order to find meaning in a life that was empty of any depth or spirituality. Her spiritual background is Methodist/Lutheran on her paternal side of the family, Southern Baptist on her maternal side of the family, and Episcopal in her childhood upbringing. After her early years in Christianity, she converted to Judaism as an adult when she was 38 years of age and had had a powerful, Jewish mystical experience—not realizing a fulfillment of the Lurianic teachings. Her “caravan of spiritual teachers” has been across Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Jewish Traditions with the Jewish Tradition being her final, happy and ‘fitting’ home. She is a lifetime seeker and, finally in recent years, a finder. The journey has been long, arduous, costly on many levels, and extremely rewarding.