

Mysticism is a Form of Experientialism

Mysticism says that knowledge “can be attained through subjective experience.” [Miriam Webster, referenced above, emphasis mine]

Experientialism is “a philosophical theory that experience is the source of all knowledge not purely deductive, formal, or tautological.” (Tautological is “true by virtue of its logical form alone.”) [merriamwebster.com/dictionary/experientialism]

If experience is “the source of all knowledge” and that source is “not purely deductive,” then where does that knowledge, the meaning of the experience, come from? The experiential answer is the meaning comes from the experience itself. Experientialism assumes that events speak for themselves. In other words, experiences themselves dictate their own meaning, they are selfinterpretative.

But that is not true. Experiences are capable of being understood in a variety of different ways. The Zen Buddhist looks at the same world as the evangelical Christian with a nearly opposite meaning. Creationists and evolutionists are experiencing the same world, but they come to contradictory conclusions about it. Meaning must be brought to experiences.

Experiences do not speak for themselves and do not come with meaning labels on them. When mystics say, “God called me ...,” they mean, “I have decided that my experience (feelings, inclinations, or circumstances) is a call of God.” But they only know that because they brought their idea of the call of God to their experience.

Suppose someone is late for a Bible conference they hope to attend. Then they get the next six traffic lights green, allowing them to get to the conference on time. The mystic will conclude that God gave them the green lights, to get them to the conference on time. But notice, this is a conclusion based entirely on experientialism. Going through green lights does not give off meaning. Meaning must be brought to the lights.

The same is true of the common example of people getting a parking place “up close” and concluding it is from God. But the parking place did not give off any meaning. Meaning must be brought to the parking place via experientialism.

Nowhere in the Bible do we have a command or example of God manipulating things, like streetlights or parking places, to help us with our personal (supposedly good) desires. Could God do that? Of course He could. But there is no biblical basis for claiming He does, because He never did that in the Bible. Revelation in the Bible is about what God is doing, not our personal agenda. It is about God’s desires, not our desires. Any thought that God manipulated the streetlights or parking places is experientialism, bringing meaning to the experience.

Understand: everything is in the sovereign plan of God. God is sovereign over my marriage. But that has nothing to do with my determining what God is doing. I might say that I think (or believe) God led me to the right woman to marry, but if I say, “God led me to the right woman to marry,” then I am speaking as a prophet. There is no way to verify my understanding through my experience.

For more information see the book [The Mysticism Deception](https://relationalconcepts.org/) on Relational Concepts web page:

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P.O. Box 141456 • Grand Rapids, MI 49514 • relationalconcepts.org