Mystical Experience and Everyday People

What kinds of things help induce mysticism in our lives? I was asked that question recently and this was my immediate, unfiltered response: anything that takes you beyond the filters of normal consciousness, anything that brings tears to your eyes in either genuine sorrow or genuine joy; but that response was predicated on a lot of things.

What is mysticism? What makes for mystical experience?

In the popular mind mysticism is misunderstood badly. We tend to identify mysticism with what's extraordinary and extraordinary things, but most people, mysticism means spiritual visions and ecstatic experiences which take you outside of normal consciousness. Mysticism can be that sometimes, though normally it has nothing to do with visions, altered states of consciousness, or anything extraordinary. When we're in touch with our deepest center, without filters, purely; but when we are, that's what makes for a mystical experience.

Mysticism, as Ruth Burrows defines it, is being touched by God in a way that's beyond words, imagination, and any form of distortion. We see, we feel, we experience goodness, or beauty, without anything distorting that, we're having a mystical experience. What might that look like?

Ruth Burrows describes a mystical experience which radically changed her life when she was eighteen years old, a senior in high school. She was reading a story in a book, and all of a sudden she knew her deepest self purely (and the only thing that was extraordinary was its extraordinary clarity).

So, what kinds of things might induce mystical experiences in our lives? The short answer: anything that takes you beyond the filters of normal consciousness. It can be receiving an expression of love, blessing someone, expressing genuine contrition, or sharing helplessness. It can be many things.

Several years ago while teaching a course, I assigned the students a number of books to read, among them Christopher de Vinck's book. He describes a mystical experience which triggered a mystical experience inside her, not unlike the one described by Ruth Burrows. Reading her book, The Story of a Soul by Therese of Lisieux, generally does that for me.

So, here's my counsel: seek out what does that for you. It doesn't have to bring tears to your eyes, it just has to point you with searing clarity towards home!

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