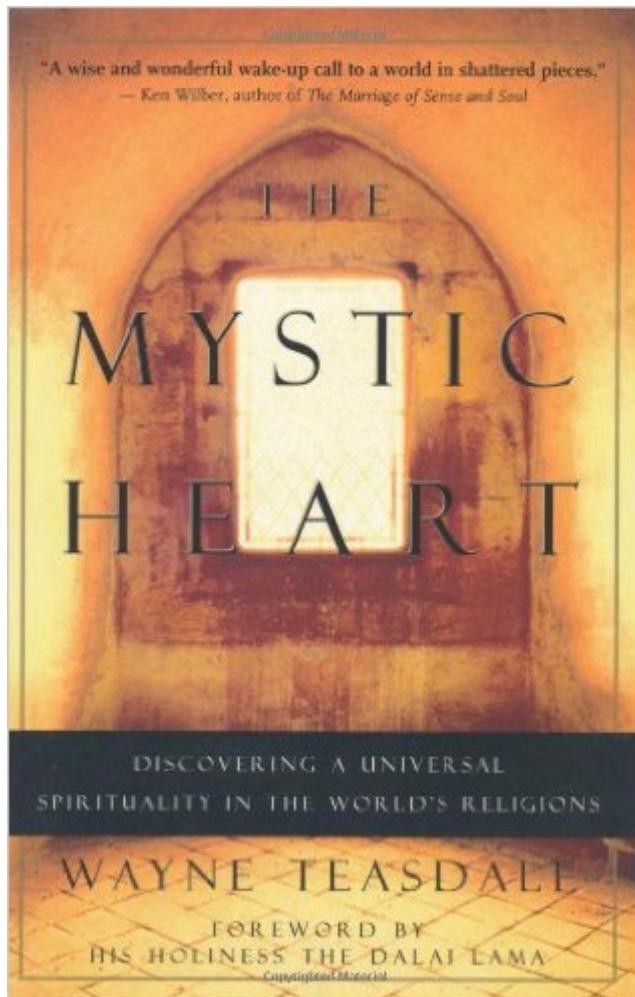


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The Mystic Heart: Discovering A Universal Spirituality In The World's Religions



Synopsis

Drawing on experience as an interreligious monk, Brother Wayne Teasdale reveals the power of spirituality and its practical elements. He combines a profound Christian faith with an intimate understanding of ancient religious traditions.

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Customer Reviews

As one who practices in the mystic tradition of dzogchen, I greatly appreciate the insight and effort of Teasdale to articulate a universal perspective of spirituality. I share his approach to integrating core understandings of the great traditions and his desire to transcend (though not eliminate) differences. Far from "tedious," as one reviewer saw it, I thought that it was well written and easy to follow. Two reviewers criticized the book for failing to articulate each of the various traditions' or mystics' perspectives. They are correct. It does not. Yet that is not his purpose. There are other sources if that is what one is seeking. Rather, he is illustrating the interspirituality found in these diverse mystical traditions. Granted that his perspective is colored by his own Catholic tradition, but he is clearly open to and appreciative of what other traditions bring to the table. I thoroughly enjoyed the book, one of the best I have read outside of those in my own tradition (my own bias showing here), and I highly recommend it!

The Second Vatican Council issued a document called *Nostra Aetate*, which called for dialogue among all religions in terms of prayer and spirituality. The Cistercians and Benedictines were

commissioned to lead this dialogue. Since that time there have been cross spiritual or interspiritual dialogue among Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems and others. Wayne Teasdale is a Benedictine monk who has spent considerable time studying the religions of the east. In this book he writes of the different emphases of these religions as well as their commonality. He maintains that spirituality is the work of all religions and cultures. He blends insights from spiritual masters of the east and west. For Christians, Teasdale notes how some practices in eastern religions match those of Christianity. The devotion to the Sacred Heart is much the same as the eastern practice of being one with God in compassion. The united presence of all people and God relates to the Catholic devotion to the Eucharist. Teasdale calls not for a bland homogenous spirituality, but one which does not cultural accretions to blind people to the beauty of prayer, devotions and mysticism available to all. This movement is not a denial of a particular religion, but a way in which all religions can benefit. Additionally, one can find support from one's own tradition. And yet receive insight from another that enhances one's own. This book offers hope that spirituality can unite humankind, not divide.

Review by Bill Williams, Hartford Current, CT, USA January 8, 2000 Submitted by Gary T. Mallalieu

Wayne Teasdale calls this "the interspiritual age" and predicts that interspirituality will become "the religion of the third millennium." The author, who grew up in Windsor (CT) and now lives in Chicago as a Catholic lay monk, offers an inspiring vision of a world where people draw from the wisdom of all the great spiritual traditions. He begins with the assertion that "every one of us is a mystic" capable of "direct contact with the divine, or ultimate mystery." As well as any recent writer, Teasdale draws on the insights of Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism to shed light on the spiritual journey. He sketches a vision that is at once practical and uplifting. He discusses social action, solitude, nature, solidarity with all living beings, nonviolence, simplicity, and other attributes of the spiritual quest. The goal of any spiritual journey is to "prepare ourselves to be receptive and sensitive to the divine presence by slowly awakening our spiritual senses." This is a landmark book in the field of interreligious dialogue, written with sensitivity and deep respect for all the great traditions.

When Teasdale speaks of his own mystic encounters, he is interesting. But that is a small percentage of the book. His overview of how mysticism figures in the world's religions is also of interest, particularly if you are not very familiar with Hinduism. But apart from Hindu and Christian, he seems to be looking at everything else from quite a distance, so that we never get much of a feel

for what Jewish or Islamic mysticism look or feel like. His description of the natural mysticism of American Indians works well only because he never goes into any depth or details. He can talk lightly on one page about harm no sentient life, and then on the next page extol American Indians as paragons of virtue, with no comment on the fact that they were hunters and warriors for the most part. My main complaint is that he seems overly-impressed with the ability of the group that he's a part of (Parliament of World Religions) to change the world. A United Nations-type committee to bring about world mystical harmony is more or less absurd to my mind. Teasdale gives us too many generalities and too many lists of virtues and guidelines. There is a sermonizing quality to much of what he says, a desire to be moralize. Also, his bottom line seemed to be that Christian mysticism leads to union with Love itself, while some other forms of mysticism lead to a state that is compassionate and blissful but may also be experienced as Void. To me this indicates that Christianity is a step beyond earlier mystic insights (although it has not done as well in leading people to follow Christ to this end-point). But Teasdale seems far more critical of Christianity than he does of Hinduism and other traditions. He says, for example, "Christian mysticism has always rejected the body, as evidenced by the extreme asceticism of Francis of Assisi. He spent a good deal of time fasting, sometimes praying all night on his knees. His poor body was a victim of his piety!....The East has its equivalent ascetical hardships on the body, but has also managed to understand that the body can be beneficial to the spiritual journey." Well, Francis of Assisi may have been hard on his body, but praying all night on your knees is nothing compared to the extreme ascetical practices still followed in Hinduism, where men spend years with one arm held over their heads or standing on their feet day and night for years. And it is simply untrue that Christian mysticism as a whole flatly rejects the body. The Mystical Marriage, with its erotic overtones, is the primary Christian mystical metaphor. F. C. Happold's book entitled *Mysticism* is superior to Teasdale's in allowing the mystic traditions to speak for themselves and also in providing a framework for understanding what they have to say. Another book called *Mystics, Masters, Saints and Sages* also is more valuable in actually allowing mystics of various traditions and no traditions at all to speak of their vision. One other complaint: Teasdale's question about psycho-active drugs/plants is worth raising, but his answer misses the point. If a state of mind similar to a mystical state can be induced by peyote, for example, the question is: doesn't this suggest that mystical states are physiologically caused? He never confronts this question.

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