



Mysticism: Holiness East and West

By Denise Lardner Carmody, John Tully Carmody

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Mysticism is pervasive throughout the religions of the world, yet varies widely in its particulars. This comprehensive work surveys the mystical dimension of the world's major religions, beginning with a working description of mysticism as "direct experience of ultimate reality," and examining how this understanding of mysticism holds up when set in interaction with Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, Japanese, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. The authors also examine the religious practices of North American, Latin American, African, and Australian native peoples, illuminating the history, principal beliefs, and teachings of each religion, and examining the lives and works of each tradition's outstanding mystics. The result is a dialogue between the particulars of mystical experience, which vary from tradition to tradition, and the generalities they share which make it possible to discuss mysticism across these traditions. This accessibly written introduction will appeal to students of mysticism, readers seeking mystical experience, and all those interested in religion as practiced throughout the world.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Admittedly, the scholarly Carmodys (*In the Path of the Masters*, etc.) have primarily an academic audience in mind for their masterly introduction to mysticism in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Chinese and Japanese religious traditions, and cultures (including Native American) in which spiritual legacies are conveyed orally. Nevertheless, general readers drawn to such classics of comparative religion as Armstrong's *A History of God* or titles by Huston Smith will find this a complementary, analogous and accessible guide to understanding the diverse paths mystics have timelessly trod. The authors begin with a sympathetic exploration of the mystical impulse and its divisions into "essential" (individually derived) and "empiricist" (culturally derived) strands before tracing the ways in which mystics have influenced their various religions or folk-belief systems. And it is in these riveting components of their synthesis of cultural history and faith experience that the Carmodys achieve brilliance. Generously excerpting texts from the Hindu Vedas to Martin Buber's *Judaic Tales From the Hasidim* and Ibn al-Arabi's *Islamic Bezels of Wisdom*, they place mysticism on the cutting edge of religions worldwide. (John Carmody lost his long battle with cancer on September 23.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Mysticism is the most elusive aspect of spirituality, yet transcendent experiences are integral to every religion and the subject of countless religious texts. In their introductory study of mysticism in world religions, the Carmodys define a mystical experience as one in which "the person having the experience feels drawn into a direct encounter with ultimate reality, the very foundation of everything that is." This is an "essentialist" perspective, one that emphasizes the universality of mysticism. The opposite approach, the empiricist viewpoint, is much more concerned with particulars and eschews generalizations. The Carmodys find merit in both viewpoints as they pick their way carefully through all the nuances of Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese and Japanese religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the traditional religions of the peoples of North America, Latin America, Australia, and Africa. Their synopses of each religion are excellent and of great value in their own right, but their explication of mysticism lacks examples of specific experiences, thus remaining rather abstract. Still, the book does cover an enormous amount of fascinating and invaluable material. *Donna Seaman*

Review

"A brilliant and moving overview of representative moments in the mystical tradition of the world's major religions....More than introducing us to the sacramental, metaphorical language of the mystics and providing a refreshing, liberating, and kaleidoscopic guide to creative self-transformation, Denise and John Carmody share their own spiritual sensitivity with us." --Leonard J. Biallas, Division of Theology and Philosophy, *Quincy University*

"The best single-volume, popular book to date on mysticism east and west. Erudite, concise, nuanced, balanced, and pellucid, it captures both the mind and heart of the world's great mystical traditions." --Harvey D. Egan, Professor of Systematic and Mystical Theology, *Boston College*

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