

From

Marion Milne, *The Suppressed Madmen of Surrealism* (1987)

18

1973: Some notes on psychoanalytic ideas about mysticism

This paper was originally written for a book of papers by her colleagues in honour of Paula Heimann's seventy-fifth birthday.

This paper began when I became aware of a need to look at psychoanalysts' ideas about mysticism, partly because of occasionally having patients who practised some form of meditation. This paper is therefore an account of what I found, beginning in the first part with a look at what my own ideas about it had been, both before and after becoming an analyst, and going on, in the second part, to see what has been written about it by other analysts. While writing both parts I have in fact become aware of a process going on; I can think of no better description for it than Bion's phrase (though it is a formulation that I did not in fact discover till near the end of this study) – 'an idea in search of a thinker'.¹

With this in mind I now remembered that a first hint of such a preoccupation had occurred, in 1916, in a conversation with a schoolfriend, a very intelligent girl who won a Mathematics scholarship to Cambridge, about the nature of thinking. The discussion had ended with us both agreeing that 'it thinks you'.² Also, it was partly this same preoccupation which led me, in 1926, to try and record, in diary form, the results of practising different kinds of attention, especially a wide unfocused kind. This was an undertaking which eventually resulted in my first book and its sequel.³ Amongst the great number of letters that I received about the first book were a few that made me realize that some of the

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experiences I had described might be called 'mystical', a fact which I had not realized; also there were some letters that forced me to ask myself the question, What is the relation between mysticism and madness?

Then, in the early 1930s, I had a phase of reading various books about mysticism, including Suzuki on Zen Buddhism,⁴ the Lao Tze,⁵ Patanjali,⁶ and a summary of the Western mystical tradition whose title or author I do not remember, but from which I picked one statement which I never forgot because it seemed so surprising. As far as I remember, it said that a beginning of mystical experience could be learning how to attend to one's own body awareness, from inside, even beginning with one's big toe.

A little later I read Silberer's *Problems of Mysticism and its Symbolism*.⁷ I do not remember what I learnt from this, but it did serve to strengthen my interest in those sudden moments of intensified perception of the outer world that I had already been studying in my first book, and that I was about to continue to study in my second.

When, in 1940, I began training as a psychoanalyst, I was so busy learning how to do it and how to pass my initiation tests into the inner circle of psychoanalysts that I forgot some of my earlier experiences – or rather, put them aside for the time being. The beginning of their return (1947) can, I think, be illustrated by a remark made to me by a boy of 6 in his analysis (see Chapter 4). He had done much painting of houses using black for the roofs and at one moment had said, 'Not horrid black, lovely black, if it's wet and shiny'. Now I found I had made a note in the margin of my notes about this, adding a quotation, 'There is in God a deep but dazzling darkness'.⁸ I also remembered that the only bit that had stuck in my mind after learning something of the philosophy of Spinoza, at the university, was the phrase, as I remembered it, 'The night in which all cows are black'; also there was Edward Thomas's poem *Out in the Dark*. About this time too, my adult patient, Susan, (see Chapter 6) had told me she had just discovered the word 'mystic' and decided that she herself must be one, in the light of certain intense experiences that she had once had, before being given ECT. Soon after this I happened to find Reich's *Character Analysis* and I pondered on his insistence that all mystical experience is due to the misinterpretation of sexual feelings.⁹ This seemed a possibly useful idea, as this patient had massive sexual inhibitions. However, I did not think this was at all the whole story.

It was in 1950 when this same patient did begin to draw that she produced many variants of a circle, as I have described in 'The Yell of

Joy's papers (see Chapter 10). Although at first I had tried thinking of the circle as standing for the breast this did not seem to get us very far, so gradually I had tried looking on it as representing, not an object, but some kind of ego state. This thought then took me back to Suzuki's book and the Chinese Cow Herding pictures that he reproduces in the appendix, for here, in the series of twelve circular pictures showing the progress in the sage's task of learning to control his attention, which is shown as a cow (in some versions a bull), the eighth one is shown as a complete blank, the sage and his hut and cow have all disappeared.

This theme of blankness, emptiness of thought, then led me on to ideas about a 'bad' blankness and 'good' blankness, just as my boy patient had distinguished between horrid black and lovely black. In fact I was gradually coming to see that there might be a kind of blankness or gap in one's perception that could be of value and even a necessary stage in a creative process, a phase of a fertility cycle comparable to the emptiness of the fields in winter. I now began to suspect too that this set of ideas had been silently active even throughout the years of my analytic training. For instance, as early as 1942, when asked to give a lecture on any subject I liked to a group of educationists, I had chosen the title 'The Child's Capacity for Doubt' (see Chapter 1) and had elaborated on the positive aspects of not-knowing. At this time too there was always in the back of my mind the memory of Keats's letters and his use of the term 'negative capability' which I had first read in the 1930s. However, apart from my patient's claim of being a mystic having directed my attention to Reich's formulation in terms of the mystification of sexuality, I had continued to put aside my queries about mysticism itself during the years from 1940 to 1950. Instead, throughout this time, apart from writing my first three psychoanalytic papers which seem to have nothing to do with mysticism, I had been preoccupied with attempts to understand my own difficulties in learning how to paint. It was in 1950 (when the first edition of the book about painting was published)¹⁰ that something else happened which I can now see could have had something to do with what I had first read about training for mystical experience. It happened one day when sitting in a garden, at a residential art school, wanting to paint but unable to find a subject. In order to deal with the tension of the frustration I had started a deep breathing exercise and had been astonished to find that the world around me immediately became quite different and, by now, exceedingly paintable. It seemed odd, then, that turning one's attention inwards, not to awareness of one's big toe but to the inner sensations of breathing, should have such a marked effect on the

appearance and significance of the world, but I had not then thought of this in terms of mysticism.

It was in 1952 that I was brought back to the subject, as the result of being present at a discussion directed by Harold Walsby (not a psychoanalyst and working almost entirely outside academic circles) whose ideas as expressed on these occasions have not, so far as I know (he died in 1973), appeared in print. He spoke about the difficulties of equating intellect with logic and how the technique of formal reasoning and its assumptions enable us to manage the inanimate world but is incapable of dealing intelligently with the territory of the self and other selves, since these require a dialectic approach; that is the capacity to embrace the very contradictions that formal logic avoids. Walsby claimed that this other kind of thinking, which can be called mystical just because of its capacity for letting go the clinging to the distinction between subject and object, became relegated to the sphere of religion and so was alienated from what should be a complementary interplay with the ways of thinking based on the rules of formal logic. He had gone on to illustrate some of his ideas from the sayings of Lao Tze in the *Tao Te Ching*.¹¹

Although I had felt when first reading the *Tao Te Ching*, in the 1930s, that it meant a lot to me, I had not, as I have said, been able to relate it to psychoanalytic theory when I began to train as a psychoanalyst. The two streams of thought had therefore remained separate in my deeper preoccupations; but after hearing Walsby it had seemed it might be possible eventually to bring them together. And now, in 1973, I remembered that I had, in 1952, acquired a different, more modern translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, in fact the one used by Walsby, in which I had marked some of the aphorisms which had been especially mentioned by him as to do with what he called 'dialectical thinking.'

It was here that I remembered how, in my 1934 book, when finding much ambiguity in my ideas about the word god and having searched for an alternative term for 'ultimate reality', I had myself quoted from Lao Tze the aphorism, 'The TAO of which we speak is not the real TAO'. And now, when I looked at some of Walsby's markings about the TAO I found the following (I have added on the right side the earlier translation):

xiv It goes back to non-existence.

It is called the form of the formless,
And the image of non-existence.

This is the appearance of the
Non-Apparent
The form of the Non-Existent
This is the unfathomed mystery.

	It is called mystery. Meet it, you cannot see its face; Follow it, you cannot see its back.	Going before, its face is not seen; following after, its back is not observed.
xvi	Attain to the good of absolute vacuity.	Having emptied yourself of every thing remain where you are.
xxviii	He who knows the masculine and yet keeps to the feminine Will become a channel drawing all the world towards it; And then he can return again to the state of infancy. He who knows the white and yet keeps to the black Will become the standard of the world;	He who being a man remains a woman will become a universal channel. As an universal channel the eternal virtue will never forsake him. He will re-become a child. He who, being in the light remains in obscurity will become a universal model.

Several of these aphorisms were especially useful for me, for instance, 'It goes back to non-existence.' This seemed to be, for some patients, the crux of the matter, the paradox of being able to feel oneself in touch with non-existence while yet continuing to exist. For them non-existence was apparently thought of as forever, a total annihilation rather than a phase in the creative process of 'lifting an image out of the stream of perception'.

Similarly, 'Attain to the *good* of absolute vacuity' (my italics), did have a particular meaning for me and this, in spite of the fact that it could easily provide, if misunderstood, an excuse for a total mental self-blinding, a dangerous denial of unpleasant truths, both in ourselves and the world, denials that could in fact lead to the total disaster of a nuclear war. Also there was one memory that reminded me that I had had ideas about the value of 'absolute vacuity' on quite a practical, everyday level. It was in the 1930s, when attending a school prize-giving, the giver-away of the prizes, Lady So-and-So wearing a feather boa, had ended her speech by saying, 'and do you also know how to wipe your minds free of learning?' Perhaps arrogantly, I had wondered how she knew. I also remembered that one of the tasks I used to set myself, then, was not only to practise wiping my mind free of learning, with its visual image of a wiped clean blackboard, but also the task of stopping internal chatter of thoughts, to reach an inner silence.

As for knowing the masculine yet keeping to the feminine, this was a concept that I had eventually struggled with in my 1934 book. Also, in the saying, 'He who knows the white yet keeps to the

black', the key word for me was 'keeps', that is an active relating to the dark, not a passive submergence in it. For this reminded me of how the dragon-like Leviathan creature in Blake's picture (see *Figure 44*, p. 171) seems to be in danger of (or in intense desire for?) complete submergence in the sea. By contrast, in 'The Morning Stars' picture (*Figure 56*, p. 205) the moon goddess is driving a team of very active dragons, in exact complementary symmetry with the sun god's team of horses on the opposite side of the picture.

At this point I had to remind myself how, in my own 1956 lecture, I had referred to the work of Ehrenzweig, and his first book where he maintains that mystic feeling is explained by our rational surface mind's incapacity to visualize the inarticulate images of the depth mind,¹² an idea which he further develops in his second book *The Hidden Order of Art*.¹³ So here, for me, the three streams were coming together with both Maritain and Walsby saying that the process which goes on in the depths essentially involves an undoing of the split into subject and object which is the very basis of our logical thinking.

Another step seems to have come from writing my Athens paper (1960: see Chapter 14) about the importance of the direct non-symbolic internal awareness of one's own body from inside; in fact, the ongoing background or matrix of one's own sense of being which can yet become foreground once one has learnt the skill of directing attention to it. Again, I had not really thought of this in terms of mysticism; however, I could now see that the idea went back once more to the 1930s, back to my amused surprise that a beginning of a mystic's training could be to become aware of one's own toe from inside. Certainly, I really had found, in my own experiments, that the deliberate effort, at times, to wipe out all awareness of an imageless existing, within one's own body, this could result in a way of being that was not only highly recuperative but also a great enrichment of one's appreciation of the outer world. And this reminded me how, in the Cow Herding pictures, after the blank circle the last one shows the sage returned to the market-place. No doubt it was this feeling about what happens to one's body awareness that had made me borrow from somewhere for the Athens paper the phrase 'divine ground of one's being' – because this was as accurate a description as I could then find for what seems to happen to one's sense of self when consciousness does suffuse the whole of the body from inside and all focused images are got rid of, an inner action that seemed to be a kind of dialectical reunion of body and mind. As I have said, it was not till later that I realized what had

been left out in the Athens description was the awareness of one's own breathing.

This thought of a felt imageless state now reminded me that also in the mid-1930s I had developed a technique for dealing with 'bad' moods of my own, moods of restless unease, by saying silently to myself, 'I have nothing, I know nothing, I want nothing.' I did not then know where the phrase came from, I might even have invented it – but it certainly worked. Then I had given it up when I started training to be a psychoanalyst for I thought it surely contained a most massive denial and so could not be looked on as healthy at all. Now however I was beginning to guess that there might be more sense in this inner gesture than I had recently allowed. Also I found out that I had certainly not invented it for I was now told that it came from the thirteenth-century German mystic, Meister Eckhart, whose books I had not read but who had most likely been quoted in the 'forgotten' one that I had read.

Another landmark had been when, during the middle 1960s, after writing the account of the analysis of my patient, Susan, who had at one time thought she was a mystic, I had chosen the title *The Hands of the Living God* (from D. H. Lawrence's poem).¹⁴ This was because she had claimed that, before they gave her the ECT, she had felt she had known what St. Paul meant by 'the length and breadth and depth and height of the love of God',¹⁵ but after, she did not know any more. Certainly I thought that this god, being so spatially containing, holding, sounded very much more like a mother god than a father god.

I was now ready to begin the second half of my undertaking; that is to see what other analysts had felt about mysticism.¹⁶ I decided to do it by seeing if they thought the subject of sufficient importance to be mentioned in the indexes of their books. This meant that I would not include paperbacks, which usually have no index, and, to keep the study of manageable size, I would include only qualified Freudian psychoanalysts.

My psychoanalytic books (the hardbacks) were arranged alphabetically on the shelf; I began at the end with Winnicott, and found only two references in all the indexes of his many books. In one he talks of mysticism in terms of a secret communication with a subjective satisfying object.¹⁷ In another place he compares the mystic and the behaviourist in terms of where they find infinity, either at the centre of the self or 'beyond the moon to the stars and to . . . time that has neither an end nor a beginning'.¹⁸

Next came Silberer. He makes only three page references to

mysticism, one being to what he calls the diabolic, as contrasted with the divine kind and which he describes as phantasmic appearances that partly flatter the wish for power and other wishes. Also he says that the true mysticism is characterized by an extension of personality, the false by a shrinking.

There were no references in Ella Sharpe.

Then came Reich. I found he elaborates at length, in many books, his view of mysticism as distorted sexuality, insisting that the mystical response does not allow the perception of sexual excitation and precludes orgasmic release.¹⁹ Also in his book *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* he gives many examples of what I think Silberer would have classified as the diabolic kind of mysticism.²⁰

Next was Rycroft, with no references in his hardback books but in his study of Reich (a paperback with no index so not really belonging here) he gives extensive summaries of Reich's views; for instance, the view that orgasm, since it unites the bodily and the spiritual, thereby breaks down the dichotomy between the natural scientific and religious-poetic vision of reality.²¹ However, says Rycroft, Reich's view was that anyone who achieves such a unification becomes a threat to the established order and is liable to be martyred, as Jesus was, and Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). Rycroft also tells of Reich's claim that, owing to the defensive character-armouring the majority never achieve orgasm in this sense.

I could only find one reference in Rickman, that is to the use of magical words in most mystical cults.²²

I found no references, amongst the volumes that were on my bookshelf, in the works of Hanna Segal, Herbert Rosenfeld, Money-Kyrle, Meltzer, Bertram Lewis, R. D. Laing (hardback only), nor in the works of Melanie Klein; but in the *New Directions in Psycho-Analysis*, which contains papers by sixteen different people (including one by me), there is one reference and that is by Joan Riviere.²³ Although she refers to the unconscious sources of our being and the reality of sensations, emotions, and so on, and claims that these realities are the origin of mystical tendencies, she maintains that their explanation is to be found in *phantasies*, such as of bodily incorporation, union, fusion and inner possession.

In all my Ernest Jones books I could find only two references, both in the third volume of the life of Freud.²⁴ These are to do with Freud's admitting that his study of religious belief was limited to that of the common man, and that he regretted having ignored 'the rarer and more profound type of religious emotion as experienced by mystics and saints'.

In Freud's own work I found three references. In *Civilization and*

its Discontents,²⁵ after discussing whether the oceanic feeling of oneness with the universe can be considered the source of religious needs he goes on to tell of the friend who claimed that the practice of yoga, in fixing attention on a bodily function, especially breathing, brings new sensations and coanaesthesia. Freud sees in this a physiological basis for much of the wisdom of mysticism.²⁶ In *Moses and Monotheism* he talks of how Jewish monotheism, borrowed from Egypt, included the rejection of magic and mysticism.²⁷ In his posthumously published *Findings, Problems, Ideas* he says, 'Mysticism is the obscure self-perception of the realm outside the ego, of the id'.²⁸

In the works of Anna Freud I found no references.

In Fenichel's introduction to *The Psycho-Analytic Study of the Neuroses* I found one reference.²⁹ He maintains that the science of psychoanalysis does include the rudiments of mystical tradition but compares these to the activities of the police dog in police investigations, which Reik saw (1925) as the survival of the animal oracle.

Now came Brierley, *Trends in Psycho-Analysis*,³⁰ and Bion's *Attention and Interpretation*.³¹ I had bought the Bion but not yet read it. Now I found that both had much to say about mystics and mysticism.

Brierley is concerned with the Christian mystics and quotes extensively from Evelyn Underhill.³² For instance:

'The mystics are fond of this metaphor – "I live in the ocean of God as a fish in the sea". That is the life of union, of conscious abiding in God: . . . It brings with it great creative power. Once more we come back for our best definition to St Paul's "I live, yet not I".'

Brierley herself says that blissful experience is not the element most emphasized by Christian mystics, rather it is their overwhelming conviction of the reality of God: and she speaks of the mystics' conviction that religion is the only true realism.

In addition to talking about mysticism, Brierley also discusses the pros and cons of what she calls the 'integration of sanctity' and speculates about what psychotic elements may be included in it. In general her conclusion is that the true spiritual vocation is very rare. She says that the findings of psychoanalysis suggest:

'that the high road for the majority does not lead to super-ego autocracy and selective idealisation, but to a more inclusive and democratic harmonization of id, ego, and super-ego systems, to

the development of a more comprehensive reality-sense and to the more enlightened ego-direction of personal life.'

In short, Brierley tries translating the Christian mystics' accounts of their experiences into psychoanalytic terms although she does not think that this is all there is to be said about it.³³

Bion on the other hand does the opposite (twenty-one years later) in that he tries using religious terminology to denote what happens in psychoanalysis. He is able to do this because of an initial decision to use the terms mystic and genius interchangeably, even including the term 'messiah'. I was not unsympathetic to this usage, having thought so much about how creativity evolves out of darkness, especially when Bion follows Meister Eckhart's use of the word 'godhead' as 'that which contains all distinctions as yet undeveloped and which is therefore Darkness and Formlessness'.³⁴

Bion goes on to ask whether it is possible, through psychoanalytic interpretation, to pass from knowing the phenomena of the real self to being the real self. His answer is that the further steps to bridge the gap must come from the analysand, 'or from a particular part of the analysand, namely his "godhead", which must consent to incarnation in the person of the analysand'. But he adds that this is not the same as for the analysand consenting to become god (or the 'godhead' of which 'god' is the phenomenological counterpart) as this latter would seem to be nearer to insanity. He maintains that the difference here is a matter of direction.

Bion also discusses the relation of the mystic or genius to the group, or 'Establishment' as being one in which they both need each other, and he illustrates this by reference to psychoanalytic societies. He sees the dynamics of this relation in terms of an explosive force within a restraining framework, as for instance 'the art form outmoded by new forces requiring representation'. He adds:

'The most powerful emotional explosion known so far, spreading to many cultures and over many centuries, has been that produced by the formulations of Jesus.³⁵ The effects are still felt and present grave problems of containment even now, though some measure of control has been established.'

Besides his use of religious terminology, Bion uses another representation to denote the ultimate reality, or God. He calls it '0' and defines the mystic as a thinker who claims the capacity for direct contact with it. He adds that '0' is unknowable, except for the mystic.

'For the same reason that makes it impossible to sing potatoes;

they may be grown or pulled or eaten, but not sung. Reality has to be "been"; there should be a transitive verb "to be" expressly for use with the term "reality".³⁶

However, although '0' is Darkness and Formlessness, it can, says Bion, be conjectured phenomenologically, through knowledge gained by experience and formulated in terms derived from sensuous experience.

So also, Bion points out, psychoanalytic events cannot be stated directly, any more than those of other scientific research and he demonstrates the use of this sign '0' to denote what happens in psychoanalytic sessions. Thus he says that 'what takes place in the consulting room is an emotional situation which is itself the intersection of an evolving "0" with another evolving "0"'; and he adds that the messianic idea is a term representing '0' at the point at which its evolution and the evolution of a thinker intersect. Then, following up his use of this term he says that there are also messianic ideas, which may be confused with the person, he may believe he is the messiah. Bion adds that there is a profound difference between 'being "0"' and rivalry with '0', the latter being characterized by envy, hate, love, megalomania.

Bion also makes the statement that the suspension of memory and desire promotes exercise of aspects of the psyche that have no background of sensuous experience. Also his last sentence in the book, after having talked of the 'mathematics of growth', is:

'What is to be sought is an activity that is both the restoration of god (the Mother) and the evolution of god (the formless, infinite, ineffable, non-existent), which can be found only in the state in which there is no memory, desire, understanding.'

Yes, I thought, no memory, desire, or understanding, that's all right, but what about sensory awareness of breathing, which plays such a crucial role in Eastern mystical training systems? Still my own guess was that part of the task of the restoration of the Mother consists in consciousness becoming able to relate itself to, suffuse, every part of one's own body, Mother Nature, through attending to one's own breathing. But surely also there is needed the restoration of the father as well as the mother; for here I remembered Silberer's quoting the seventeenth-century mystical fable in which the hero becomes responsible for two lovers within a crystal globe, who are drowned, and it is the hero's task to restore them to life. In fact, it even seemed possible that the task of consciousness becoming able to relate itself to one's own body, from inside, could be symbolized, in

phantasy, by the idea of the internal father and mother in creative union.

Finally, on my bookshelf, Balint and Abraham, with no index reference to mystics in either of them. But Balint's concepts of the 'philobat', always seeking the outer empty spaces, and the 'ocknophil', always wanting to cling so that there is no space between self and object, both seemed to be possible defences against making a dialectic relation to one's inner space, the space that is discovered when there is no clinging to knowledge, memory or desire – in fact, making a reliable contact with what Bion calls '0', the empty circle which is also the inner silence.³⁷ But to get this does seem to involve a long journey for many of us.

I received this letter from Marjorie Brierley after I had sent her a copy of this paper.

'24 January, 1975

Dear Mrs Milner,

Thank you for your letter and paper and the return envelope, which was most considerate. Unfortunately they arrived at a rather unfavourable time because I have to be out most of tomorrow and have someone coming to lunch on Saturday so, though I would have liked a bit longer to think about it, I must do what I can quickly today if you are to get paper back in good time for your dead-line. One tends to remember people as one last saw them. It was quite a surprise to hear that Paula Heimann was having her 75th birthday. I am glad she is having a Zeitschrift. If opportunity offers will you give her my congratulations?

First, *Webster's Biographical Dictionary* gives the dates for Eckhart as 1260?–1327?, i.e. not exactly known but presumably approximate.

Next, the paper itself. I found the account of your mental Odyssey most interesting. You certainly seem to have been sped on by learning from your patients, which is as it should be. I think you are probably right about the common factor between mysticism and creativity and the creative nature of perception. Every fresh perception assimilated into the pre-existing pattern must modify this, i.e. create a more or less new pattern. Your increase in perception following the breathing exercise, suddenly finding everything paintable, must have been striking. Without wishing to be too mundane, I suspect the breathing had to do with

it because it would have resulted apart from anything else in much better oxygenation of your brain.

It doesn't seem to have occurred to you that the '0' symbolises not only the emptied mind and the infant's open mouth but also the womb. It could be that a kind of temporary psychic regression to the womb is a prerequisite for both creativity and mystical experience. Christian literature abounds in references to the need to be re-born. It is a theme by no means limited to Xty. Primitive initiation ceremonies include such symbolizations, including giving a new name to the initiate. Antaeus renewed his strength every time he retouched Mother Earth, etc., etc.

It also struck me that your emphasis was on darkness, rather than light. Darkness can connote many things but most commonly the unknown, the Unconscious and also, the safe darkness of the womb (your little boy's good blackness when he and his mother were one, as he now wishes you and he were? His horrid blackness could refer to his night fears when alone with mother?) The mystic's dark night of the soul, in which all sense of the love and presence of God is lost, often said to precede illumination and the unio mystica, would be a most horrid blackness too. It would seem that both creativity and mystical experience emerge from or are mediated through, the Unconscious. I believe in the existence of telepathy in its literal sense of empathetic communication, so that I think games of telecard-reading etc. are a bit off the beam. When your idea finds its thinker I fancy the unconscious is sensitised to a kind of mental climate which comes through and is translated into conceptions.

Emptying of the mind, frequently aided by breathing methods, seems to be a common feature of "spiritual" life of most major religions. I am not sure how common your becoming aware from the big toe up is. Certainly no "still small voice" can be heard above what you aptly call the chatter of the mind. A feature of experiences of the "peace that passeth all understanding" is timelessness; they have a quality of eternity, though themselves transient.

Re your summary of my efforts, I do not think you have misrepresented me. Naturally you couldn't give more than a brief sketch but I am glad you said I didn't think that was all there was to it. Because I don't think we have any right to make assertions on ultimate issues like the existence or non-existence of God, etc. Re Bion I would agree that mystics and geniuses have features in common but am not at all sure the terms are interchangeable. His "godhead" in Christian terms would be God Immanent, the

counterpart to God transcendent. But I have't read this book of his (I don't blame you for not always reading books you buy!) and your summary needs much more thought than there is time now to give it, as indeed the whole paper does. I don't think these hasty ruminations and first impressions will be much use to you but they are the best I can do in present circumstances.

Hoping the birthday, your paper and Zeitschrift itself will be a great success.

Yours sincerely,
Marjorie Brierley

P.S. Had never heard of Walsby before but have long been convinced that our intelligence is intended to cope with the external environment and thus not a good instrument for dealing with subjective experience. Intuition is more serviceable here but not necessarily reliable because more difficult to evaluate and far more open to selective influence of personal bias etc.?

Here are a few extracts from a letter I received from Bion after I had sent him my mysticism paper.

'A few immediate reactions to your paper. I found it both interesting and stimulating. . . .

Have you read Gerard Manley Hopkins "Habit of Perfection", "Candle indoors" and the "terrible" poem all very illuminating in this context. Also Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess" which I am sure you know better than I do but it may be worth reading again if you haven't read it recently. I also find very sympathetic St John of the Cross though unfortunately I depend on translation which is very bad, even the best like a little of Roy Campbell . . . likewise Lorca . . . Meister Eckhart unfortunately I cannot get in any reasonably compact form altho' it is obvious from the effect that he had on the "Establishment" that he was right on the nail. Dante, in spite of his somewhat off-putting letters, must, I think, at the end of the Paradiso, be after the same thing. The *Bhagavadgita* I think is marvellous in spite of the translation. I cannot now undo my mispent youth by learning French, Spanish, Sanskrit. Why is one almost fit to start one's education when it is nearer one's second childhood than one's first? I don't know. Perhaps I had better write a paper on it! . . . Like a fool I cannot find your letter so I shall have to send this off without being able to answer it.'

I cannot remember what I said in my letter, but suspect it may have been asking his views about some mystical training insisting on becoming aware of one's body, even one's big toe, from the inside.

References

- 1 Bion, W. R. (1970) *Attention and Interpretation*. London: Tavistock, p. 88.
- 2 H. Guntrip, having read this paper, wrote to me: 'Re: "it thinks you" and "Ideas in search of a thinker", I have come to feel there is an insistent pressure of a hidden, undiscovered True Self in search of an owner, with roots in the unmothered infant in search of a parent.'
- 3 Milner, M. (1934) *A Life of One's Own*; (1937) *An Experiment in Leisure*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- 4 Suzuki, D. T. (1927) *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. First series. Kyoto, Japan: Luzac & Co. for the Eastern Buddhist Society.
- 5 Lao Tze (c. 600 BC) *Tao Te Ching*. Trans. W. Gosser Wild (1927) London: Rider & Co. A book of aphorisms, the title sometimes being translated as 'The Simple Way'.
- 6 Patanjali (1974) *Aphorisms of Yoga*. London: Faber & Faber.
- 7 Silberer, H. (1917) *Problems of Mysticism and its Symbolism*. New York: Moffat.
- 8 Henry Vaughan (1621-95) in his poem *The Night*. Here is the relevant verse:

"There is in God – some say –
A deep, but dazzling darkness; as men here
Say it is late and dusky, because they
See not all clear.
O for that Night! where I in Him
Might live invisible and dim."
- 9 Reich, W. (1950) *Character Analysis*. London: Vision Press.
- 10 Milner, M. (1950) *On Not Being Able to Paint*. London: Heinemann.
- 11 Lao Tze (c. 600 BC) *Tao Te Ching*. Trans. Ch'u Ta Kao (1937) London: Buddhist Society.
- 12 Ehrenzweig, A. (1953) *The Psycho-Analysis of Aesthetic Hearing and Perception*. London: Routledge.
- 13 Ehrenzweig, A. (1967) *The Hidden Order of Art*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- 14 Milner, M. (1969) *The Hands of the Living God*. London: Hogarth.

'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God
But it is a much more fearful thing to fall out of them.'

- 15 In his letter to the Hebrews, 10: 31.
- 16 While working on this paper I often found myself not entirely satisfied with the use of the word 'mysticism' for psychoanalytic thinking; it seemed too liable to get associated with 'mystification'. But when I tried to find another word to denote a particular kind of enlargement of consciousness different from the everyday 'common-sense' kind, I failed to find one.
- 17 Winnicott, D. W. (1965) *The Maturation Process in the Facilitating Environment*. Ch. 17. London: Tavistock.
- 18 Winnicott, D. W. (1971) *Playing and Reality*. Ch 8. London: Tavistock.
- 19 For example, Reich, W. (1927) *The Function of the Orgasm*. (1942 edn.) New York: Orgone Institute. Here Reich does not seem to have known about the Indian cult of ecstasy, Tantra.
- 20 Reich, W. (1934) *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. London: Souvenir Press.
- 21 Rycroft, C. (1971) *Reich*. London: Fontana.
- 22 Rickman, J. (1957) *Selected Contributions to Psycho-Analysis*. London: Hogarth.
- 23 Riviere, J. (1955) The Unconscious Phantasy of an Inner World Reflected in Literature. In M. Klein, P. Heimann, S. Isaacs, and J. Riviere (eds.) *New Directions in Psycho-Analysis*. London: Tavistock.
- 24 Jones, E. J. (1957) *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 3. London: Hogarth.
- 25 Freud, S. (1930) *Civilization and its Discontents*. Standard Edition 21.
- 26 Later I found another reference to mysticism in Freud's writing, though not mentioned in the index. In Freud, S. (1920) *The Psychogenesis of a Case of Female Homosexuality*. Standard Edition 18, on p. 165 this sentence occurs: 'I know, indeed, that the craving of mankind for mysticism is ineradicable.' This follows his referring to 'the unconscious, the real centre of our mental life, the part of us that is so much nearer the divine than our poor consciousness'.
- 27 Freud, S. (1939) *Moses and Monotheism*. Standard Edition 23. Compare Bakan, D. (1955) *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand.
- 28 Freud, S. (1940) *Findings, Problems, Ideas*. Standard Edition 23.

Paula Heimann, on seeing the manuscript of this paper, writes that this is one of the translations she does not agree with. Hers would be 'Mysticism is the dark self perception of the realm of the id, the realm outside the ego'. She adds that Freud's word is 'dunkel' and that 'dark' has far more poetry than 'obscure'. . . . Having more poetry it is more

true. Moreover, the word 'dark' is associated with natural phenomena, whereas 'obscure' suggests something made by men.

She also says that Freud uses 'Mystik' in an article 'Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy' (1921), Standard Edition 18. He says there: 'Psycho-Analysis . . . stands in opposition to everything that is conventionally restricted, well-established and generally accepted. Not for the first time would it be offering its help to the obscure but indestructible surmises of the common people against the obscurantism of educated opinion.'

Again Paula Heimann prefers a different translation: 'Not for the first time would it be offering its help to the dark but indestructible, inarticulate hunches of the people against the arrogant know-all of the educated.'

- 29 Fenichel, O. (1946) *The Psycho-Analytic Study of the Neuroses*. London: Kegan Paul.
- 30 Brierley, M. (1951) *Trends in Psycho-Analysis*. London: Hogarth.
- 31 Bion, W. R. (1970) *Attention and Interpretation*. London: Tavistock.
- 32 Underhill, E. (1913) *The Mystic Way*. London: Dent. (1927) *Man and the Supernatural*. London: Methuen. (1946) *Collected Papers* (ed. L. Menzies). London: Longman Green.
- 33 A paper on the 'Psycho-analytical Aspects of Mystical States', including the practice of yoga, was given to the British Psycho-Analytical Society in 1970 by F. W. Graham but as it is not yet published it does not come within the scope of this study.
- 34 If I had been allowed more space I could have gone on to see what Jungian analysts have said about mysticism. However, after finishing this paper I did happen to be looking at Jung's *Psychological Types* and came upon extensive quotations from Eckhart, which helped me to amplify the passage quoted from Bion. (C. J. Jung (1933) *Psychological Types*. London: Kegan Paul.)
- 35 This reminded me of the exploding lines of light radiating out from the figure of Jesus in Blake's *Job* pictures.
- 36 Reading this book sent me back to an earlier one which I also had not read: Bion, W. R. (1965) *Transformations*. London: Heinemann. Here the word mystic does not appear in the index, but does in the text, as if Bion had not yet quite realized how important the word was going to become in his thinking and in his next book. But in it I found much elaboration of his use of the symbol '0' and some of what I have tried to describe here of his use of this is taken from that book.
- 37 Balint, M. (1959) *Thrills and Regressions*. London: Hogarth.

1975: A discussion of Masud Khan's paper 'In Search of the Dreaming Experience'

Masud Khan's paper was given to the International Psycho-Analytical Congress in London in 1975 and I was one of the discussants.¹

When Dr Pontalis wrote asking me to contribute to this discussion he said it was because I seemed to use dreams in a very personal way, as described in my last book about a patient who did doodle drawings.² I answered that I did not think I used them in any special way, as I only looked for associations, and if there were none I tried to see if I could find understandable symbols. I therefore asked him for examples of what he meant. He wrote back quoting what I had said in the book, about two of the patient's dreams; he then said that I had considered the dream neither as a message or text to be deciphered nor as a compromise between repressed desires and ego defence mechanisms, but as a witness of a state of being; in fact as an attempt at symbolization, rather than as a symbolic language to be decoded, and how this makes it possible to work on the manifest content without necessarily considering it as a distortion of the latent content. He said he wants this approach, although it may be 'usual' for me, made explicit. I will try, very tentatively, at least to make some comments on this problem.

First, I think that what I do is perhaps not so way out. I think it does follow from Ernest Jones's list of what gets symbolized, since he includes the word 'self' in his list. So this is perhaps the central problem, just because what it is that this word self denotes is so very elusive.

In listening to the discussions here this week on change in patients