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1. The Encounter with Mystery

The mystery of the unseen belongs to Allah.
Then wait; I too will wait with you. (10:20)

The sacred journey inward in pursuit of a traditional spirituality in the modern world must commence with the human confrontation with the Divine Mystery. As point of departure on a voyage that will never end, the idea of mystery commences the ascending journey through the byways of this world in search of an essence that will resolve the questions that, though often not consciously articulated, lie sequestered deep within human consciousness. Our challenge is to lift the veil that separates the manifested world of forms from the unseen world of the spirit and discover thereby a conscious experience of the truth. Embedded within the external world of forms lies a passageway to the internal world of spirituality, which, when experienced, comes alive and breathes spirit and life within human consciousness. To give oneself up to this ancient presence is to begin the process of transcending human limitations; to seek answers to the universal enigma we are confronted with in life is to set the heart on fire with the vision of the Spirit of God as the Origin, Source, Center, and End of all spirituality.

Prior to my conversion to Islam over thirty years ago when I was in my mid-twenties, I felt strangely torn between the forces of two conflicting realities and deeply confused by the experience of modern life that offers people of our time two convincing possibilities. People today can either deny the fundamental mystery of life altogether, or they can confront this mystery by lifting the veil that separates the seeming reality of this world from the true reality of the spiritual world.[1] Because the physicality of this world imposes a superficial

[1] The Prophet has said in a well-known *hadith*: "God has seventy thousand veils of light and darkness; were He to draw their curtain, then would the splendors of His Aspect (or Countenance or Face [*wajh*]) surely consume everyone who apprehended Him with his sight." Also, the Archangel Gabriel (*Jibril*) has said: "Between me and Him are seventy thousand veils of light." The veil of veils in this context suggests the absolute barrier that exists in the modern world between the knowledge of God and the ignorance of man based on a human attitude that precludes any opening to the spiritual world, much less to the Spirit of God itself.

and surface reality onto the human consciousness that is as unsatisfactory as it is overwhelming, many people today have second thoughts about the kind of life they are leading and are searching for a deeper meaning by discovering within themselves a genuine "sense of the sacred." Many people today seek to lift the existential mask of their modernist self to reveal the true soul that lies within the core of their being. In many ways, we are still confronted with a mystery that is both fundamental and sacred: fundamental because the unseen side of reality will always remain mysterious by definition, and sacred because its presence imposes a holy quality that renders the Divine Mystery less obscure and more accessible to the human sensibility. To deny the mystery or neutralize its sublime attraction would be as if to shoot a bird in flight, expressing a willingness to see in its fall to earth the end of the mystery that keeps its afloat, and to destroy the courage it takes to fly over mountains and across oceans in its wanderings.

The story of my conversion to Islam over thirty years ago has already been told in another place,[2] but suffice it to say in this context that by becoming Muslim, I was acknowledging, indeed embracing, the existential challenge to confront and lift the aura of mystery that overlays all of human existence as a transparent veil. One traditional saying (*hadith*) of the Messenger Muhammad, upon whom blessings and peace, expresses it this way: "Human excellence lies in worshipping Allah *as if* you saw Him, for even if you do not see Him, nevertheless He sees you."[3] The modern psyche already has a number of questions that haunt it with the specter of missed opportunity and

[2] *The Seeker and the Way: Reflections of a Muslim Convert* (Kuala Lumpur: Noordeen Publishers, 1998).

[3] Faith requires a leap of mind through the conditional "as if" in order to see with the inner eye and thus to understand that which cannot be seen with the external eyes. The veil separating man from God is both opaque and transparent—opaque because "man is his own veil," and transparent because "man is his own revelation" and as a consequence can lift the veil. If God is a mystery, then we are expected to live the mystery of God through the mystery of faith. "Man must feel that faith is something other than ordinary logic and that it sees things in terms of God and not in terms of the world; and by this fact, the believer is himself not entirely of this world, his faith is not a 'natural' thought, but a 'supernatural' assent . . . and this divine transparency of earthly things . . . confers on faith a sort of concrete and sacramental mystery, in short, an element of the marvelous which makes the believer a being marked by the supernatural" (Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam* [Bloomington, Ind., World Wisdom Books, 1985], pp. 220-221).

unfulfilled potential. If the sky did not reflect its mysterious message of infinite space, then we might not be able to see the world of the spirit that is the hidden side of reality. If the planets did not stream on course around the sun and if night did not revert into day as a sacred verse (*ayat*) of God, then we might not be able to realize the implicit harmony and order of the universe or the progression of time within eternity. If the world were not so absolute in its creation and so relative in its manifestation, then we might not be challenged to transcend our limitations and escape the world of relativity for the world of permanence and certitude. If the conditions of life had been other than what they are, the modern mentality might have been able to justify the irony of its existence by clinging to a purely secular and externalized understanding of human existence. Perhaps we should be as daring and bold as the traditional saying of the Prophet suggests and worship Allah as if He really exists, rather than worshipping this life as if He does not exist. Perhaps we should live as though in possession of a secret that we struggle every day of our lives to make real through our thoughts, words, and actions.

One question we need to ask is: How do we understand the word "mystery" and how does it define and shape the way we understand ourselves and the world we live in? Many people today may even be surprised by a question that has little relevance to their daily lives. Who today is prepared to assert that there are mysteries surrounding us that will never be resolved, mysteries that actually heighten human consciousness, mysteries that promise alternative worlds and a deeper experience of life than we could ever imagine on our own. The question of mystery and its power to resolve the human dilemma no longer inspires the modern psyche. The modernist mentality of today wants answers not questions, facts that neutralize the mystery pertaining to our origins and final end through scientific speculation, when once there was a time when certain questions were not asked lest a person risk destroying the very forces that keep us asking them.

On the surface, the question of mystery is profoundly simple; we ask it because its subtle inscrutability confronts us at every turn and stimulates the desire to discover what lies at the heart of the human condition. On the other hand, the question of mystery is quite simply profound, so deep that although it will never be resolved within this world, it fuels the desire to transcend human limitations. Elements of the mysterious substantiate for humanity an ancient purpose to life's

procession through time; that which is knowable or provable through the evidence of human investigation is superseded by an ancient mystery—a *mysterium tremendum*—that positions us within a framework of time that does not pass us by and that creates an ambiance of wonder and bewilderment that opens onto the grace and beatitude of the supra-natural.

From within the cosmic wilderness there is placed within each person an initial spark—call it a form of energy, a vibration, a sound, or a light[4]—that initiates the line of human inquiry into the cosmic mystery. It is a spark that begins as a mystery, that becomes a hidden secret of the Supreme Being, that flowers into a revelation of the essential knowledge of God, that enters into the human soul as an eternal flame, that expresses itself as worship and praise of the Divinity, and that ultimately reflects through human virtue the qualities and attributes of God. Before a person can adopt a religious tradition, before any active participation in the life of the spirit, and before any true understanding of the role of a personal identity within a universal plan, this spark and the mystery it represents must be acknowledged and confronted.

The Divine Mystery is the Objectivity beyond the horizon of the human mentality, a metacosmic and infinite projection of both Truth and Reality; but this mystery comes down as a sacred presence in order to enter the ground of the human soul as a central and subjective experience. Because of the descent of the knowledge of God through the formal religions, humans know at least superficially that God exists and affects them in some way, but it may take a lifetime for that knowledge to become an inner realization that reflects back out into the world as forms of wise and virtuous behavior. When the human spirit meets the Spirit of God within the ground of the soul, that is the moment and the place when the knowledge of Truth becomes an experience of Presence.

The Divine Mystery in its objective and infinite mode is portrayed at a glance through the canopy of the night sky with the stars shining down their message of eternity and infinitude. The night sky, apart

[4] In the Islamic tradition, the universe is initiated through a vibratory sound with the words "*Kun fa yakoon*" ("Be and it becomes"), while the Biblical rendition of the creation begins with the words: "Let there be light."

from its serene and mysterious beauty, presents a pictorial representation of the cosmic reality. It is as if the heavenly bodies of the night sky have been designed by the Divine Mind to give humanity the experience of the presence of the Infinite. Despite their monumental distance on both physical and mental planes from true human comprehension, the stars offer a compelling experience of the mystery of the Divine. Yet we see this marvel every day of our lives without taking note of its profound implications. Ralph Waldo Emerson has put this thought quite eloquently and even a little mischievously: "One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. Seen in the streets of cities, how great they are! If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which men have been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile."[5]

At the heart of the cosmic universe lies a fundamental mystery that will never be resolved on the human plane of existence. Yet this mystery, like a lingering scent, stirs up desires and emotions that lead us to the edge, not of some forlorn darkness but of an ineffable light that illuminates a vast universe of aspiration and hope, a mystery that will witness the destiny of humankind as cloud-covered mountain peaks witness the valleys to which they are enjoined.

> Nor will Allah disclose to you the secrets of the unseen mystery. (3:179)

Modern science's claim to objectivity in its relentless investigation of physical reality negates the traditional conception of mystery as the point of departure toward an unseen reality and denies what according to the Quran is the interplay between what is seen and what is hidden. The universe has been reduced to a horizontal cross-section of a flat, expanding universe, although the infinite nature of the galaxies and the eternal projection of time through light years recalls the Quranic

[5] *Selected Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 207.

phrase, "verily a day in the sight of thy Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning" (22:47). It has become for us "this narrow world," and remains so even though we are regaled by images of billions of stars populating billions of galaxies, images that settle on the modern mind like so much dust permeating the air with nowhere to go. Nature has become "a dull affair," as Whitehead has observed, "merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly."

For the ancients, the mystery actually protected the integrity of the physical universe since they believed if God were to fully reveal Himself, the very focus of His attention would reduce the universe to ashes. Even Einstein, father of modern physics, did not rule out an appreciation of the fundamental mystery that lies at the heart of the universe, declaring that: "The most beautiful emotion that we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of all true art and all true science. Whoever does not have it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dim."[6] Yet most scientists of today follow more in the footsteps of Newton, who once irritably remarked, "'Tis the temper of the hot and superstitious part of mankind in matters of religion, ever to be fond of mysteries and for that reason to like best what they understand least."[7]

The reality of the Divine Mystery is contained within any number of spiritual traditions, from the Indians of North America who acknowledge the Great Mystery (*Wakan-Tanka*),[8] to the Muslims who acknowledge the mystery of the Unseen (*al-ghaib*). If the Divine

[6] Einstein, quoted in Bruce Vinall, *The Resonance of Quality*, unpublished PhD thesis (Bendigo: La Trobe University, 2002), p. 110.

[7] *The Betrayal of Tradition*, edited by Harry Oldmeadow (Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom Books, 2005), p. 85.

[8] The name *Wakan-Tanka* means literally "Great Sacred" (*wakan* = sacred) and has been translated alternatively as "Great Spirit" or "Great Mystery" and even "Great Powers." "As regards these Indian expressions, so needlessly the subject of controversy, we see no reason for not translating them as 'spirit,' 'mystery,' or 'sacred,' depending on the case. It is obviously unreasonable to suppose that these expressions have no meaning, that the Indians speak in order to say nothing, or that they adopt modes of expression without knowing why. That there is no complete equivalence between one language and another—or between one thought and another—is an entirely different question" (Frithjof Schuon, *The Feathered Sun* [Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom Books, 1990], p. 9).

Mystery were not central to the human mentality as a latent secret that demands exploration as well as explanation, then for thousands of years humanity would not have manifested the impulse toward the sacred and the mysterious through devotional worship and sacred art; nor would the yearning of the human consciousness for a higher consciousness have existed for millennia.

The Quran repeatedly calls upon the images of the Seen (*al-shahadah*), or the things of this world, and the Unseen (*al-ghaib*), or the Mystery that is implicit within the concept of the Supreme Being. The Quran elaborates on this mystery of the Unseen by identifying 99 names and qualities of the Divinity that humanize the image of the Divine Mystery of the Unseen so that humanity can understand what is required and what they must focus on in order to be truly spiritual beings. Among His many names, God is known as the Subtle and Mysterious (*al-Latif*), thereby establishing Himself once again as the unknowable as well as the All-Knowing (*al-Alim*). He is also the Near One (*al-Qarib*) and the Friend (*al-Wali*). As such, humanity can identify itself and approach the Divine Being indirectly, through a transparent veil as it were, because of the supra-human qualities and attributes of Allah set forth in the Quran. In Islam, to be human means first and foremost to attempt to model oneself on the divine names and qualities because these are "the best of names" (*al-asma al-husna*).

If Allah is the Divinity, the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner, mysterious and paradoxical, He is also characterized by the Quranic revelation in terms that humanity sees within its own being and can understand implicitly and "without question." The qualities and attributes are elusive and possibly unattainable on the one hand, but direct, spontaneous and above-all personal on the other hand. As *Homo sapiens* we are none other than a mirror reflection of God, a humanity that can internalize the Objectivity of the Divine within its own subjective being. Because of our intelligence, we have access to the knowledge of God. Because of our human will, we can internalize that knowledge through experience, thus overlaying the purely subjective being with the Divine Objectivity. The human "I" can be subsumed into the Divine "I" and we are gathered together into the unity of the cosmic We.

The Divine Mystery is the cosmic enigma of all time. Its inevitable presence within the human mind marks the absolute horizon to the mind's cosmic inquiry beyond which exist realms that no voyager will ever reach. We do not need to know fully the universal mystery that confronts us. We do, however, need to maintain an attitude of open spiritual inquiry, and this may serve as the key to the unfolding of this macrocosmic mystery within the microcosmic world of humankind. All people must discover, through their own experience, the inner ground of their own mystery—where the wind of the spirit begins to blow—and how this "hidden treasure" relates to the Divine Mystery. Having once crossed the threshold to the inner self, there to have experienced the human mystery, we can begin to develop an appreciation, if not the elusive comprehension, of the Divine Mystery, in keeping with the *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad, upon him blessings and peace, who said: "Know thyself in order to know God."

I remember myself as a devout child with a burning desire for God. As a matter of spiritual instinct, I felt the holy mystery that was embodied in the idea of God as a Supreme Being and Creator of all things. It seems that my "spiritual instincts" were still finely tuned in the manner of all young children who have newly "fallen from Heaven" and who are still close to the source of all Truth or what I have called elsewhere "truth's Truth." I remember that heightened consciousness of my childhood as an experience of true spirituality that I attempt to recapture even to this day. An example may serve to illustrate my point. When I was ten years old, I inherited a paper route from my two older brothers that, for two reasons, I hated with all my heart. First, it gave me my first taste of hard work, as the dark predawn of winter saw me rise from the warmth of my bed to face the bitter winter cold as I drove my bicycle down to the local newspaper outlet where I collected the newspapers. Second, it interfered with my near fanatic desire to attend daily Mass. Only if I rose at 5:00 a.m. did I have just enough time to deliver the newspapers (avoiding the neighborhood dogs that terrified my childhood sensibility) and get myself to the 7:00 a.m. Mass at the local church which was a 15-minute bicycle ride away from my house in the suburbs of Boston.

One cold winter's morning, I awoke later than was my custom and soon realized that I didn't have enough time to deliver the papers and make my way through the emerging dawn to attend the beloved ceremony of the Mass. I burst into inconsolable tears. This was

my initiation into the world of true desire for the mystery of God. Everything up to that point had been the ordinary experience of life; but this represented an experience of profound emotion that was as mysterious as it was raw and unexpected. The tears that fell down my cheeks opened my heart so that I began to yearn to transcend life's limitations and to seek the inner spiritual ground of my outward self. Many years have now passed, but this childhood memory is still vivid and continues to motivate my efforts in pursuit of the way. I remember this experience as the origin of my spiritual quest, the first initiatory "gift of tears."

St. Augustine has bequeathed to us an interesting insight about the nature of mystery and of ourselves. "People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering." Mystery can teach us something about ourselves, the world, and the universe that proclaims its marvels and wonders, but the value of mystery itself cannot be taught. No one will take you by the hand and teach you the miracle of the Mystery of the Unseen, for every person must find and face the mystery on the inner ground of the soul. We are confronted with a mystery of what lies outside us, and of what lies within us. To understand the outward mystery, we must understand the inward mystery, or to echo the sentiment of St. Augustine, it is time to start wondering, as we pass ourselves by.

The resolution to the perennial mystery that shapes our lives finds impetus and direction through two symbolic images, namely, the horizontal plane and vertical ascent. The world of the spirit is represented by the vertical perspective,[9] while science and the world of provable facts are presented by the horizontal plane. It is important to understand the subtle differences implicit in these two points of view. The horizontal or scientific perspective proposes facts that seem to have no intrinsic meaning or symbolic value; while each thing is "something"

[9] "The traditional vision of things is above all 'static' and 'vertical.' It is static because it refers to constant and universal qualities, and it is vertical in the sense that it attaches the lower to the higher, the ephemeral to the imperishable. The modern vision, on the contrary, is fundamentally 'dynamic' and 'horizontal'; it is not the symbolism of things that interests it, but their material and historical connections" (Titus Burckhardt, *Mirror of the Intellect* [Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1987], p. 25).

with respect to its factuality, it is "nothing" with respect to a possible significance or inner meaning. Thus the universe—its origins, its constitution, and its future—is merely a puzzle awaiting to be solved by human ingenuity through the application of the scientific method and the faculty of reason. The purely scientific response to mystery is not deference or respect, let alone reverence, but a relentless pursuit of "the answer." When a scientist accepts the premise that there are some enigmas that will never be solved, he or she is no longer within the bounds of the science framework.

From the vertical or spiritual point of view, the brash, but ultimately meaningless,[10] certitudes of the scientific perspective intrude upon God's space and His mystery. From a properly spiritual perspective, every external fact has its own fundamental mystery and corresponding meaning. Even a grain of sand is "not nothing" and has its own mystery and meaning by virtue of its very existence. No matter how much we may attempt to deny it, mystery comes bubbling up like a mountain spring. We only need to turn our sights upon the stars in the night sky to realize that a science of the finite needs knowledge of the Infinite, just as the body needs a soul in order to be animated, and just as a human intellect needs the Divine Intellect in order to be illuminated.[11]

At the heart of the Divine Mystery lies the notion that God is completely incomprehensible on the one hand, yet completely self-evident on the other. God is perfectly intelligible and uncondition-

[10] Much may be made, for instance, of the scientific theory of black holes or of parallel universes; but without a perspective that leads beyond the physical facts, there is no mystery, revelation, or secret disclosed by this knowledge that transforms the physical fact into a meaning that transcends the abstract theory.

[11] "He (the man of our times) sees the sky above him like any child sees it, with its sun and its stars, but the remembrance of the astronomical theories prevents him from recognizing divine signs in them. The sky for him is no longer the natural expression of the Spirit that enfolds and illuminates the world. Scientific knowledge has substituted itself for this 'naive' and yet profound vision, not as a new consciousness of a vaster cosmic order, an order of which man forms a part, but as an estrangement, as an irremediable disarray before the abysses that no longer have any common measure with him. For nothing now reminds him that in reality this whole universe is contained within himself, not of course in his individual being, but in the spirit or intellect that is within him and that is both greater than himself and the whole phenomenal universe" (Titus Burckhardt, *Mirror of the Intellect*, p. 32).

ally plausible to the intelligence of people who must respond to that Being. Yet He must also remain obscure, unknown, and unknowable, and beyond anything that human beings can really fathom with their present consciousness. There is, however, nothing in our intelligence that prevents a belief in the supernatural, although it is invisible and obscure. On the contrary, our native intelligence draws its substance from a natural inclination to believe in the mystery of some unseen higher Reality. Thus, ultimately, we believe in God, because He is who He is, the Subtle (*al-Latif*) and the Wise (*al-Hakim*), and He and only He makes sense.

The Divine Mystery presupposes a veil, or a tissue of veils, that protects its universal secret and maintains its integrity in the face of the lower order of human inquiry. Creation itself could be said to be that veil, and all of nature is thereby the formal representation of the mystery that pervades the entire manifested universe, from a bubble floating on the river to the black holes of cosmic space. The atom is a veil and so is the distant star. The universal cosmos cast as a dome of darkness in the depths of the night sky is a veil as is the cave within the heart of man.

From a more specific point of view, there are essentially three veils that preserve the integrity of the mystery without compromising the possibility of human inquiry. First, there is a supra-natural veil between man and God, the veil of veils. It provides the isthmus beyond which no one will pass, forever reminding mankind of the mystery of God that lies hidden behind the veil. Then, there are the natural veils that exist between man and the world and between man and his inner self, veils that hide the full disclosure, but often signal a revelatory message of some kind. The signs of nature are an example of such veils. Finally, there are the artificial veils that man creates for himself that are forms of illusion rather than sources of knowledge. These numerous veils of illusion are the ones we most often confront.

The veil between man and God remains absolute given that man will not see God, and for no other reason than that he simply cannot, any more than Moses could see God, and Moses was a prophet. "'Oh Lord,' Moses said to God when he reached the appointed place.

'Show Thyself to me, that I may look upon Thee.' But God replied: 'By no means canst thou see Me'" (7: 143). If not for a prophet, then certainly not for an ordinary human being will the supra-natural veil between man and God be lifted.

The veils between man and the world and between man and his inner self are relative and temporary. If we understand these veils in their aspect of revelatory meaning and not as ends in themselves, we can begin to see through the veil that separates us from the direct perception of the truth. If, however, we understand the manifested world and our own being as "absolute," without the support of the absolute Divinity, then the world and our human nature become permanent and opaque veils that exclude us from the truth. Behind the veil of the world is a mystery that cannot be fathomed in and of itself, but only through a meaning infused into the world through the vision of the Divine that is, as it were, filtered through the veil of His creation.

The majority of modern individuals have created their own artificial veils by adopting attitudes that darken and obscure, rather than reveal and protect, the life of the spirit. For example, the contemporary assumption that the physical world is the bottom line of reality amounts to a man-made veil, whereas in reality the phenomena of nature both protect and reveal the knowledge of God as well as preserve the mysterious sense of a unified reality that exists beyond the abrupt physical horizon of this world. Other artificial veils include an abiding belief in evolution as the explanation of our origins, the belief in progress as constituting our destiny, a materialism that is believed to form the basis of true happiness, and the general worldview of secularism. Taken together these beliefs form a thick and hardened veil that renders contemporary global society a closed and terminal system rather than a symbolic gate that opens toward the other side of reality.

Is it strange to commence this work with reflections on the mystery that strikes at the very heart of the life force and that shapes the way we understand the world? Perhaps, but only because we live in an age that does not see the forest for the trees or that in listening to the sound does not hear the sweet melody of the music. The Divine Mystery may go beyond the ability of words to contain it, but the presence and force of that mystery is undeniable for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. And as compensation for the mysterious secret of the Divine Unfolding, every human being has his or her own

secret that only God can truly fathom. "He knows every thought and hears the secret whisperings of what the soul itself may be less than fully aware, for He is the sole Owner of our souls, our minds, and our senses. Above all, He knows the *sirr*, the innermost nucleus of each human being, and no man can know another's secret."[12]

The meaning of the Great Mystery hovers in the background of our mind as the absolute interrogative of the human condition.[13] No one can deny its compelling presence, no matter how much he would like to be free of its implications. Like a watermark, mystery is embedded within the very parchment of our lives. But by acknowledging this mystery we create a bridge between the relative and the absolute, between doubt and certainty, between ignorance and knowledge. The unfathomable Mystery of the Unseen then becomes truth's associate, and its holy secret stirs the human heart with an inspiration that will one day lend the soul wings.

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[12] S. H. Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), p. 374. Cf. footnote: "The *sirr* may also be said to contain the seeds of the future, which is concealed from mankind but known to God, and none can foresee what a man may become in the course of time."

[13] People today may consider themselves knowledgeable, but this does not mean that they have tasted necessarily the fruits of that knowledge, nor that they have internalized it as an operative wisdom. In fact, the knowledge they possess may have no genuine fruit in terms of experience. Secular knowledge may fascinate and intrigue the modern mind, but ultimately it "leads nowhere" and as experienced is actually as "dry as ashes."