According to Sri Aurobindo 'silence' is absolute. In a poem *Silence is All* he reveals the state of interior silence.

"Silence is all, say the sages.

Silence watches the work of the ages;

In the book of the Silence the cosmic Scribe has written his cosmic pages;

More important for us, because more characteristically mystical, is the next great stage of *Orison*. It is curious and extremely definite mental state which mystics call Interior Silence, or *Orison of Quiet*. It represents the results for consciousness of a further degree of that inward retreat where recollection began. It is a plane apparently characterized by an immense increase in the receptivity of the self, and by an almost complete suspension of the reflective powers.

Here the self has passed beyond the stage at which its perceptions are capable of being dealt with by thought. It cannot any longer take notes. It can only surrender itself to the stream of an inflowing

There are two aspects of the orison of quiet. It is the aspect of deprivation and the aspect of acquisition of
something found, in which it is complete. In its description, all mystics will be found to lean to one side or the other, to the affirmative or negative element which it contains.

'The soul' with all its powers, has divided and scattered itself in outward things, each according to its functions; the power of sight in the eye, the power of hearing in the ear, the power of taste in the tongue, and thus they are the less able to work inwardly, for every power which is divided is imperfect. So the soul, if she would work inwardly, must call home all her powers and collect them from all divided things to one inward work. If a man works inwardly he must pour all his powers into himself as into a corner of the soul, and must hide himself from all images and forms, and then he can work. Then he must come into a forgetting and not-knowing. He must be in a stillness and silence, where the 'word' may be heard. One cannot draw near to this word better than by stillness and silence. It is heard and understood in utter ignorance. When one knows nothing it is opened and revealed. Then we shall become aware of the divine ignorance, and our ignorance will be ennobled and adorned with supernatural knowledge. When we simply keep ourselves receptive we are more perfect than when at work.
The psychic state of quiet has a further value for the mystic, as being the intellectual complement and expression of the moral state of humility and receptivity a new birth.

“It may be asked whether this Birth is best accomplished in Man when he does his work and former and thinks himself into God, or when he keeps himself in Silence, stillness and peace, so that God may speak and work in him. As God is boundless in giving, so the soul is boundless in receiving and as God is almighty in His work, so the soul is an abyss of receptivity and so she is formed a new with God and in God.”

‘Quiet’ is the danger-zone of introversion. Of all the forms of mystical activity, perhaps this has been the most abyss the least understood. The accusation of quietism has been hurled at many mystics whose only fault was a looseness of language which laid them open to misapprehension.

It is important, in the spiritual life that we should know, denounce and crush all quietism. These quietists remain in a state of utter passivity, and in order that they may be more tranquilly enjoy their false repose they abstain from every interior and exterior act. Such repose is treason to God crime to lese majeste. Quietism blinds a man, plunging him
into that ignorance which is not superior but inferior, to all knowledge. Such a man remains seated within himself, useless and inert. This repose is simply laziness, and this tranquility is forgetfulness of God, one's self and one's neighbour. It is the exact opposite of the divine peace, the opposite of the peace of the abyss, of that marvellous peace which is full of activity, full of affection, full of desire, full of seeking, that burning and insatiable peace which we pursue more and more after we have found it. Between the peace of the heights and the quietism of the depths there is all the difference that exists between God and a mistaken creature.

The true condition of quiet, according to the great mystics, is at once active and passive. It is pure surrender, but a surrender which is not limp self-abandonment, but rather the free and constantly renewed self-giving and self-emptying of a burning love. The departmental intellect is silenced, but the totality of character is flung open to the influence of the real personality is not lost. Its hard edge is gone. "A rest most busy" says Hilton.

The great teachers of quietism arrive at an experienced the psychological state of 'quite'. The ineffable peace and certainty, the bliss follow on their act of complete surrender.
They believe themselves to have discovered in this half-way house the goal of the mystic quest. From this inward surrender the self emerges to the new knowledge which is mediated to it under the innumerable forms of contemplation.

"The contemplative stage appears under the forms which ascetic writers call 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' 'infused' or 'passive' contemplation and as that 'orison of union'. Sometimes it shows itself under those abnormal psychological conditions in which the intense concentration of the self upon its overpowering transcendental perceptions results in the narrowing of the field of consciousness to a point at which all knowledge of the external world is lost. All the messages of the senses are utterly ignored. The subject appears to be in a state of trance characterized by physical rigidity. These are the conditions of rapture or ecstasy."²

Rapture and ecstasy differ from contemplation proper in being wholly involuntary states. Rapture, says St. Teresa, who frequently experienced it, is absolutely irresistible. Contemplation is a supreme manifestation of that indivisible power of knowing, which lies at the root of all our artistic and
spiritual satisfaction. In it, man's made trinity of thought, love and will become a unity.

When contemplation appears it produces a general condition of indifference, liberty, and peace. It is an elevation above the world, a sense of beatitude. The subject ceases to perceive himself in the multiplicity and division of his general consciousness. He is raised above himself. A deeper and a purer soul substitutes itself for the normal self. In this state consciousness of I-hood and consciousness of the world disappear. The mystic is conscious of being in immediate relation with God Himself and of participating in divinity. The mystic has more and more the impression of being that which he knows and of knowing that which he is. Temporally rising, in fact, to levels of freedom, he knows himself Reality. The object of the mystic's contemplation is always some aspect of the infinite life, of God, the one Reality. The enhancement of vitality which artists or other unselfconscious observers may receive from their communion with scattered manifestation of goodness, truth, and beauty, is in his case infinitely increased. His uniformly rapturous language is alone enough to prove this. In the contemplative act, his whole personality directed by love and will, transcends the sense-world, casts off its
fetters, and rises to freedom. Contemplation is not, like meditation, one simple state, governed by one set of psychic conditions. It is a name for a large group of states partly governed by the temperament of the subject and accompanied by feeling-states which vary from the 'extreme of quietude' to the rapturous and active love in which 'thought into song is turned'.

Plotinus says that contemplation places us in purity and radiance which is far above our understanding. None can attain to it by knowledge, by subtlety, or by any exercise but he whom God chooses to unite to Himself, and to illuminate by Himself, he and no other can contemplate God.

Ecstasy is the last term of contemplation. Mystics regard it as a very favourable state and declare that the self is "in God and God is in her". In pure contemplation he refuses to attend to that external world. Mystics of all ages have agreed in regarding such ecstasy as our exceptionally favourable state. The word has become a synonym for joyous exaltation and for the inebriation of the Infinite.
"There are three distinct aspects under which the ecstatic state may be studied. (a) the physical (b) the psychological, (c) the mystical."³

Physically considered, ecstasy is a trance. The trance includes according to the testimony of the ecstastics two distinct phases. (a) the short period of lucidity and (b) a longer period of complete unconsciousness which may pass into a death-like catalepsy, lasting for hours. The difference between union and trance says St.Teresa, is this that the latter lasts longer and is more visible outwardly because breathing gradually diminishes, so that it becomes impossible to speak or to open the eyes.

Ecstasy physically considered, may occur in any person in whom (a) the threshold of consciousness is exceptionally mobile and (b) there is a tendency to dwell upon one governing idea or intuition. Its worth depends entirely on the objective worth of intuition.

Psychologically considered, all ecstasy is a form of the state which is technically called complete mono-ideism It is withdrawal of consciousness from circumference to centre. It is deliberate attention to one thing.
It is always paid for by psycho-physical disturbances, and rewarded in healthy cases by an enormous lucidity, a supreme intuition in regard to the one thing on which the self's interest has been set.

Ecstasy, on its physical side, is an entrancement. On its mental side it is a complete unification of consciousness. On its mystical side it is an exalted act of perception. It represents the greatest possible extension of the spiritual consciousness in the direction of pure being. It is profound experience of eternal life.

In this experience the departments of activities of thought and feeling, the consciousness of I-hood, of space and time—all that belongs to the "world of being." In this transcendent act of union the mystic sometimes says that he is conscious of nothing.

"Rapture, says St. Teresa, "comes in general as a shock, quick, and sharp, before you can collect your thoughts or help yourself in any way, and you see and feel it as a cloud, or a strong eagle rising upwards and carrying you on its wings."
This carrying-away sensation assumes the concrete form known as levitation when the upward and outward sensation so dominate the conscious field that she is raised bodily from the ground. In this state all the senses are instantly suspended the hands and the whole body becomes so intensely cold that the soul seems to be separated there from. Some times it is difficult to know whether one still breathes. Rapture lasts but a short time. At this high degree the extreme suspension is relaxed, and the body seems to regain life, that it may die a new in the same manner, and make the soul more living than before.5

The mystic, like other persons of genius, is man first and artist afterwards. ‘The dark night of the soul of mystic’ once fully established, is seldom lit by visions or made homely by voices. It is of the essence of its miseries that the once possessed power of orison or contemplation is now wholly lost. The self is tossed back from its hard won point of vantage. Impotence, blankness and solitude are the epithets by which those immersed in this dark fire of purification describe their pains. This is a state of oscillation between ‘state of pleasure’ and ‘state of pain’.

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Thus the exalted consciousness of divine perfection which the self acquired in its mystical 'awakening' was balanced by a depressed and bitter consciousness of its own interest imperfection, and clash of these perceptions spurred it to that laborious effort of accommodation which constitutes the 'purgative way. The renewed and ecstatic awareness of the Absolute which resulted, and which was the governing characteristic of illuminations, brings with it of necessity its own proper negation. The illuminated consciousness during this time is fully established. It is perfectly content. The soul reaches the goal of its quest. Sooner or later, however, psychic fatigue sets in. The state of illuminations begins to break up, the complementary negative consciousness appears, and shows itself as an overwhelming sense of darkness and deprivation.

"This sense is so deep and strong that it breaks all communication setup between the self and the transcendent. It swamps its intuitions of Reality and plunges its self into the state of negation and unutterable misery which is called the 'dark night." 6

Psychologically considered the dark night is an example of the operation of the law of reaction from stress. It is a
period of fatigue and longitude following a period of sustained mystical activity. It is one of the best established laws of the nervous system. It means that it has period of exhaustion if exercised continuously in one direction and can only recuperate by having a period of rest.

However spiritual may be the mystic-so long as he is in the body, cannot help using the machinery of his nervous and central system in the course of his adventures. His development, on its psychic side, consists in the taking over of this nervous machinery, the capture of its centres of consciousness, in the interest of growing transcendental life. This transcendental life will be partly conditioned by psychic necessities and also amenable to the laws of creation and of fatigue.

Each great step forward will entail a period of longitude and exhaustion in that mental machinery which he has pressed into service and probably overworked. When the higher centres have become exhausted under great strain of a developed illuminated life with its accompanying periods of intense lucidity, of deep contemplation, perhaps of visionary and auditory phenomena, they swing-back into the negative state oceans almost of necessity.
The great contemplatives those destined to attain the full stature of the mystic, emerge from this period of destitution. It is for them the gateway to a higher state. But persons of lesser genius cannot pass this way. If they enter 'night' at all, it is to succumb to its dangers and pains. This 'great negation' is the storing house of the spiritual life. Here we part from the 'native mystics.' The mystic poets, and all who share in, are contented with the illuminated vision of reality. Those who go on are the great and strong spirits, who do not seek to know but driven to be.

The states of darkness and illumination coexist over a long period, alternating sharply and rapidly. Many seers and artists pay in this way, by agenizing periods of impotence and depression, for each violent outburst of creative energy.

"The periods of rapid oscillation between a joyous and a painful consciousness occur most often at the beginning of a new period of mystic way between Purgation and Illumination and again between Illumination and the Dark Night. Mystics call such oscillations the "Game of Love"."
The dark night is really a deeply human process, in which the self thought itself so spiritual, so firmly established upon the supersensuous plane, is forced to turn back, to leave the light, and pick up those qualities which it had left behind. By the transmutation of the whole man, not by a careful and departmental cultivation of that which we like to call his "spiritual" side, can divine humanity be formed. It is the mystic's only certain ladder to the Real.

The self in its first purgation has cleansed the mirror of perception in its illuminated life. In so doing it has transcended the normal perceptive powers of 'natural' man, immersed in the illusions of sense. Now, it has got to be reality. For this, a new and more drastic purgation is needed—not of the organs of perception, but of the very shrine of self: that 'heart' which is the seat of personality, the source of its love and will. In the stress and anguish of the night, when it turns back from the vision of the Infinite, to feel the limitations of the finite again, the self loses the power to do. It learns to surrender its will to the operation of a larger life. As the alchemist, when he has found silver, is not content, but tosses it back into the crucible in order that he may complete the great work and transmute it into philosophic gold. " Indwelling
spirit is the artist of man's destinies labouring at his transmutation from unreal to real, tosses back the illuminated self into the melting-pot that it may become the raw material of divine humanity, the 'noble stone'."8

What is the unitive life? It is the peculiarity of the Unitive Life that it is often lived, in its highest and most perfect forms, in the world. It exhibits its works before the eyes of men. Man, having at last come to full consciousness of reality, completes the circle of being. He returns to fertilize those levels of existence from which he sprang.

The unitive life, though so often lived in the world, is never of it. It belongs to another plane of being. He moves securely upon levels unrelated to our speech. He eludes the measuring powers of humanity. We, from the valley, can only catch a glimpse of the true life of these spirits, transfigured upon the mountain. They are far away, breathing another air: we cannot reach them. Yet it is impossible to over-estimate their importance for the race. They are our ambassadors to the Absolute. They vindicate humanity's claim to the possible and permanent attainment of Reality and bear witness to the practical qualities of the transcendental life.
Coming first to the evidence of the mystics themselves, we find that in their attempts towards describing the unitive life they have recourse to two main forms of symbolic expression: both very dangerous, very liable to be misunderstood: both offering ample opportunity for harsh criticism to hostile investigators of the mystic type. These two forms of expression belong respectively to mystics of the transcendent metaphysical and of the intimate-personal type: and that their formulae, if taken alone, appear to contradict one another.

(a) The metaphysical mystic, for whom the Absolute is impersonal and transcendent, describes his final attainment of that Absolute as *deification*, or the utter transmutation of the self in God. (b) The mystic for whom intimate and personal communion has been the mode under which he best apprehended Reality, speaks of the consummation of this communion, its perfect and permanent form, as the spiritual marriage of his soul with God.

"The language of 'deification' and of "spiritual marriage," is temperamental language. It is related to subjective experience rather than to objective fact. It describes on the one hand the mystic's
sudden, astonished awareness of a profound change
effected in his own personality—the transmutation
of his salt, sulphur, and mercury into spiritual God-
on the other, the rapturous consummation of his
love.”

Unitive state is essentially a state of free and filial
can we surely get some news, however fragmentary,
concerning the transcendent condition of being which involves
these characteristic states and acts. Beyond this even Dante
himself could not go:

(a) It appears from the standpoint of the psychologist. (b) It is described to us by those mystics who use the language of
deification and that of spiritual marriage. (c) Finally, we will turn to the lives of its initiates to perceive it as an organic whole.

In the words of the Sufi poet, the mystic journey is now prosecuted not only to God. He has entered the eternal order. He attains here the state to which the magnet of the Universe draws every living thing. Moving through periods of alternate joy and anguish, as his spiritual self woke, stretched, and was tested in the complementary fires of love and pain, he was inwardly conscious that he moves towards a definite objective. In so far as he was a great mystic, he was also conscious that this objective was no mere act of knowing, however intense, exultant, and sublime, but a condition of being, fulfillment of that love which impelled him, steadily and inexorably, to his own place. In the image of the alchemists, the fire of love has done its work. It is the mystic mercury of the wise. "Reality, within him has utterly transmuted the salt and sulphur of his mind and his sense. Even the white stone of illumination, once so dearly cherished, he has resigned to the crucible. The great work is accomplished. The last imperfection is gone and he finds within himself the gold of spiritual humanity."
What the mystic here desires to tell us is, that his new life is not only a free and conscious participation in the life of eternity. It is not only a fully established existence on real and transcendental levels but also the conscious sharing of an inflowing personal life greater than his own. Tightening of the bonds of that companionship has been growing in intimacy and splendour during the course of the mystic way.

The divine persons are in the fecundity of their nature ever active. In the simplicity of their essence they form the Godhead and eternal blessedness. God according to the persons is Eternal Work. But according to the essence and its perpetual stillness, He is Eternal Rest. Love and fruition live between this activity and this rest. Love would work without ceasing. For its nature is eternal work with God. Fruition is ever at rest, for it dwells higher than the will and the longing for the well beloved, in the well-beloved. In the divine nescience the Father, together with the Son, enfold His well-beloved in the abundant unity of His Spirit. And that same Father says to each soul in His infinite loving-kindness, "Thou art mine and I am thine: I am thine and thou art mine, for I have chosen thee from all eternity."
Next is the vision of the self’s destiny:

“Our duty is to love God. Our fruition is to endure God and be penetrated by His love. There is the same difference between love and fruition as there is between God and His grace. When we unite ourselves to God by love, then we spiritualize ourselves. When He Himself draws us in a flight of the spirit, and transforms us in His spirit, then, so to speak, we are fruition. And the spirit of God Himself pushes us out from Himself by His breath, in order that we may love, and may do good works; and again He draws us to Himself, in order that we repose in peace and in fruition. This is eternal life even as our bodily life subsists in the indrawing and outgoing of our breath.” 11
Notes


