

Mysticism: The 'Engine' of liberal Quakerism

Rufus Jones (1863-1948) helped to shape the modern soul of liberal Quakerism that was first birthed unintentionally by Elias Hicks in 1827, to then be matured by the influence of the Progressive Quakers of the later 1800's, and then ripened into a more universal mystical religious experience due to the influence of Rufus Jones in the first half of the twentieth century. (Note: you can discover more about Elias Hicks and the Progressive Quakers upstairs on the walls of the Midlothian Friends Meeting library).

In 1917 Rufus Jones helped found the Nobel prize-winning American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) as a vehicle for Quakers to provide humanitarian relief around the world. In 1927, one hundred years after liberal Quakerism first began with the "Hicksite Quakers", Jones visited India to meet with Mahatma Gandhi and tour the birthplace of the Buddha. Upon experiencing 'that of God' outside of Christian spiritual traditions, he formulated a new approach to Quaker missionary efforts—that of giving humanitarian aid to people while having no need to also convert people to Christianity. And thus an appreciation of spiritual universalism became widely accepted by liberal Quakers.

Rufus Jones became a well-known *Christian mystic* who experienced his Quakerism as a direct mystical experience with the Inner Light that guided his every action. This was much like the very earliest Quakers in the mid-1600's before the Quaker movement under George Fox's direction soon adopted a strict discipline and practice that was expected from all Quakers until the mid-1800's.

While alive Jones's mysticism and influence thrust the liberal Quaker tradition solidly into the family of mystical world religions; along with Taoism, Zen Buddhism, Sufi Islam, Kabbalah Judaism, among others. All of these religious traditions, including liberal Quakerism views 'becoming one with God or the Absolute' as possible in order to live an enhanced human experience.

While not every liberal Quaker would accept the "mystic" label for their self, many would agree that Jesus was perhaps the first Christian mystic, and his oneness with the Universal Source was a model of how best to live. Modern liberal Quaker thought and practice clearly has mysticism as its 'engine', giving power to the movement. Consider a selection of mystical thought from Rufus Jones which helped to shape the modern liberal Quaker experience.

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Mysticism ought to be thought of simply as the experience of direct communion with the soul of God.

The essential characteristic of mysticism is the attainment of a personal conviction by an individual that the human spirit and the divine Spirit have met, have found each other, and are in mutual and reciprocal correspondence as spirit with Spirit.

The mystic is a person possessed of conviction, which for him amounts to an experience, that he has come upon the goal of life, that he has come back to the spiritual Source of his being, that he has in very truth found God.

It seems to me tremendously important that Jesus is as truly a revelation of man as he is a revelation of God. We see at last in him what man was meant to be. We have seen God revealed in Jesus. I wish now that we might learn to see the divine possibilities of man revealed in Jesus.

The reason we can hope to find God is that He is here, engaged all the time in finding us.



We cannot find God with a little fraction of ourselves. It is the business of the whole self; it is the task of our entire life.

There is in most of us a vast acreage of our inner estate which has never been touched by the plow. It remains uncultivated. We are this, we have been this, but how much more we might be. Coming to our self, our true self, and reaching out with divine help and the gift of Grace to win the whole of oneself is to be 'spiritual-minded'.

Our human nature is unmistakably double. There is something in us that the divine Spirit can make its appeal to, something that draws us upward and onward, something that makes our moral and spiritual life possible. I think that this divine spark in us is the most significant thing about us.

We shall not rebuild our shattered world until we recover our faith in eternal realities; we shall not do that until we discover Spirit within ourselves.