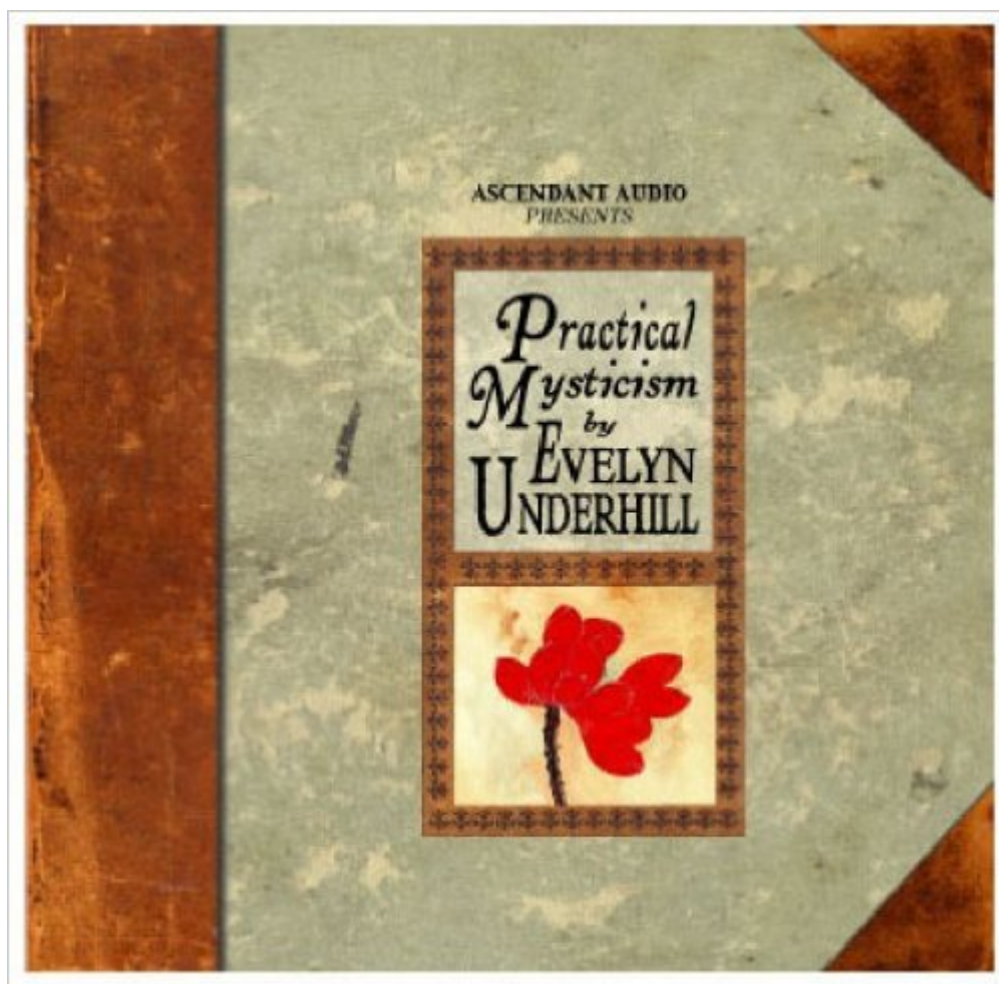


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Practical Mysticism



Synopsis

In Practical Mysticism, Evelyn Underhill distills the essential (and comprehensible) steps that comprise the process of achieving mystical understanding. Though she uses the pantheon of Christian mystics as her guide, her methodology transcends any particular faith and offers a common sense approach to self-improvement and enhanced awareness.

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Customer Reviews

I first encountered this book when I was an undergraduate student taking a Mysticism course in a Jesuit University. At the time, the book was out of print and the instructor thought it was so valuable he photocopied it for everyone in the class at his own expense. More than 20 years later, I agree with him that this book is unique and valuable. I also think that its message is still relevant to modern people and would rank it as a spiritual classic. What makes this book valuable is that it cuts to the essence of what mysticism is and how it is relevant to everyday people living in the world. It is written in a lyrical almost poetical style, which is to say that the author has the power to make difficult concepts come alive with great impact and beauty. There are many books on Western Mysticism, but this one is very concise and delivers the essentials in an easy to digest manner. While some of the language is outdated and the world has changed in many ways, the underpinning of man and the world have changed very little. This is why I still think Evelyn Underhill's message still applies and speaks across the decades directly to the human heart. At times, there can be a bit of a moralistic tone. However, when viewed from the mystic's side of feeling unworthy of the experience of union with God they are having, this makes sense. When looked at from the human

side, it can be a bit disconcerting. However, I think its analogous to the situation where two people who are really in love with each other, don't feel worthy of each other. This is the way I try to view these sections because basically a mystic is much like a lover in relation to the divine. This book is only \$10.

Some people say 'mysticism is a dangerous thing. It begins with mist and ends in schism' (haha)! Evelyn Underhill defuses this myth with this artistically written book addressed to the 'practical man who has lived all his days amongst the illusions of multiplicity'. She calls mysticism 'the Science of Love' - it asks us to stop seeing the world through our egoistic lenses and see it instead as it is. The world in fact for all its parts and diversity points to the Whole, the Real that gives unity to everything. The path of mysticism needs not be as ethereal and mystifying as it sounds to many people. It is a practical skill, to put it simply, of learning to see - a skill that the great theologian Thomas Aquinas reckons proper to all people, if only they get some training! This is what the book is about. It invites us and tantalizes us with the rudimentary steps of learning to *see*..with our inner eyes/ the eyes of the heart - a spiritual discipline mystics call 'contemplation'. The great obstacles of spiritual perception are 'thoughts, convention and self-interest'. We need to stop asking the instinctive, selfish question 'what's in it for me?' and see things as they really are and adjust ourselves to that reality, which we will discover far transcend the narrow confines of our self-centred, parochial world! Underhill gently invites us to some basic preparatory exercises of contemplation, training our eyes to see again by taking some simple objects to gaze upon, ceasing all habits of analysing, dissecting, measuring or labelling. As Teresa of Avila taught her disciples, 'I want you to do no more than to look.' That simple exercise when persisted long enough will gradually alter our way of looking at things, ourselves, others and the world around us.

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