



ANCIENT MYSTICISM

**Greek and Christian Mysticism,
and some comparisons with Buddhism**

RAOUL MORTLEY

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On 19 August 1662 died in Paris Blaise Pascal, the French philosopher and religious thinker. Several days after his death a maid noticed something in the lining of his doublet. On cutting it open she found a document written in Pascal's hand, now known as The Memorial. For the last eight years of his life, Pascal had had the document sewn into his doublet whenever he replaced it, and it reads as follows:

... 'From about 10:30 pm till about half past midnight.

Fire

*'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not
[the God of]
philosophers and scholars.*

*Certitude, certitude, emotion, joy, peace.
Forgetting the world and all excepting God. Just father,
the world has not known you, but I have known you.
Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.'*

(The "Memorial", Pensées 913)

And so Pascal recorded his particular mystical experience bearing the record of it close to his heart, deliberately sewn into his clothing. A fiery vision of God, with a unique and centralised focus on God alone; this was an experience to which Pascal alone of all the world was privy. These are the typical themes of mystical experience, which bring great peace of mind to those who experience them. A transcendent experience, going beyond language and reason, and beyond the boundaries of normal experience, which gives the individual a sense of unification with a higher reality, and complete certainty. Most world religions have had their mystics, and it is in their mysticism that they most resemble each other, since mystical experiences go beyond the constraints of language, doctrine, and ritual, and function in an area of the human mind untouched by cultural differences.

In the Jewish tradition a strong mystical tradition has developed around the Kabbalah (or 'tradition'): the Kabbalists

