

“ZAABALAWI” — THE ARC OF THE NARRATOR’S JOURNEY

Person	Occupation	Setting	Notes
Sheikh Qamar	Lawyer	Office, Chamber of Commerce Building	Western dress and attitudes. Dismisses the Narrator when he sees he’s not a potential client.
Bookseller	Commerce	Entrance to the Birgawi Residence	“small, insignificant fellow, a mere prologue to a man” Sells books on theology and mysticism.
Unnamed Sheikh	Politician	Shiekh’s office	Mixture of Western and traditional dress. Tells Narrator to go about it systematically. Typical politician.
— WHY THE BREAK HERE? SEE BELOW —			
Hassanein	Calligrapher	Umm al-Ghulam	“I felt him [Zaabalawi] to be a part of everything I drew.” “ . . . it was due to him that I made my most beautiful drawings.” “Such suffering is part of the cure!” “God forgive you . . . for saying such a thing of a visit that has caused me to know you and you me!”
Sheikh Gad	Composer/Musician	House in Tabakshiyya	Zaabalawi punched him in the chest for inspiration; “till I finished the most beautiful piece I have ever composed.” “You have only to hear him . . . to be inspired to creativity”
Hagg Wanas al-Damanhour	“a man of private means”	Negma Bar	The drinking: 1 st drink: “it seemed to ignite” — fire 2 nd drink: “I lost all willpower” — loss of desire 3 rd drink: “I lost my memory” — loss of the past 4 th drink: “the future vanished” — loss of the future What is left? Only the NOW, without past, future, will, or desire. The Narrator is fully in the present, and thus he is <i>disponible</i> (available), for the first time ever.

THE BREAK ABOVE

As it moves from Western ideals to more traditional settings, the Narrator’s journey is split into two halves. The first half, addressing law, business, and politics, are things that humans hold to be important. Some might even call them timeless. But they’re just the opposite; they’re totally dependent on human choices, and can change very quickly, because humans decide what they will be and how they will be used. Those who practice in these fields are usually well-respected, because they perform many functions necessary for the smooth operation of our society.

But the second half is filled with people who are far less “respectable.” Their work involves something extra-human, something that not all humans are capable of doing, understanding, or even appreciating. But they are far more in touch with the Divine. We have two artists (their ordering is based on both ephemerality and disponibility), and one hardened drinker who facilitates a mystical experience for the Narrator.

DISPONIBILITY

This means to **make oneself available**. Here, it means to give up what YOU want, your desires, your memories, your hopes, and live fully in the present, willing to accept whatever is given to you by the Divine.

THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Fundamentally, this is **the direct, unmediated experience of the Divine**. Every other experience we have as humans is mediated. That means it comes to us through our senses. And, because all those experiences come through these senses that we all have, we can attempt to explain that experience to someone else and have him or her understand us.

But this is not true of the Mystical Experience. This experience is unmediated, meaning that it does not come through our senses. (Many mystics say that their senses are “clouded”; one of the most famous books about the mystical experience is Meister Eckhart’s *The Cloud of Unknowing*.) Because it is direct, and unmediated, it is impossible to describe, or ineffable. The closest mystics get to explaining it is through analogies and symbolism. Common images are gardens, fountains, shifting planes, puzzle pieces falling into place, and even—in a very unclinical usage—sex (see Bernini’s “The Ecstasy of St. Teresa” for a fine example of the sexual analogies.)

Here’s a rather extended definition of mysticism from Peter A. Angeles’ *Dictionary of Christian Theology*:

Definition:

1. The feeling of utter dependence upon a higher reality that is the source of all things.
2. The ecstatic feeling of union or oneness with God.
3. A confrontation with a Divine Presence or the sense of its presence.
4. The sense that all things are signs (symbols) of the creative activity of a higher reality attempting communication with man's consciousness.
5. The belief that the divine essence, or God, can be known by means of an immediate intuition or insight (or even revelation) quite different from the knowledge procured by the faculty of reason or ordinary sensation.
6. Belief in direct communication with the divine reality, or God, and a knowledge of spiritual and godlike things that are unobtainable by any other natural means or powers.
7. Any apprehension of a transcendent, supernatural, or divine reality.
8. Any intense religious experience in general during which one feels in contact with the divine.
9. That aspect of theology that stresses
 - a. the direct apprehension of God,
 - b. the direct communication with, or revelation from, God (with or without sacred texts and accumulated tradition), and
 - c. thereby the attainment of salvation (moral blessedness, beatitude, serenity).
10. The belief that a knowledge of God's being can be had in an immediate and nonrational way by means of a unity with his existence or an awareness of his presence in all things.

Some of the characteristics of mysticism:

1. A feeling of oneness, total unity, completeness;
2. a feeling of unique joy, euphoria, harmony, well-being, ECSTASY, that is
3. ineffable, incommunicable, and
4. of supreme intensity;
5. a feeling of transcending time and reality, of becoming one with "eternity";
6. a noetic feeling—something is known, disclosed, revealed, understood, incapable of being had in any other way, beyond all ordinary human knowledge and senses, and indefinable;
7. a feeling of surprise, awe, wonder mingled with fear, and sometimes dread;
8. a feeling of the objective presence of, or the near-ness to, something that can only be called "divine" causing the experience (knowledge);
9. a passive feeling that one is being overwhelmed, "taken up," spiritually controlled and inspired to be in this state, and that this is not done of one's own choice;
10. an accepting feeling of the reasons why all common reality is the way it is, and
11. why that which transcends all common reality makes it what it is and will be.