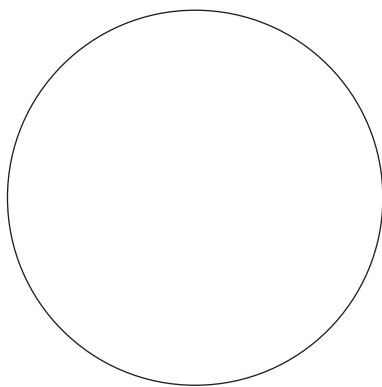


The Daily Mystic

finding mysticism
in the ordinary world



Ann Rennie




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PUBLISHING

In this fast-paced, chaotic and noisy world we live in, this book is an invitation. It is an invitation to step aside and listen, reflect, observe. Ann has drawn on the major world religions and historical and contemporary spiritual writers to suggest practical ways we can do this. She highlights deep truths about humanity and our need for connecting with nature and cultivating gratitude. This is truly a practical and easily accessible treasure trove of spiritual wisdom.

**Dr Bernadette Mercieca,
academic and author**

It's impossible to fall into Ann Rennie's company without learning a great deal. In *The daily mystic*, she is a warm and hospitable guide for anyone looking for uplifting spiritual companionship. It is a special book, harvested from much experience, which will help anyone on the journey that really matters.

Reading Ann Rennie is like listening to a wise and kind friend.

**Michael McGirr,
essayist, reviewer, author of *Ideas to save your life* and
Caritas Australia Mission Facilitator**

Glimpsing a sunset, moved by a melody, a moment of deepest grief – whether we realise it or not, these are moments of profound contemplative experience. We could name them 'mystical'.

Ann Rennie guides us in our quest to discover our inner mystic.

**Peter Malone MSC,
film reviewer, theologian, author**

The daily mystic is a doorway and a map. Ann shows us how to step into a mystical life and how to navigate the terrain. The book provides a backpack of spiritual tools that can be used at anytime, anywhere. When we don't know where to start, *The daily mystic* provides quotes, questions and reflections that allow us to formulate our own daily mystic rituals.

What Ann shares, gives us a foundation and opportunities to begin our journey into daily mystic moments.

This book challenges us to ask, "Why grow our daily mystic?" It was easy to immerse myself in *The daily mystic*. In the soft, soothing words, possibilities opened up and became a safe haven to connect with the Divine where one is nourished and nurtured.

Reflecting on the book, Ann's offerings are practical, deeply moving and necessary in this fast-paced world.

Gemma Di Bari,
life skills coach, teacher, writer

Ann finds solace in the everyday as a way of appreciating what we should hold sacred in our lives.

Regardless of one's faith or belief, there is a need for reflection which enables us to appreciate what is magical about our lives. Ann explores some of the ways we can touch the ephemeral through simple things like listening and acknowledging what we have before us.

David McLean,
author, actor, radio host, *Published or not*



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Preface

I am an ordinary woman living an ordinary life in a big city. And in the midst of the daily demand of expectation and obligation, I have a faith that lifts me to see above and beyond the fence line of the ordinary to the horizon of the extraordinary. I am looking about me, alert to the movement of the spirit, sometimes nurtured, occasionally unbidden.

A soul is like a secret garden – rare and beautiful and unseen. It cannot flourish without a constant gardener responding to its rhythms and seasons. Your soul needs you to look after it; to grow it into the mystery of its oneness with creation; to water it with prayer, silence and stillness; to know it as the core of your being; to own it for its uniqueness. Regardless of your religious or spiritual leaning – what you become is your gift to yourself.

We are all looking for answers.

We are not simply bodies with souls but souls with bodies, as Teilhard de Chardin reminded us. We are so, so much more than our mere packaging.

We must seek the spark that illuminates the ordinary, that bathes the everyday in joy. We need to be awake to what is small and lovely around us: the sunrise painted with pink

ribbons and purple tendrils and apocalyptic gold; the minor elation of hearing a favourite song; the soft swoon of tenderness as you nurse a grandchild.

It is the constancy of moon and stars and the lullaby lap of the ocean and the morning canticle of birds in trees. It is the reliable pleasure of reading a new book or spending time in the rabble-babble of big family gatherings when everyone is talking over each other because there is so much news to share. It is a quiet word with God in church or meditating in the cocoon of home or solo-kayaking down the river. It is the slow perambulation around the block, noticing changes in neighbours' gardens.

It is whatever you want it to be, when you suddenly see a new vision of yourself and your place and purpose in the world. It is a reminder of who you are, not what you do, and how this shapes your singular soul journey.

It is about leaning in, listening, lingering, taking the time needed.

I hope that this book may be a part of an awakening delight, seeing the world through a spiritual lens, however we define that for ourselves. It urges us to live our lives more expansively, to be alert to wonders and challenges and to know how to deal with these equably. It encourages you to find your unique inner mystic wherever you walk in the world.

There is a wonderful Irish saying about living in

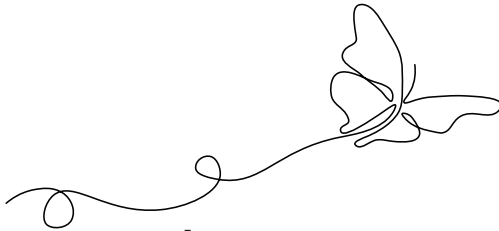
the shelter of each other. We are all in this together, walking our way to God, or to good, to a place where the soul soars. I invite you to take what you need from my ponderings that may open up your heart in an uncertain world. This will be your gift to yourself.

Questions or prompts at the end of each chapter may inform your own thoughts or journalling. The hope of this book is that its impact elicits thought, consideration, a reappraisal, perhaps a re-enchantment or new orientation. (Thoughtful doodling is absolutely fine.) Welcome!

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Introduction

Finding your inner mystic is about a preparedness to look above and beyond and to seek your own inimitable way of unlocking the mystery that is your spiritual self.

*This is finding your way to a still point in your turning world;
the still point that allows you to reach your truest self.*

The word *mysticism* immediately conjures up notions of mystery and otherworldliness. It has hints and glimpses of places we yearn for, states of mind we seek, soulful satisfactions we want to reach so that we feel in tune with a cosmic rhythm. We want to find a place, a home beyond bricks and mortar, a sanctuary of deep knowing and elemental safety. The word has something of an elastic meaning depending on the context of its usage; however, its etymology links it to the Greek word *mystikos*, meaning 'secret' or 'hidden'. This was especially the case with early Christian practice, where an individual or private encounter with the divine enabled a more spiritually intimate relationship with God.

For me, mysticism has something to do with reaching beyond the tangible to the transcendent. It is seen in those who seem to be lit with a goodness that touches others; those able to enter a realm that is intuitive and soulful. It is about having an awakened consciousness of the now – the now that is inextricably linked with the forever ineffable.

Mysticism is both ancient and new, rewritten every day as we inch the human story along. It is about longing, yearning, looking for answers to an existential ache. It is about sacred moments when the answer is almost touched, finding that chink where the light gets in. It is a certain restlessness, an instinct for an 'elsewhere', which might be heaven above or might be

heaven right here in the dailiness of our lives. It is also about the mystery of who we are and what we open up to when we dare to risk a new way of being.

Mysticism is about seeking and finding the transcendent.

Some part of the daily mystic's experience is related to the mystery of self. We are all creatures made of stardust, merely one of the billions who have existed and who, do and will exist. But we are all special in the eyes of God special in our uniqueness and human dignity. You are a once-and-forever individual with a special story and new chapters to add to your lifelong narrative.

This insight leads to a longing for spiritual consummation, one that has been experienced by mystics across many faith traditions. It is a state of union or blissful consciousness. In medieval Christianity, it is exemplified by Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint John of the Cross, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich and Meister Eckhart, who experienced this deeper knowing through ecstatic trances and deep, prayerful contemplation. They identified the soul's longing for union with God, especially Saint Teresa, who spoke of falling in love with God.

Confucius, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Guru Nanak and the many Eastern religious mystics found deep spiritual insights or enlightenment in contemplation and removal from distraction. This enabled the stilling of the body and soul in profound silence. With this detachment from the temptations of the temporal world, they could enter into a serene sense of oneness with the universe.

Islamic mysticism emerged in the 8th century CE and is seen most profoundly in Sufism and the experience of the Whirling Dervishes, whose ritual spinning symbolises a mystical journey toward divine love and truth.

Judaic mysticism is practised in three main ways: by seeking a close connection with God through deep, heartfelt prayer; by using meditation to reflect on life and the spiritual ideas that shape us; and by studying sacred texts such as the *Kabbalah* and the *Zohar*.

Hindu mysticism emerged through the story of Krishna, who was born, according to tradition, in northern India in 3229 BCE. This mysticism is practised through meditation, yoga, chanting, mantras, rituals and devotion to deities, all with the aim of the transcendence of the ego.

Sikh mysticism under Guru Nanak centres on direct, loving union with the One God through meditation on the Divine Name, inner devotion and service beyond ritual or caste.



Much as we have avenues into mysticism through traditional religious channels and indigenous spiritualities, this does not mean that is the only way in.

Contemporary mystics include Thomas Merton, the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Dorothy Day and Mary Oliver, among others. Each of these modern mystics believes in the power of love. They believe in the possibility of human lives being transformed into channels of goodness that affect self and flow outwardly to others. They share a number of common threads: for example, they show us that the sacred is found in the here and now, through deep attention and reflection. It is accessible to anyone who takes the time to seek it.

The sacred, then, is all around us, in the ordinariness of the day, in the routine, in the predictable. It is found in the nooks and crannies we overlook. It is in the soft, sweet and shy rather than the big, brash and triumphal. It is in the noticing glance, the interested gaze, the curious interest, the sudden wonder.

These modern mystics believe that all life is interconnected and worthy of reverence and that spirituality inspires ethical living and justice for others. It is an outward-flowing exercise born of the inner waters of compassion. They believe that simplicity clears space for deeper presence, because we are not cluttered by the inanimate contrivances that prevent

our immersive engagement. Most importantly, these modern mystics believe the sacred is not necessarily confined to doctrine or religious experience but revealed through lived experience. As so many Millennials and Gen Z keep reminding us, the many who describe their religion as ‘none’ in the national census, one can be spiritual without being religious. Mysticism does not need a god or deity to be an avenue of great consolation and interior growth.

For me, John O’Donohue, the Irish poet and philosopher, is a mystic whose words open up places in his readers’ hearts. With his Celtic sensibility, he understands the thin places, the liminal spaces where the veil between heaven and earth is lifted, allowing the sacred to touch the everyday. Such places may well be thresholds to an atmosphere that speaks of deep and abiding holiness. He speaks of the Celtic imagination as having a ‘friendship’ between the natural world and the soul. For many, the beauty of nature, its grandeur and grounding, its teeming web of life and kaleidoscopic colours, is answer enough.

Western and Eastern mysticism find common ground in a number of areas. One of the most significant commonalities is the transcendence of the ego. There is a movement away from the arrogance of ego to the surrender of humility. This leads to a rethinking of identity from the self-involvement of ‘I’ to a deeper universal self. Put simply, it can make us better people.

And then there is the finding of peace; the peace we so often seek in a world full of clamour and cacophony; the peace of knowing ourselves in a new way; the peace of compassion and loving kindness for one another.



The Christian theologian Karl Rahner said that the Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all. This applies to anyone, anywhere and at any time, who seeks to find the truth of their own lives and what they can live with and live out. It may even apply to someone who may not necessarily identify themselves with a Christian denomination but who has a casual or cultural understanding of its imperatives.

Most faith traditions embrace the Golden Rule – treat others as you wish to be treated – as a core ethical teaching. It appears in various forms across religions, promoting empathy, compassion and mutual respect.

**One of the gifts of living today is
that ordinary persons can take
charge of their own soul journey.**

Clerical hegemony and authority no longer rule the lives of the faithful. Trust in many of the traditional institutions and systems has been lost by many. Those many include the disenchanted, lapsed and disappointed who are still searching for meaning. Millions of people want to find their life's purpose. They want their lives to matter and are looking for guidance. They want clear paths that point them in the right direction to ways of living that celebrate the human spirit, not debase it.

Today's world is, for the most part, about visibility, relevance and virality; being on-trend, being seen in the right places, being a TikTok influencer. It's the loudest voice, the biggest bank balance, the unabashed ego. Mysticism instead is about quietude, an atmosphere of calm in which a gentle revolution may brew, a spiritual and emotional realignment of what truly matters. To energise our own daily mystic, we must look for the quiet time: the pools of silence, those places where reflection is encouraged and discernment made, those times when we remake ourselves.

However one decides to experience mysticism for themselves, it is a reawakening of the dormant, a new appreciation of the gifts we fail to see and use, even though they are already within us. These gifts can be reached through both the sacred and the secular realms. As Hamlet tells Horatio on the battlements at Elsinore, "There are more things in heaven and

earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy' (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 165–66). We are looking for those *more things*, above and beyond, just out of reach, but graspable if we genuinely care to make changes so that they become part of our essential being.

Each day, we have the opportunity to access our own inner mystic. It is liberating to know we are not in competition with anyone else. Any practice of spirituality must be expansive, open-hearted, alert to the inner voice, the godly or blissful impulse that moves us in different ways, at different times and in different places.

It is never a one-size-fits-all experience, because we are all unique, and our responses and reactions to the tangible and intangible are our own. Divining and encouraging our own inner mystic is about flourishing, a self-actualisation that is readily entwined with a spiritual personhood. It can be summed up by the line in Robert Browning's 'Andrea del Sarto':

*Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?*

Even in the midst of struggle
and endurance, in hard
times that test us,
we can find that deeper
mystical reality, that
impetus that somehow
helps guide us.

Mysticism isn't a luxury,
a hobby: it connects us to
the deepest nurturing
to give us what we need
to sustain us.

Mystics matter today because they can lead us to a better tomorrow where we truly love one another and love this planet, our shared and common home. They help us to open up avenues of thought and action that may have been stopped or stultified because we have been too caught up in other things – the ephemerality of success and status, the grasping for more that ends up making us less.

Mystics are our navigators, our lighthouses in the dark, our modern prophets. And while we can rely on these special others to guide us, we also have our own inner whisperer, our own mystic impulse, our own locus of grace and wisdom that we can access because we have taken the time to tune into the deep well of spiritual consciousness we all possess.

As you continue to tune into your own daily mystic, you will begin to notice changes in how you respond to the world around you. You may notice things more readily because you are allowing your gaze to land on new and unexpected places. You may soften some of your hard-held views because you are listening closely, attentively, to others, being present to them.

All these riches are hidden in plain sight of our everyday lives, in the ordinary and mundane, in the routine and unremarkable, in what we have to do and what we dream of doing.

Your mission now, as you become your own daily mystic, is to discover the treasure inside you.

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