

Many people believe that the place to go for this experience is a church, synagogue, mosque or other religious meeting place.

### *Going To Church*

So the question is whether one truly can experience the indescribable there? Absolutely! But doing so is not simply a result of a particular kind of worship service. Rather, it's a result of a particular way of *being there*. So, the experience is largely up to *you*, not the externals of ritual or dogma.

On one brilliantly sunny Sunday, our friends Rita and Enrico took me to the Sant' Antimo Abbey which was tucked in a valley beneath the village Castelnova. The first stone of the structure is said to have been laid in the eighth century.

The Gregorian Latin Mass was sung mostly by seven monks with occasional congregational response. The haunting unison notes and the sweet tenor solo tunes swirled through the six story high travertine alabaster stone cathedral. It was a feast for the ear and eyes, united with the touch of the stone, the permeating aroma of the incense and, for those choosing to participate, the taste of the wafer.

A sensate experience!

The service was in Latin and therefore not a "thinking" experience, except for those present who understood the words passionately delivered in the Italian sermon. For me the passion was engaging and enough.

The mystery of the Mass, a sensate and intuitive moment pointing beyond itself to the indescribable mystery, is awesome. Patricia and I have been in awe in a Russian Orthodox service in Moscow. The same sense of a mystery pointing beyond the enchanting experience of the moment was especially strong for me in the chanting of the priests and the visual beauty of the interior.

Unversed as I am in Islam, I imagine the same when I see Muslims kneeling for prayer, or walking at Mecca round and round the Kabah which their tradition says was built by Adam and then repaired/rebuilt by Abraham and his first born son (by Hagar) Isma‘il.

Transcendent moments!

All religions have created such opportunities. As a boy I loved the gospel songs we sang in church. Yes, the words were sung in the language I knew, but it was something in the union of voices and the rhythms of the music that enchanted me. I still love singing gospel songs and spirituals, but if I were to take many of those words literally today, the experience of a-mystery-beyond would escape me.

In life a Jesus *happens!* A Moses *happens!* A Buddha, a Zoroaster, a Mohammed *happens*. Religions arise attempting to perpetuate the peak transcendent experiences of their first hero. They formulate orthodoxy or right-thinking. They often become rigid and dogmatic. In the midst of having to maintain the approved right beliefs, religions again and again lose that original spark. The mind and dogmas trump intuitive faith.

It doesn't have to be this way. We can have an experience of the mystery of life in a house of worship as long as we don't get stuck on the doctrines, the symbols, or the words. The mystery will rekindle as long as we don't let it—the indescribable experience that we each create—ever be defined for us by others or finally in a fixed way by ourselves. Definitions are limited. They are the enemies of awe and mystery.