

# “Numinous Experience vs ibs”

August 30, 2020  
On-site and Online Worship Service  
York United Ministries  
Broadcasting from King City United Church  
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## Prayer for Illumination

Let us pray: God of wisdom, I do not turn away from your ordinances, for you have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth. As we read Your Words of wisdom, O God, let your Words reside in the center of our heart. Amen.

## Scripture Readings: Mark 15:37-41, 16:1-2

### Exodus 3:1-6

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” <sup>4</sup> When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” <sup>5</sup> Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” <sup>6</sup> He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

### Acts 9:1-7

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” <sup>5</sup> He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” <sup>6</sup> But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” <sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one.

## **REFLECTION**

Good morning everyone, how are you? I mean it, how are you? It's really nice to see you again, physically and virtually. I'm back and we are back! I've been doing my ministry for more than 20 years, and this vacation was my longest vacation ever! I really missed all of you, and being together at church. How was your summer, brothers and sisters? And how was my summer? Oh dear, I stayed in Ontario within family bubble, went camping at a provincial park with my family, which was great, and you might sense that my face is getting darker because of bike ridings. Yes, I rode my bike 5 times a week! And I found that it was one of the healthiest practices I've adopted, especially for this COVID situation. And I learned a lot about maintaining bikes from fixing tire punctures to adjusting wheels and spokes. If you have some problems with your bikes AND questions about Christian faith, just bring them to me and I can freely help. Look at this picture: A few weeks ago, I rode to York Pines and the roads were full of green. I like to travel on well-maintained trails, and had barely ridden on the road. I was quite scared when a big truck passed me by. The truckers usually use engine breaks when they reduce the speed, and the rumbling engine sounds distracts bikers. Later, I understood the engine sounds are not for threatening bikers but for protecting. At some point I found myself accustomed to the truck engine and enjoying riding on the roads as a leisure activity. As soon as I enjoyed it, I started sensing the other sounds: not just of cars and trucks but also of nature, of wind and of crickets. These sounds are always there, but I HAVEN'T NOTICED. Strange, isn't it? And it was interesting to connect my story to the apostle Paul's experience: According to Acts chapter 9, he was heading to Damascus to persecute first Christians. And yet, Jesus revealed himself to Paul in a vision. But the

people who were with Paul only heard the voice not see the vision. Their sense of sight became limited but not for Paul. How could this happen to Paul and to the travelers with him?

And how about Moses from our bible passage? He saw the burning bush and it was not consumed. It is known that bushes on fire are not uncommon due to the heat, dried bush, and oils from the branches of bush. But certainly a flame on a bush that didn't burn is weird.

What happened to the bush, and what did that mean? How can we explain this? In our lives, there are tons of things that we cannot explain exactly even though it really happens. Here is a mother who sensed her son's danger in her dream. On that day, his son on the other side of the earth broke his leg. An old grandmother foretells her grandson's promotion and it happened. No one can explain it. At best we can say, it was good luck or just a coincidence. That may be right. But who knows? All we can do is interpret the phenomena rightly to our reality. Due to the weird and inexplicable phenomena in human life, modern psychologists created the phrase "Numinous Experience"

The word "numinous" indicates an experience of phenomenon that cannot be scientifically explained or understood. That is, transcendental or mysterious things are called "numinous experience" in psychology. Why did psychologists create this word? Because, there are human experiences that have phenomena which cannot be logically explained or scientifically proved.

In the Bible, we can find tons of transcendental and inexplicable cases: Like the Bible verses from Exodus today, Moses saw unquenchable flames in Mt. Sinai. That was the presence of God, and he heard God's voice. At that moment Moses was a shepherd, literally a shepherd of a herd of sheep

that was owned by his wife's father; however, after he was confronted with a numinous experience, his job and job concerns became meaningless. His focus in his life had drastically changed.

What about Paul in the New Testament? We know Paul met Jesus in a vision on the way to Damascus. A mysterious voice called his name, and Saul promptly became blind for three days. "Who are you?" Saul responded with awe and fear. "I am Jesus whom you persecute." After this numinous experience, Saul couldn't see for three days but could see a new vision for his life. And that completely changed his life direction.

When biblical characters had a numinous experience, in most cases, they faced a crucial life changing moment. And the life changing moments give a tremendous meaningful turning point. In the turning points God was there. Jesus was there, and the Holy Spirit was there. This mystical and numinous experience is not a daydream or a self-imaginary fantasy. It happens in reality not arbitrarily but with heavenly intention. God reveals God-self at some point in our lives. At the verge of our new study or new life, right after our biggest failure, when we delight or despair for someone's birth or death, at the bottom of our solitude, when we cry out for divine redemption from great pains, when we face our authentic self in front of God, and when we devote ourselves to God, God intervenes us, God penetrates our hearts and mind, and God changes our life direction.

I am not a big fan of exaggerated mysticism; rather I am more towards logical Western philosophy, so don't get me wrong.

When it comes to mystic divine moments in our lives, there is one more word we have to take a look at. That is, another psychological term, “ibs”: This term is being used as acronym of “irrational beliefs.” “Irrational beliefs” is like this:

Here is a person who prayed on a regular basis. One day, in the middle of the prayer, a strange imaginative scene came upon the person. The image was about Mr. K, his neighbor. In that imagination, Mr. K was a vicious vampire. The imaginative Mr. K was so strong that the person was captured. Since then the person pre-judged Mr. K and tried to find bad things in his life. It sounds funny, but some people have that and psychologists call their assumption “ibs,” irrational beliefs.

Another example of ibs is here. Noah in Genesis chapter 9 has three sons, named Shem, Ham, and Japheth. One day Noah was drunken and naked. When one of the sons, Ham saw that, he mocked his father while other two respectfully covered their father’s body. Noah was sober and found what his sons did. And he cursed Ham to serve his two sons. Later, Ham became the ancestor of Canaan. We know that; however, this incident in the Bible cannot justify modern mistreatments of the Black people in North America. If there are Christians who believe that God allowed Noah to curse black people and who strongly believe the Black people should take their hardship for granted, they have no logical foundation in that claim, so we call it “ibs.”

Then what is the difference between a numinous experience and ibs? How do we know this is a numinous experience and that is ibs? There are four standards to distinguish the two.

Bible, I-community, Nature, and God. I can elaborate on them but today I’ll just touch on the four standards succinctly.

First, we need to know what the Bible says. The mystical experience shouldn't oppose biblical perspective. Second, the mystical experience should be engaged, testified, and incarnated by myself and by others. Third, the mystical experience should coincide with the value of nature that God created. In other words, the mystical learning shouldn't undermine the integration of creation. Fourth, from the mystical experience, the person should be drawn closer to God. All four standards should be discerned to be classified as a numinous experience. And spiritual discernment is needed for the numinous experience. We all need numinous experiences to confess our sincere hearts.

Brothers and sisters, do you hear what nobody hears? Do you see what no one sees? You know I'm not talking about a ringing in the ears or optic nerve disorder. I'm saying insights that may reveal divine love and truth. All of a sudden we find ourselves hearing something and seeing something that we have ignored or passed by. If we hear and see something in insightful ways, wouldn't it be God's voices and visions? Does a cricket's singing in the forest tell lots of divine mysteries in our world? And would it be a small door of hope for the future? With Christian spiritual sensitivity, let us try to listen for what we've ignored, and let us look for what we've passed by. God is telling us. Let us pray silently.