



Ordinary Mysticism: Your Life as Sacred Ground Study Questions – Week Two

October 12 – 18, 2025

Based on “Ordinary Mysticism” by Mirabai Starr

Attention: A Fearless Gaze

Quotes

“Now that you have set your intention to make yourself available to the beauty and wonder of everyday life, it’s time to tune all your faculties to perceive it. Pour your attention into the vessel of the present moment.” P.48

“...When you plant yourself in the ground of what is, your capacity to be present to all of life expands. Refining your faculty of perception allows you to feel everything, to feel deeply and even intensely, and yet also not be drowned in the experience. When we practice this kind of sacred seeing, we are able to perceive the world at its best, overflowing with grace. Sometimes broken grace, destabilizing and aggravating, but real and beautiful.” P. 51

1) Begin by reading this aloud (with different readers in your group). Read each paragraph slowly and let it land.

Intention and **Attention** are twin forces of consciousness. **Intention** is *the aim of the soul* and **Attention** is *the gaze of the soul*. They move together, intention sets the direction, and attention provides the energy. Without intention, attention scatters. Without attention, intention remains only an idea. Intention aims; attention sustains.

In *Ordinary Mysticism*, Starr invites us to begin by **setting our intention**. Once intention is set, she says, the next step is to **tune all our faculties to perceive it**, to *pour our attention into the vessel of the present moment*.

Attention, she teaches, is not passive. It can (and should) be **trained like a muscle**; strengthened each time we notice our awareness, and learn to be present. With practice, our capacity to *stay present* expands, and our attention/perception becomes more pure and refined.

Starr writes, “When we plant ourselves in the ground of what is,” we grow more stable in our awareness. But this stability is not about clinging to what is fixed; rather, it’s about finding our footing **in the flow of impermanence itself**.

She calls this being “**grounded in the groundless**,” a way of rooting in reality - even as it constantly shifts and transforms. In this sense, impermanence, *aka “God” as the active Presence of Life* - is our true grounding.

She also reminds us of the need for **contemplation and rest**. To attend deeply, we must sometimes unplug, slow down, and create space for **Sabbath** - for stillness, silence, and renewal. These pauses help replenish the very energy that makes attention possible.

Throughout the chapter, Starr also encourages us to notice where we divide life into “sacred” and “ordinary.” (Such as God and money, or God and politics.) She invites us to bring attention to the areas we relegate as “ordinary... or where we turn away, and to see these, too, as doorways to the sacred Presence.

As our practice deepens, we begin to see how much of our perception is shaped by our own **filters and conditioning**. We stop identifying so tightly with those filters, and we learn instead to **behold reality with clearer awareness** – as the observer or witness. As the Talmud reminds us, “*We do not see things as they are; we see things as we are.*” As our attention purifies, we begin to see with greater honesty, humility, openness and possibility.

Ultimately, **attention is both gateway and vehicle** of *Pure Awareness*. Through it, we realize that our *ability to pay attention* and “*awareness itself*” - are not separate. Learning to **untangle the object of our attention** (what we notice) from **the act of being aware** (the noticing itself) is key.

In this deepening, *our attention* becomes **aware of itself**. Here, the mystic no longer “pays” attention; they **become attention (Presence) Itself**. Attention and pure awareness merge as one continuous presence. Our capacity to be present in this way allows us to become **a gateway of Greater Presence** - a living embodiment of Presence – wholly present and available, here and now.

2. Attention is not passive; it is active and trainable. Attention can be strengthened through practice. Each time we *notice what we are noticing...* and *how we are noticing...* our capacity to be mindfully aware expands.

2 a. What most often weakens or scatters your attention? (*i.e. distraction, hurry, worry, noise, multitasking, past, future, something shiny, avoidance, etc.*)

2 b. What simple practices or habits help you strengthen your “attention muscle”? (*For example: mindful breathing, pausing before reacting, being fully present in one task, intentional rest.*)

3. Purifying Perception - Seeing Through Filters

As awareness grows, we begin to see how our perception is shaped by conditioning, emotion, fear, and expectation. Seeing clearly means seeing without projection - with humility, curiosity, and openness.

3 a. Name one “filter” that often distorts your perception. (*e.g., busyness, fear, assumption, mistrust, control, intolerance, comparison, defensiveness, rose colored glasses, etc.*)

3 b. How does awareness of *your filters* change how you relate to others and yourself? What does it *feel like*?

4. Healing the Split – Through Attention

We often separate aspects of life into “spiritual” and “ordinary,” thinking God is in one and absent from the other. Starr invites us to bring attention especially to these places - money, politics, conflict, sex, or strong emotions - and to see these as doorways to greater awareness and the sacred.

4 a. Where in your own life do you notice this divide?

4 b. What might it look like to bring reverent, conscious attention to those areas?

5. Untangling Object and Awareness

Most of the time, we confuse *what we’re aware of* - our thoughts, feelings, sensations, and beliefs - with *awareness itself*. But awareness is not simply the *content of observation or experience*; it is the *space* in which all experience occurs and All-This-Is is present.

5 a. How does awareness feel when it’s no longer entangled with what it observes?

5 b. How does this recognition change the way you experience yourself, others and the situation?

Week 2 - Take Home Soul Care _____

- **Reading for next week** – Chapter 3, “Ordinary Mysticism”

- **Mysticism in Practice**

- ~ **Continue the Daily Practice**

- At the start of the day, place your hand on your heart and ask: “*What is my deepest intention today?*” Identify it and say it aloud. Invite it to guide your day. Then, at bedtime, reflect a moment on that intention... and give thanks for the way it guided you today.

Optional Practices - Contemplation & Journaling

- ~ **Resting as Awareness**

- Be still. Breathe. When you stop being occupied by thoughts, emotions, or sensations... and simply *rest within awareness itself*, what changes in your inner experience? What does it feel like *to be the open space* in which everything arises, rather than the one pre-occupied or trying to manage it all?

- ~ **Seeing Through Filters**

- Recall a time when you realized you were perceiving through a personal filter - a belief, fear, feeling or assumption. What helped you notice that lens?

- How did that awareness shift your understanding of yourself, another person, or the situation?

Guide for Cultivating Awareness - Sit for 5 minutes (or more)

1. Settle and Sit comfortably.

Let your spine rise naturally, shoulders soft, hands resting easily. Close your eyes or lower your gaze. Take a slow, steady breath in... and a long, easy breath out. Let yourself relax.

2. Be Aware

Turn your attention inward and simply notice: be here now. No need to focus on anything in particular. Just rest mindfully - as the presence - that is noticing.

3. Attachment and Release

As you sit, awareness will attach itself to a thought, a feeling, or a sound.

Awareness gets entangled and absorbed - like getting caught up and carried away by a cloud drifting across the open sky. But, the moment you notice you've been caught up and absorbed by something... breath and release it.

4. Return... again and again

With your breath, release the cloud (pre-occupation with a thought). Return to the clear, open sky of awareness. Keep breathing. Keep noticing. Keep returning, again and again, each time a little softer.

5. Rest in Presence... in the spaces

For these few moments (between clouds), simply notice. No worry, no judgment, no fixing. Simply be *aware of being aware*. Rest in that quiet, spacious, fully-aware Presence.

6. Close

Take one final deep breath. Offer a silent moment of gratitude.

When you're ready, open your eyes, and carry this quality awareness into whatever comes next.

7. Smile. Repeat. Be Transformed.

Over time, as you train your attention, you come to recognize that it is both your honor and your responsibility to be the steward of your own awareness. You begin to see the distinction between what you notice - and your capacity for presence itself. Gradually, you grow more grounded, more able to witness life as it unfolds - without being swept away by its currents. You develop the ability to hold space, to remain open and steady, becoming a gateway through which greater presence and possibilities can enter the world.