Unit 5 RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE*

Structure

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

Our objective in this unit is to study closely two eminent writers who analyzed the dimensions of religious experience. At the end of this unit learner will be able to understand,

- Psychological view of William James
- Phenomenological view of Rudolf Otto

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The word "Experience" is ordinarily used to refer to an active act of consciousness. While none of the medieval theologians considered "experience" as being central to their theological works, the significance of this phenomenon began to assume a definite shape in the contemporary period with the works of William James and Rudolf Otto. While William James looked at religious experience mainly from the psychological point of view, Rudolf Otto, a well-known phenomenologist of religion, tried to bring out the aspects of Divinity and religious experience, which cannot be expressed through rational, deductive method.

William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1901) and Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* (1917) translated as *The Idea of the Holy* opened up new horizons of theorizing about

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religious experience.

5.2 WILLIAM JAMES ON RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature, is one of the most important books dealing with the analysis of religious experience, albeit specifically from a psychological perspective. In *The Principles of Psychology* James defined experience as a 'stream of consciousness', an idea which becomes vital to his understanding of religious experience as well. Accordingly, he pointed out organic and temperamental reasons for the various religious experiences. In his book *Radical Empiricism*, he underlines the importance of experience, and clarifies the meaning of experience as something continuous, changing, and personal. According to him, experience is self-contained and self-sufficient. He held that everything real must be somewhere experiential. This principle of radical empiricism is also fundamental to James' epistemology. If there is genuine or authentic religious experience, it is based on this founding principle. He suggests a method and a theory of truth. His method proposes to interpret concepts in terms of their consequences, while as a theory of truth James considers truth as an attribute of ideas rather than of reality, which can be verified by the norm of usefulness. In other words, for James truth can be verified by experience and experience is also to be verified by experience itself.

5.2.1 Religious Experience

Religious experience, according to William James is "the consciousness which individuals have of an intercourse between themselves and higher powers with which they feel themselves to be related. This intercourse is realized at the time as being both active and mutual".

The phrase 'higher powers' is used quite broadly by James and it is meant to be inclusive of a variety of religious objects. According to him a conscious person is continuous with a 'wider self' through which experiences come. 'Wider self', for James, was not the normal 'self' of the conscious person, rather it was to be understood as having a dimension wider than the sensible world, ultimately involving the mystical and the supernatural as well. This unseen world must also be regarded as a *present reality*

because it *affects* individuals and transforms their lives. He also maintained that religious experiences have positive content because they manifest as conversations with the unseen; voices and visions; responses to prayer; changes of heart; deliverances from fear; inflowing of help; assurance of support; etc. According to James there are many forms or varieties of religious experience. The religious experience in which there could be touch of the 'unseen' is only one such form of religious experience.

James states three hypotheses which according to him are applicable to all forms of religious experience.

1. There is the touch of the 'more', which may be the 'higher spiritual agencies'.
2. The subconsciousness which is the intermediary either for divine encounter or for abnormal psychic invasion
3. The active consciousness in which the individual realizes the experience as something real.

Using these hypotheses, James tries to explain all kinds of religious experience, both healthy and unhealthy, normal and abnormal. The unhealthy or abnormal cases remain, according to him, as mere psychological phenomena. They are due to the invasions from subconscious region, which take objective appearances and suggest to the subject an external control. James speaks of the reality of genuine, healthy and normal religious experience as well. In this case there is the touch of a 'more', 'the unseen', or 'the divine'. As our primary, wide-awake, consciousness throws open our senses to the touch of the material things, so it is logically conceivable that there can also be higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch man. The possibility for such experience, James explains, might stem from our possession of a subconscious region which ends up yielding access to the spiritual beings. In short, then, genuine religious experience of the encounter of the 'more', 'the unseen', or 'the higher spiritual agencies', appear through the subconscious region of the self. In this sense, the subconscious region becomes the intermediary between the normal self and the higher spiritual agency.

5.2.2 Validity of Religious Experience

In judging the validity of religious experience, James applies his pragmatic method, and indicates three criterions to accomplish it. These include:

(1) Immediate luminousness

(2) philosophical reasonableness

(3) and moral helpfulness

Immediate luminousness means direct evidence of the fact as in perception. It is the criterion of judging, based on our own immediate feeling. By *philosophical reasonableness*, he means that the fact must be consistent with logic and experimentation. It is the consistency of the alleged fact with the accepted principles, i.e., the indirect evidence of the fact. *Moral helpfulness* means the congruence of the fact with the passionate nature, especially with the resolute will. In short, the given fact should be contributing to the moral needs and to the rest of what we hold as true and good. By these criteria, therefore, James seeks the direct evidence of the fact, its consistency with the existing truths, and its moral usefulness.

If one's experience manages to withstand these three tests, then whether or not one is hysterical or nervously off, his description makes no difference. When a religious experience passes through these tests successfully, it can be considered true and valid. Consistently applying these criteria, James however finds that they are not fully verified in the case of religious experience. It is mainly because of its individual and private character. Religious experience is immediately evident and morally helpful to the person concerned. But they cannot be tested by scientific experiment, as a result of which they tend to lack scientific validity. But that does not mean that they are not valid or true at the individual level. In fact, James advocates that it is literally and objectively true and can be very well held to be so, at the individual level.

5.2.3 Mysticism: An Intense Form of Religious Experience

As we have seen, James holds religious experience to be the consciousness in which the individuals have a feeling of union with the higher powers. Mysticism may be identified as a peculiar and intense form of religious experience. Mystical intuition, according to James is to be understood as a sudden and great extension of the ordinary `field of consciousness`.

James enumerates four elements of mystical experience including: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity. *Ineffability* implies that the experience cannot be expressed in words, for language is found to be inadequate to express its nature and significance to one who has not experienced it. *Noetic quality* of religious experience means that it is not just remarkable or pleasant but that it also contains a degree of knowledge, i.e., states of insight into depths of truth plumbed by the discursive intellect. *Transiency* means that the experience is not long lasting. Mystical instances may last half an hour or at the most an hour or two. The *passivity* highlights the fact that the experience, although often facilitated by personal concentration and discipline, involves the subject losing his or her own will. The person here is over taken by an experience that is, so to speak, forced upon him. That means this experience is not something that can be turned on and off at will.

James was concerned mainly with the cognitive aspect of mysticism and its value as a way of revelation. He omits the mention of visual and auditory hallucinations, verbal and graphic automatisms such marvels as `levitation', and the healing of disease. Though the mystics have presented these phenomena in their witnesses, but James does not consider them as essential to mysticism itself. For him, consciousness of illumination is the essential mark of `mystical` states. Whatever may be the mental condition of the mystics, James does not take away the value of the knowledge of consciousness which the mystical states induce.

James does not see any scientific reason, in the strict sense, to account for mysticism. He also qualifies many of the mystical cases as pathological. But he was very particular to distinguish some cases as unique. James writes "When mystical activity is at its height, we find the consciousness possessed by the sense of a being at once *excessive* and *identical* with the self: great enough to be God; interior enough to be me. The 'objectivity' of it ought in that case to be called excessivity, rather, or exceedingness." He even argues that there is no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal. The 'effect' this unseen world creates forces James to accept its existence. He emphasizes that so far as our ideal impulses originate in this region, call it mystical region or the supernatural region, we belong to it in a more intimate sense than that in which we belong to the visible world, for we belong in the most intimate sense wherever our ideals belong. Since the experience of the unseen world produces effects in this

world, the unseen region in question is not merely ideal. When we commune with it, the effect is actually imparted to our finite personality. Therefore, that which produces effects within another reality must, according to James, be termed a reality itself.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Explain the logical conceivability of religious experience according to William James

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2. According to James what are the three criteria to judge the validity of religious experience? How does he consider the pragmatic criterion as important to prove the validity of religious experience?

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5.3 RUDOLF OTTOS'S ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Rudolf Otto, a well-known phenomenologist of religion tries to bring out the aspects of Divinity and religious experience, which cannot be expressed through rational and deductive method. *Das Heilige* (*The Idea of Holy*), is the most important work of Otto wherein he describes the religious experience as the experience of the *Numinous*.

Rudolf Otto presented a phenomenological analysis of the religious consciousness. In contrast to the traditional rational method, Otto's method was descriptive and phenomenological. Phenomenology tries to investigate into what actually appears to direct intuition. Husserl the originator of Phenomenology wanted to pay attention to the phenomena of experience. It is the study of immediate, direct experience with the

intention to build an 'exact science' of description, or even a method of precise, sharable and testable description.

Phenomenology of religion is particularly concerned with examining phenomenologically the character of religious experience taking the presented aspect or moment within the stream of experience as an object of analysis and reflection. In this way Rudolf Otto tried to describe the essential character of 'the Holy' through phenomenological analysis of religious experience. In his book *The Idea of Holy*, he phenomenologically analyses and describes what he calls 'non-rational or supra-rational in our religious experience.

5.3.1 Analysis of the Non-Rational in Religious Experience

Otto analyses the fundamental religious experience and tries to understand it in its own terms, especially by elucidating the non- rational core of religion. Otto holds religion to have a non-rational core which cannot be articulated in language. He does not deny the rational side of religion. Otto's point is that if we focus only on the rational side, we miss the essential character of religious experience. To this non-rational, non-explainable element of religion he gave the name "*Numinous*". Now it may be asked that if the religious realm cannot be explained in words, how can it be known? Here Otto explains that, it can be known because everyone has an inborn sense of the *numinous*. In order to show this non-rational character of such experiences he avoids using ordinary words to describe them, preferring to use Latin words instead. *Numinous* is said to be *mysterium tremendum et fascinans. Mysterium* denotes that which is hidden and esoteric, beyond understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar. Though what is enunciated in the word is negative, what is meant is absolutely positive. The most valuable contribution of Otto consists of his careful analysis of the feeling- states which constitute the numinous experience. There is on the one side what is called 'creature-feeling' that is the feeling of nothingness of finite being. On the other side is the feeling of the presence of an overwhelming Being, the '*Numinous Being'*, which strikes one with amazement. This amazement is what is summarized by the expression "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*".

Mysterium denotes that which is hidden and esoteric, beyond understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar. Though what is enunciated in the word is negative, what is meant is absolutely positive. It points to what is called the 'wholly other' character of the numinous Being, which, as supra rational, utterly transcends the grasp of conceptual thought. The word *Trementum* comes from 'tremor', which means normally the familiar emotion of fear. But here the term is used analogically to denote a kind of emotional response different from mere fear. It denotes an 'awe' or awe-filled-ness due to *majestas*, it is a state of absolute 'overpoweringness' and dynamic energy of the numinous presence. The element of Fascinans points to the captivating attraction of the numinous Being, evoking rapture and love. *Mysterium* is expressed as *trementum* and also as *Fascinans* or fascinating. These two qualities, the daunting and fascination are combined in a strange harmony of contrasts. The reluctant dual character of the numinous consciousness is at once the strongest and most noteworthy phenomenon in the whole history of religion. The mystery aspect is for religious man not merely something to be wondered at but something that throws him into a trance. The element of fascination is what brings out the properties of love, mercy etc. in the religious experience. For instance, what does one feel when one is in deeply felt personal prayer or when one partakes in a solemn liturgical service or when one is in an old church or temple? The appropriate expression to this feeling is *mysterium trementum et fascinans.* The feeling of it may come sweeping like a gentle breeze or tide, it may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasm and convulsions, or it may lead one to strong excitements or to ecstasy. It can also take wild and demonic forms and put one in horror status. Though it cannot be explained, but we cannot rule out the possibility to evoke it indirectly.

5.3.2 The "Wholly Other"

While "The more" is an expression used by William James to refer to the reality that cannot be identified with the natural, Otto referred to it as the "Wholly Other", describing it as "that which is beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar…". According to Otto even on the lowest level of religious development, the essential characteristic of religious experience is 'stupor' before something 'Wholly Other', whether such this "Other" be named as 'Spirit', 'Demon', '*Deva*' or be left

without a name. This feeling of the 'Wholly Other' may be indirectly 'aroused' by means of objects which are already puzzling upon natural plane. "Wholly Other' as mysterious is something which is absolutely beyond our understanding. But that which merely eludes our understanding for a time is a 'problem' and not a mystery. Truly mysterious object is beyond our comprehension not only because our knowledge has certain limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently 'wholly other'.

Mysticism contrasts the numinous object, the "Wholly Other' with the objects of ordinary experience. Not satisfied with contrasting with such objects of nature, mysticism finally calls it 'that which is *nothing'*. By this 'nothing' is meant not only that of which nothing can be predicated, but that which is absolutely and intrinsically other than the opposite of everything that is and can be thought. The 'nothingness' of the Western mystics is termed as '*sunyam*' or '*sunyatha*' or 'void' and 'emptiness' by Buddhist and Hindu mystics. All these are apparently synonymous to the Numinous ideogram of the 'Wholly Other'.

5.3.3 The Epistemological Grounding of the Experience of the Holy

Otto tries to locate a transcendental basis of the experience of Numinous in the subject as Kant did in his epistemology. When the concept of the numinous and the schematizing concepts are brought together, we have the complex category of 'the Holy' itself. Otto's analysis of the structure of the religious consciousness is based on a clarification of this key-word of all religions namely 'the Holy'. 'The Holy' is identified by Otto as the 'category' by which we apprehend the transcendent both in its rational and non-rational aspects. In the case of non-rational elements of the category of the Holy we are referred back to something still deeper than pure reason, i.e., to that which the mystics call 'the ground of the soul'. The word 'holy' can have varied forms of characteristics. One of the characteristics can be that it is rational in its nature in the sense that it can be thought conceptually. Thus, for example by holiness we can mean moral goodness and it is possible to have some kind of understanding of what goodness is. But the rational characteristics do not explain completely the meaning of the word holy. For Otto the rational meaning is only derivative. In its fundamental sense the word holy stands for a non-rational character. By it we mean that it is something which cannot be thought conceptually.

From this preliminary examination we can say religion is compounded of rational and non- rational elements. We think of God in terms of goodness, personality, purpose, and so on. These ideas are applied to God analogically. They are rational characteristics in the sense that we have definite concepts of them. This rational side of religion is something that cannot be dispensed with. But sometimes it neglects the deeper non-rational core of religion. The idea of God is not exhausted via such rational attributions. He is the holy God and the adjective points to His deeper, inconceivable, super rational nature. Otto wishes to stress this non-rational side of religion, as against the traditional philosophy and theology of his times which appeared to have lost sight of these aspects, thereby giving an excessively intellectualistic interpretation.

But the problem is if the numinous core of religion is inconceivable, how can we talk about it or explain it? According to him although it is inconceivable, it is somehow within our grasp. We apprehend it in feeling, in the *sensus numinous*. This feeling is not merely an emotion but an affective state of mind which involves some kind of valuation and pre-conceptual cognition. The feeling revealed in the analysis of the numinous experience, while analogous to natural feelings, have a unique quality. The *sensus numinous* is something *sui generis*. It cannot be compounded out of merely natural feelings. It cannot even be regarded as evolved from natural feelings. For Otto it is connected with the faculty of divination which is a faculty for genuinely cognizing and recognizing the holy in its appearance.

These speculations prepare the way for Otto's assertion that 'the holy' is an a priori category. Its non-rational or numinous element is said to arise from the deepest foundation of cognitive apprehension that the soul possesses. Otto follows the Kantian model to locate religion as well as the sense of God in man. According to Kant knowledge arises from our faculty of cognition and sense impressions are occasions for such knowledge. The knowledge of the *Numinous* could be described in the same manner. It is derived from the deepest foundation of the cognitive apprehension of the soul. The experience of the *Numinous* arises by means of sense experience but not in and through sensory data. The latter provide the stimulus and the occasion for the *numinous* experience to be stirred. The experience of the *Numinous* becomes purer when the soul disengages itself from this sense experience and takes its stand in absolute contrast.

Not only the rational, but even the non-rational elements of the complex category of the Holy have *a priori* elements. The non-rational content has its own independent roots in the hidden depths of the spirit. The first stirring of demonic dread is purely *a priori* element. This could be pictured as the experience of the *Numinous* in the primitive and crude form. In the same way the developed form of the experience- *mysterium, trementum et fascinans* is *a priori*. This non-rational element of the experience of the *Numinous* may be compared with the aesthetic judgement and the category of the beautiful. Intuitively I apprehend in the object only its sensuous qualities and its spatial form and nothing more. The meaning 'beautiful' is not given by the sensory elements. I must have an obscure conception of the 'beautiful' and in addition, a principle of assumption by which I attribute it to the object. If not the simplest experience of a beautiful thing is rendered impossible.

5.3.4 Religious Feeling and The Feeling of The Sublime

Otto tries to draw a clear distinction between numinous or religious feeling and the feeling of the sublime. Numinous feelings have two primary aspects (i) a feeling of religious dread (ii) a feeling of religious fascination. The closest analogue to religious dread or awe is the feeling of uncanniness – the feeling one has when the hair on the back of one's neck rises, the shudder or terror on hearing a ghost story, the dread of haunted places. The feeling of fascination by, attraction to, and prizing of the object which arouses the feeling in question creates both the desire to approach the object and the feeling that one possesses of value when considered in relation to the fascinating and prized object.

His attempt to conceptualize and describe the various feelings must be clearly distinguished from his theory about numinous. According to Otto numinous feelings are, first of all, unique and it cannot be analyzed as a complex of non-numinous feeling such as love, fear, horror, a feeling of sublimity, and so on. Secondly the capacity for numinous feeling is unexplainable. Although the capacity may appear in the world only when certain conditions are fulfilled, the conditions do not constitute an adequate explanation of the capacity in question. Thirdly, numinous feelings are also cognitive. The feelings are the source of the concept of the numinous – the concept of something which is both a value and an objective reality. It is cognitive in the sense that they are

like visual experiences. They have immediate and primary reference to an object outside the self, i.e., the numinous quality or object, which is an object of numinous feelings in somewhat the same way that visible objects and qualities might be said to be the object of visual experiences.

However, the relation between these two is not clear. There could be two interpretations. In the first interpretation it is claimed that numinous feelings disclose the numinous object. The encounter with the numinous object through numinous experiences gives rise to the concept of the numinous in much the same way that encounters with objects and qualities through visual experiences are thought to give rise to the concepts of those objects and qualities. The concept of the numinous is both a priori and a posteriori. It is a posteriori since it is not derived from the experience of an object or quality and it is a priori because it is not derived from any sense experience. The feeling is the source of the concept only in the sense that it discloses the object of the concept. It is the encounter with the object that produces the concept of the object.

According to the second interpretation the feeling gives rise to both the concept and the disclosure of the numinous object. However, it is not the encounter with the numinous which gives rise to the concept of the numinous rather it is feeling that furnishes the concept. The feeling which furnishes the concept also discloses the object to which the concept applies. Now the problem is how are these two functions of numinous feelings related, since neither the concept nor the object is given in isolation. The two are given together although one is not derived from the other.

In both these interpretations Otto claims that feeling puts us in contact with and discloses something outside of ourselves. Feeling becomes like visual and auditory experiences. It has an objective referent whether this is structured by an a priori concept or whether it simply gives rise to a concept. The object of numinous feeling, according to Otto, is numen. Numen is both value and object and can be only indirectly characterized. For example, the encounter with the numen evokes religious dread. This is analogues to fear. So, it may be said that it is the property of the numen which arouses religious dread. Still, we can schematize the numen by means of such rational concepts as goodness, completeness, necessity and substantiality. It means that concepts of this kind can be predicated of the numen.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What is the difference between religious feelings and the feeling of the sublime?

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2. Explain about the category of Holy?

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5.4 LET US SUM UP

A descriptive approach to religion seems to have much to acclaim it. It plainly places before us what the basic elements in religious experience are, without distorting the picture by introducing doubtful speculations about the possible genesis or ultimate significance of such experience. One can aim at presenting the essence of the phenomenon which appears in the religious consciousness. The thinkers discussed during the course of this unit seem to have penetrated to the affective states of mind which lie at the heart of religion which are so often overlooked both in intellectualist accounts and in pragmatic accounts. The intellectualist accounts understand religion as a kind of world-view and pragmatic accounts tries to assimilate religion to morality.

An accurate description of the typical experiences of the religious person would seem to provide at least a firm starting-point for an investigation into religion. But the question is, is it enough? Do we need something more? The answer to this question depends on whether or not the religious experience can be regarded as sui generis, qualitatively unique and irreducible. Some thinkers take this view but Marett is more cautious. Robert Ranulph Marett (1866 – 1943), an English anthropologist aimed at translating a type of

religious experience remote from our own into such terms of our consciousness. Marett believed that the word "awe" expresses the fundamental religious feelings most accurately. For him what constitutes the core of the primitive religious consciousness is nothing other than awe. He describes awe as human being's reaction to the hidden mysterious forces of its environment. It cannot be merely interpreted as fear of the unknown. It is much more than fear. Viewing from this point we can say that religion does not originate just in fear of the unknown. The essential constituents of awe are wonder, admiration, respect, even love.

Otto and other thinkers think that it is important to maintain the unique quality of the religious experience. But when they try to do this by talking of a faculty of divination or of the theomorphic structure in man, they seem to have left the relatively firm ground of description and receded into a more speculative realm. For example, Otto adopts Kantian terminology and speaks of the numinous as an a priori category which undergoes schematization into the idea of the holy.

However accurate the descriptions of religious experience that are offered to us may be, it seems that they cannot establish the validity of such experience. Yet on the other hand a clear description of religious experience must be the first step towards its assessment. Perhaps there is no way at all in which the validity of religious experience can be established. One can only be pointed to the kind of experience which Otto and the others describe and be left to decide about it in the light of the most honest discrimination of one's experience that can be made.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is the appropriate expression to the feeling of *Numinous?*

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2. How does Otto follow the Kantian model to base religion and sense of God in man?

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5.5KEY WORDS

Phenomenology = It is a philosophical approach concentrating on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience. It is the description or study of appearances. This term was introduced by Lambert in 1764. It is philosophical method restricted to the careful analysis of the intellectual processes which we are introspectively aware of. Brentano, Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty are some the important philosophers who used this method in their philosophy.

Sui Generis = is a Latin expression, literally meaning of its own kind/genus or unique in its characteristics. The expression is often used in analytic philosophy to indicate an idea, an entity, or a reality which cannot be included in a wider concept.

5.5 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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5.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. James speaks of the reality of genuine, healthy and normal religious experience where man has the touch of a 'more', the unseen or the 'divine'. As our primary wide-wake consciousness opens our senses to the touch of the material things, so it is logically conceivable that if there be higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch man. The possibility for such experience, according to him, might be our possession of a subconscious region which should yield access to the spiritual beings. In this sense subconscious region becomes the intermediary between the normal self and the higher spiritual agency.

2. The criteria to judge the validity of religious experience indicated by James are three. They are:

a. Immediate luminousness
b. philosophical reasonableness
c. moral helpfulness

He gives more importance to the pragmatic criterion. Since the experience of the unseen world produces effects in this world, the 'unseen region' in question is not merely ideal. When we commune with it, the effect is actually imparted to our finite personality. Therefore that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself. Therefore James finds no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal. The 'effect' the unseen world creates makes him to articulate its existence.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. In his book The Idea of Holy Rudolf Otto tries to make a clear distinction between numinous or religious feeling and the feeling of the sublime. Numinous feelings have two primary aspects (i) a feeling of religious dread (ii) a feeling of religious fascination. The closest analogue to religious dread or awe is the feeling of uncanniness – the feeling one has when the hair on the back of one's neck rises, the shudder or terror on hearing a ghost story, the dread of haunted places. The feeling of fascination by, attraction to, and prizing of the object which arouses the feeling in question creates both the desire to approach the object and the feeling that one possesses no value when considered in relation to the fascinating and prized object.

2. When the concept of the numinous and the schematizing concepts are brought

together, we have the complex category of the holy itself. The word holy can have varied forms of characteristics. One of the characteristics can be that it is rational in its nature in the sense that it can be thought conceptually. Thus, for example by holiness we can mean moral goodness and it is possible to have some kind of understanding of what goodness is. But the rational characteristics do not explain completely the meaning of the word holy. For Otto the rational meaning is only derivative. In its fundamental sense the word holy stands for a non-rational character. By it we mean that it is something which cannot be thought conceptually.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. To the non-rational, non-explainable element of religion, Otto gave the name "Numinous". The Numinous experience is expressed by him by three Latin words: *mysterium tremendum et fascinans.* For instance, what does one feel when one is in deeply felt personal prayer or when one partakes in a solemn liturgical service or when one is in an old church or temple? The appropriate expression to this feeling is *mysterium, trementum et fascinans.*

2. According to Kant the knowledge arises from our faculty of cognition. Sense impressions are occasions for such knowledge. According to Otto the knowledge of the *Numinous* could be described in the same manner. It is derived from the deepest foundation of the cognitive apprehension of the soul. The experience of the Numinous arises by means of sense experience but not in and through sensory data. They are stimulus and occasion for the *numinous* experience to be stirred. The experience of the *Numinous* becomes purer when the soul disengages itself from this sense experience and takes its stand in absolute contrast.