

## ॐ Excerpts from the *Upaniṣads* [c. 800 BCE – 0 CE]<sup>1</sup>

### From *Isā Upaniṣad*

#### *Peace Invocation*

All this is full. All that is full.  
From fullness, fullness comes.  
When fullness is taken from fullness,  
Fullness still remains.  
OM *shanti shanti shanti*

*The paradoxical, transcendent, yet immanent, unity underlying the diversity of the world*

1. By the Lord (*Isā*) must all this be enveloped—  
Whatever moving thing there is in this moving world.  
With all this renounced, thou mayest rejoice.  
Covet not the wealth of anyone at all...
4. Unmoving, the One is swifter than the mind.  
The sense-powers reached not It, speeding on before.  
Though standing still, It overtakes others running.  
In It, Mātariśvan<sup>2</sup> places life-energy.
5. It moves. It moves not.  
It is far, and It is near.  
It is within all this,  
And It is outside of all this.
6. When one beholds all things in the Self (*Ātman*),  
And the Self in all things,  
One has no aversion hence.
7. When one realizes that all beings are but the Self,  
what delusion is there, what sorrow,  
to the perceiver of that Oneness?...
9. Into blind darkness enter they  
That worship non-knowledge;  
Into darkness greater than that, as it were, they  
That delight in knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Translations from R.E. Hume (1931), *The Thirteen Principle Upanishads*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford UP—except for the peace invocation from the *Isā Upaniṣad* and the selection from the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, which are taken from Eknath Easwaran, (2007), *The Upanishads*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press. [Small changes were made to improve style, to be gender-inclusive, etc.]

<sup>2</sup> ‘Mātariśvan’ is a Vedic epithet for Vāyu, the wind god.

10. Different indeed, they say, from knowledge.  
 Different, they say, from non-knowledge.  
 —Thus we have heard from the wise  
 Who to us have explained It.
11. Knowledge and non-knowledge—  
 He who this pair conjointly knows,  
 With non-knowledge overcomes death,  
 With knowledge wins the immortal.
12. Into blind darkness enter they  
 Who worship non-becoming;  
 Into darkness greater than that, as it were, they  
 Who delight in becoming.
13. Different indeed, they say, from becoming!  
 Different, they say, from non-becoming!  
 —Thus have we heard from the wise  
 Who to us have explained It.
14. Becoming and non-becoming—  
 He who this pair conjointly knows,  
 With non-becoming overcomes death,  
 With becoming wins the immortal...
16. O Nourisher, lone Pilgrim of the sky! Controller!  
 O Sun, offspring of Prajāpati, spread forth thy rays! Gather thy brilliance!  
 I would see, through Your grace, that form of Yours which is the fairest—  
 I myself am thee! (*so 'ham asmi*)...

**From *Kena Upaniṣad***

[Question:] *The real agent in the individual?*

1. By whose command soars forth the mind projected?  
 By whose wish goes forth the first breathing?  
 By whom are we caused to utter this speech?  
 What god enjoins the eye? The ear?

[Answer:] *The all-conditioning, yet inscrutable agent, Brahman*

2. That [*Brahman*] is the hearing of the ear, the thought of the mind,  
 The voice of speech, as also the breathing of the breath,  
 And the sight of the eye! Past these escaping, the wise,  
 On departing from this world, become immortal.

3. There the eye goes not; speech goes not, nor the mind.  
 We know not, we understand not, how one would teach It.  
 Different, indeed, is It than the known,  
 And moreover above the unknown.  
 —Thus have we heard of the ancients  
 Who to us have explained It. (i.1-3)

*The paradox of Its inscrutability*

3. [Teacher:]  
 It is conceived of by him by whom It is not conceived of.  
 He by whom It is conceived of, knows It not.  
 It is not understood by those who understand It.  
 It is understood by those who understand It not. (ii.3)

**From *Chāndogya Upaniṣad***

*The individual self-identical with the infinite Brahman*

2. ...this Self of mine within the heart is smaller than a grain of rice, or a barley-corn, or a mustard-seed, or a grain of millet, or the kernel of a grain of millet;  
 this Self of mine within the heart is greater than the earth, greater than the atmosphere, greater than the sky, greater than these worlds...  
 This is *Brahman*. In Thou I shall enter on departing hence... (iii.xiv.2)

*Brahman as life, joy, and the void*

5. “*Brahman* is life-energy (*prāṇa*). *Brahman* is joy. *Brahman* is the void.”  
 Then he said: I understand that *Brahman* is life. But joy and void I do not understand.  
 They said: “Joy (*ka*)—verily, that is the same as the void (*kha*).  
 And the void—verily, that is the same as joy... (iv.x.5)

*Progressive worship of Brahman up to the universal Self*

1. Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is a plenum...

1. That [the plenum], indeed, is below. It is above. It is to the west. It is to the east. It is to the south. It is to the north. It, indeed, is this whole world.

I [the ego], indeed, am below. I am above. I am to the west. I am to the east. I am to the south. I am to the north., I, indeed, am this whole world.

2. ...The Self (*Ātman*), indeed, is below. The Self is above. The Self is to the west.  
 The Self is to the east. The Self is to the south. The Self is to the north. The Self, indeed, is this whole world. (vii.xxiv.1, vii.xxv.1-2)

*The universe within the Self*

1. In the center of the castle of Brahman, our own body, there is a small shrine in the form of a lotus-flower, and within can be found a small space... This little space within the heart is as great as this vast universe. The heavens and earth are there, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars; fire and lightning and winds are there; and all that now is and all that is not; for the whole universe is in Thou and Thou dwellest within our heart. (viii.i.1)

**From *Taittirīya Upaniṣad***

*Brahman, the one Being and the source of all*

The Lord of Love willed “Let me be many!”  
And in the depths of meditation, It created everything that exists...

The One who is formless assumed many forms;  
The One who is infinite appeared finite;  
The One who is everywhere assumed a place;  
The One who is all wisdom caused ignorance;  
The One who is real caused unreality;  
It is That who has become everything;  
It is That who gives reality to all. (ii.6)

**From *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad***

7. Not inwardly cognitive, not outwardly cognitive, not both-wise cognitive, not a cognition-mass, not cognitive, not noncognitive, unseen, with which there can be no dealing, ungraspable, having no distinctive mark, non-thinkable, that cannot be designated, the essence of the assurance of which is the state of being one with the Self, the cessation of development, tranquil, benign, without a second (*advaita*)... This is the Self. This should be discerned.

## ☯ Lao-Tzu, *Tao-te Ching* (excerpts) [c. 300 BCE]<sup>3</sup>

1. The Tao that can be told of is not the eternal Tao;  
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.  
The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;  
The Named is the mother of all things.  
Therefore, let there always be non-being so we may see their subtlety,  
And let there always be being so we may see their outcome.  
The two are the same,  
But after they are produced, they have different names.  
They both may be called deep and profound [*hsüan*]  
Deeper and more profound,  
The door of all subtleties!
  
2. When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty,  
There arises the recognition of ugliness.  
When they all know the good as good,  
There arises the recognition of evil.  
Therefore: Being and non-being produce each other;  
Difficult and easy complete each other;  
Long and short contrast each other;  
High and low distinguish each other;  
Sound and voice harmonize with each other;  
Front and back follow each other;  
Therefore, the sage manages affairs without action [*wu-wei*]  
And spreads doctrines without words.  
All things arise, and such a person does not turn away from them.  
The sage produces them, but does not take possession of them.  
The sage acts, but does not rely on individual ability.  
The sage accomplishes the task, but does not claim credit for it.  
It is precisely because of not taking credit that the accomplishment remains with the sage...
  
4. Tao is empty (like a bowl),  
It may be drawn from without ever needing to be filled.  
It is fathomless, perhaps the mother of all things.  
It blunts its sharpness,  
It unties its tangles.  
It softens its glare  
It becomes one with the dusty world.  
Deep and still, it appears to exist forever.  
I do not know whose child it is.  
It seems to have existed before God...

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<sup>3</sup> Translation from Wing-Tsit Chan (1963), *Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton UP. [Small changes were made to improve style, to be gender-inclusive, etc.]

14. We look at it and do not see it;  
Its name is The Invisible.  
We listen to it and do not hear it;  
Its name is The Inaudible.  
We touch it and do not grasp it.  
Its name is the Incorporeal.  
These three cannot be further inquired into,  
and hence merge into one.  
Going up high, it is not bright,  
and coming down low, it is not dark.  
Infinite and boundless, it cannot be given any name;  
It reverts to Nothingness.  
This is called shape without shape.  
The insubstantial image....  
Meet it and you will not see its head.  
Follow it and you will not see its back.  
Hold onto the Tao of old to master things of the present.  
From this, one may know the primeval beginning.  
This is called the thread of the Tao...
18. When the great Tao is in decline,  
The doctrines of humanism (*jen*) and moral righteousness (*i*) arise.  
When (talk of) knowledge and wisdom are prominent,  
There emerges great hypocrisy.  
When the six family relationships are not in harmony,  
There will be advocacy of “filial piety” and “deep love to children.”  
When a country is in disorder,  
There will be praise of loyal ministers...
21. The all-embracing quality of the great virtue [*te*] follows alone from the Tao.  
The thing that is called Tao is eluding and vague.  
Vague and eluding, there is in it the form.  
Eluding and vague, in it are things.  
Deep and obscure, in it is the essence.  
The essence is very real; in it are evidences.  
From the present back to antiquity,  
Its name never deserted it.  
It is a means for seeing the beginning of all things.  
How do I know that the beginning of all things is so?  
Through this (Tao).
22. To yield is to be preserved whole.  
To be bent is to become straight.  
To be empty is to be full.  
To be worn out is to be renewed.  
To have little is to possess.

To have plenty is to be perplexed.  
Therefore, the sage embraces the One  
And becomes the model of the world.  
The sage is not self-ostentatious, and is therefore luminous...

25. There was something undifferentiated and yet complete,  
Which existed before heaven and earth.  
Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing  
and does not change.  
It operates everywhere and is free from danger.  
It may be considered the mother of the universe.  
I do not know its name; I call it Tao.  
If forced to give it a name, I call it Great  
Being great means functioning everywhere  
Functioning everywhere means far-reaching  
Far-reaching means returning to the source.  
Therefore Tao is great.  
Heaven is great. Earth is great.  
And the (sage) monarch is also great.  
There are four great things in the universe, and the (sage) monarch is one of them.  
Humanity takes its law from Earth  
Earth takes its law from Heaven  
Heaven takes its law from Tao  
And the Tao takes its law from itself...
41. ...The Tao which is bright appears to be dark.  
The Tao which goes forward appears to fall backward.  
The Tao which is level appears uneven.  
Great virtue appears like a valley (hollow).  
Great purity appears like disgrace.  
Far-reaching virtue appears as if insufficient.  
Solid virtue appears as if unsteady.  
True substance appears to be changeable.  
The great square has no corners.  
The great talent is slow to finish (or mature).  
Great music sounds faint.  
Great form has no shape.  
Tao is hidden and nameless.  
Yet it is Tao alone that skillfully provides for all and brings them to perfection.
42. Tao produced the One.  
The One produced the two.  
The two produced the three.  
and the three produced the ten thousand things.  
The ten thousand things carry the yin and embrace the yang.  
and through the blending of the life force (*ch'i*) they achieve harmony.

People hate to be orphaned, the lonely ones, the unworthy.  
And yet kings and lords call themselves by these names.  
Therefore it often is that things gain by losing and lose by gaining...

64. ...the sage takes no action and therefore does not fail.  
Such a person grasps nothing and therefore does not lose anything...  
Therefore the sage desires to have no desire.  
Nor values rare treasures.  
The sage learns to be unlearned, and returns to what the multitude has missed (Tao).  
In this, the sage supports all things in their natural state but does not take any action...

71. To know that you do not know is the best.  
To pretend to know when you do not know is a sickness.  
Only when we are sick of our sickness  
Shall we cease to be sick.  
The sage is not sick, being sick of sickness;  
This is the secret of health.

81... Those who know (the Tao) are not extensively learned;  
the extensively learned do not know it.  
The sage does not hoard:  
The more one uses for others, the more one has oneself.  
The more one gives to others, the more one possesses for oneself.  
The Way of Heaven is to benefit others and not to injure.  
The way of the sage is to act but not to compete.



## ❁ Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* (excerpts) [c. 200 CE]<sup>4</sup>

### *I. Investigation of Conditions*

1. There absolutely are no things, nowhere and none, that arise [anew].  
Neither out of themselves, nor out of non-self.  
Nor out of both, nor from randomness...
4. There is no activity which has a condition; there is no activity which lacks a condition.  
There are no conditions which lack an activity, and no conditions which have an activity...

### *XV. Investigation of Essences*

7. The Buddha, through knowledge of reality and unreality,  
In the discourse with Katyayana,  
Negated both existence and non-existence...
10. Existence is the grasping at permanence; non-existence is the view of annihilation.  
Therefore, the wise do not dwell in existence or non-existence...

### *XVIII. Investigation of Self and Things*

6. It is said that “there is a self,” but “non-self” too is taught.  
The buddhas also teach there is nothing which is “neither self nor non-self.”
7. That to which language refers is denied, for an object experienced by the mind is denied.  
The unborn and unceasing nature of reality is comparable to *nirvāṇa*.
8. Everything is real and is not real,  
Both real and not real,  
Neither real nor not real.  
This is Lord Buddha’s teaching...

### *XXV. Investigation of Nirvāṇa*

1. If everything were empty, there would be no arising and perishing. From the letting go of and ceasing of what could one assert of *nirvāṇa*?
2. If everything were not empty, there would be no arising and perishing. From the letting go of and ceasing of what could one assert of *nirvāṇa*?
3. No letting go, no attainment, no annihilation, no permanence, no cessation, no birth: that is spoken of as *nirvāṇa*.

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<sup>4</sup> Translation is from Stephen Batchelor (2000), *Verses from the Centre*, Sharpham College. [Small changes were made to improve style, to be gender-inclusive, etc.]

4. *Nirvāṇa* is not a thing. Then it would follow that it would have the characteristics of aging and death. There does not exist any thing that is without aging and death.
5. If *nirvāṇa* were a thing, *nirvāṇa* would be a conditioned phenomenon. There does not exist any thing anywhere that is not a conditioned phenomenon.
6. If *nirvāṇa* were a thing, how would *nirvāṇa* not be dependent? There does not exist any thing at all that is not dependent.
7. If *nirvāṇa* were not a thing, how could it possibly be nothing? The one for whom *nirvāṇa* is not a thing, for that person it is not nothing.
8. If *nirvāṇa* were nothing, how could *nirvāṇa* possibly be not dependent? There does not exist any nothing which is not dependent.
9. Whatever things come and go are dependent or caused. Not being dependent and not being caused is taught to be *nirvāṇa*.
10. The teacher taught [it] to be the letting go of arising and perishing. Therefore, it is correct that *nirvāṇa* is not a thing or nothing.
11. If *nirvāṇa* were both a thing and nothing, it would follow that it would be a thing and nothing. That is incorrect.
12. If *nirvāṇa* were both a thing and nothing, *nirvāṇa* would not be not-dependent, because it would depend on those two.
13. How could *nirvāṇa* be both a thing and nothing? *Nirvāṇa* is unconditioned; things and nothings are conditioned.
14. How could *nirvāṇa* exist as both a thing and nothing? Those two do not exist as one. They are like light and dark.
15. The presentation of neither a thing nor nothing as *nirvāṇa* will be established [only] if things and nothings are established.
16. If *nirvāṇa* is neither a thing nor nothing, by who could “neither a thing nor nothing” be perceived?
17. After the Buddha has entered *nirvāṇa*, one cannot perceive him as “existing,” likewise as “not existing,” nor can one perceive him as “both” or “neither.”
18. Even when the Buddha is alive, one cannot perceive him as “existing,” likewise as “not existing,” nor can one perceive him as “both” or “neither”.

19. *Samsāra* [the cycle of death and rebirth] does not have the slightest distinction from *nirvāṇa*. *Nirvāṇa* does not have the slightest distinction from *samsāra*.
20. Whatever is the end of *nirvāṇa*, that is the end of *samsāra*. There is not even a very subtle slight distinction between the two...
22. In the emptiness of all things what ends are there? What non-ends are there? What ends and non-ends are there? What of neither are there?
23. Is there identity? Is there difference? Is there permanence? Is there impermanence? Is there both permanence and impermanence? Is there neither?
24. Completely quieting all referents and completely ending fixations is peace. The Buddha nowhere taught any reality [*dharma*] to anyone.

## ○ A few kōans from Chán/Zen Buddhism [500 CE onward]

- Hakuin Ekaku said “Two hands clap and there is a sound, but what is the sound of one hand?”
- Huìnéng, the sixth patriarch, asked “Not thinking of good or evil, in that moment, what was your original face before your mother and father were born?”
- Two monks were arguing about the temple flag waving in the wind. One said “The flag moves.” The other said “The wind moves.” Huìnéng intervened, saying “Not the flag, not the wind, it is the mind that moves.” The two monks were instantly enlightened.
- A monk asked “Does a dog have Buddha-nature or not?” Zhàozhōu answered “*Wú*”<sup>5</sup>
- Zhàozhōu asked Nánquán “What is the Way?” He replied “Your ordinary mind.” Zhàozhōu responded “Can it be studied?” Nánquán said “To seek it is to deviate from it.” Zhàozhōu then asked “If I do not study it, how can I know about the Way?” Nánquán said “The Way does not belong to knowing or not knowing. Cognition is an illusion and non-cognition is senseless. If you want to reach the Way beyond doubt, place yourself in the same freedom as the sky. You name it neither good nor not-good.” Upon hearing this, Zhàozhōu was enlightened.
- A monk asked Zhàozhōu to teach him. Zhàozhōu asked “Have you eaten your meal?” The monk replied “Yes.” “Then go wash your bowl” Zhàozhōu said. At that moment the monk was enlightened.
- A monk asked “Please point out the state of ‘true ease.’” Zhàozhōu said “Pointing it out makes it uneasy.”
- A monk approached Master Fa-yen, saying “My name is Hui-chi’ao—what is Buddha?” The Master replied “You are Hui-ch’ao.”<sup>6</sup>
- Shuzan once held up his *shippe* [a short bamboo staff] and said “Call this a *shippe* and you assert; call it not a *shippe* and you negate. Now, do not assert nor negate, and what would you call it?” A disciple came out of the ranks, took the *shippe* away from the master, and breaking it in two, exclaimed “What is this?”
- Yúnmén said to his disciples: “I do not ask you about the first fifteen days of the month—but say something about the other days of the month.” Because no monk replied, Yúnmén answered himself, saying “Every day is a good day!”

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<sup>5</sup> ‘*Mu*’ is the Japanese transliteration often used, even though Zhàozhōu was Chinese. Either way, his answer is a negative particle, akin to “Not” or “Nothing,” and there are different views on what the kōan is supposed to be in the first place. Some say that Zhàozhōu is denying that the dog has a Buddha nature, contradicting the Buddhist view that everything has a Buddha-nature. A more common opinion is that Zhàozhōu’s response is non-sensical, effectively suggesting that the question is somehow mistaken.

<sup>6</sup> There are other notable kōans starting with “What is Buddha?” One time Zhàozhōu’s response was: “Who are you?” Another time, he replied “Aren’t you Buddha?” Also, consider Mǎzǔ, who once answered “This very mind is Buddha,” and another time responded “This very mind is not Buddha.”

- Said Yúnmén “However wonderful a thing is, it may be better not to have it at all.”
- A monk asked “What is the kind of talk that transcends Buddhas and Patriarchs?” Yúnmén replied “Rice cake!”
- A monk asked “What are the teachings of a whole lifetime?” Yúnmén answered “An appropriate statement.”
- When Xuěfēng was living in a hermitage, two monks came to pay their respects. As Xuěfēng saw them coming he thrust open the gate, jumped out, and said “What is this?” The monks also said “What is this?” Xuěfēng hung his head and returned into his cottage.  
 Later the monks related the incident to Yántóu. Yántóu said “Alas! I regret that I did not tell Xuěfēng the last word when I was with him. If I had done so, no one in the whole world could have outdone him.”  
 At the end of the summer session the monks brought this up again to ask Yántóu about its meaning. Yántóu said “Why didn't you ask earlier?” The monks said, “We did not dare.” Yántóu said “Xuěfēng came into life in the same way that I did, but he does not die in the same way that I do. If you want to know the last word, I'll tell you—it is this.”
- Linjì to a monk “Sometimes a shout is like the sacred sword of the Diamond King. Sometimes a shout is like a golden-haired lion squatting on the ground. Sometimes a shout is like a rod or a piece of grass [used to attract fish]. And sometimes a shout is like one which does not function as a shout at all. How do you know which one to use?” As the monk was deliberating what to say, the Master shouted.
- Said Linjì “If you meet the Buddha, kill him.”

## ☉ Ibn Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (excerpt) [c. 1235 CE]<sup>7</sup>

### *There Is No Existence Except Allah*

He is and there is with Him no before or after, nor above nor below, nor far nor near, nor union nor division, nor how nor where nor place. He is now as He was. He is the One without oneness and the Single without singleness. He is the very existence of the First and the very existence of the Last, and the very existence of the Outward and the very existence of the Inward. So that there is no first nor last nor outward nor inward except Him, without those becoming Him or His becoming them. He is not in a thing nor a thing in Him, whether entering in or proceeding forth. It is necessary that you know Him, after this fashion, not by learning nor by intellect, nor by understanding, nor by imagination, nor by sense, nor by the outward eye nor by the inward eye, nor by perception. By Himself He sees Himself and by Himself He knows Himself. His veil, that is, phenomenal existence, is but the concealment of His existence in His oneness, without any attribute. There is no other and there is no existence for any other than He. He whom you think to be other than *Allah*, he is not other than *Allah*, but you do not know Him and do not understand that you are seeing Him. He is still Ruler as well as ruled, and Creator as well as created. He is now as He was, as to His creative power and as to His sovereignty, not requiring a creature nor a subject. When He called into being the things that are, He was already endowed with all His attributes and He is as He was then. In His oneness there is no difference between what is recent and what is original: the recent is the result of His manifestation of Himself and the original is the result of His remaining within Himself.

There is no existence save His existence. To this the Prophet pointed when he said: “Reville not the world, for *Allah* is the world,” pointing to the fact that the existence of the world is *Allah*’s existence without partner or like or equal. It is related that the Prophet declared that *Allah* said to Moses: “O My servant, I was sick and thou didst not visit Me: I asked help of thee and thou didst not give it to Me,” and other like expressions. This means that the existence of the beggar is His existence and the existence of the sick is His existence. Now when this is admitted, it is acknowledged that this existence is His existence and that the existence of all created things, both accidents and substances, is His existence, and when the secret of one atom of the atoms is clear, the secret of all created things, both outward and inward, is clear, and you do not see in this world or the next, anything except *Allah*, for the existence of these two Abodes and their name, and what they name, all of them are assuredly He.

When the mystery—of realising that the mystic is one with the Divine—is revealed to you, you will understand that you are no other than *Allah* and that you have continued and will continue, without when and without times. Then you will see all your actions to be His actions

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<sup>7</sup> This is from chapter 1 of Arabī’s book, but it also found in a separate treatise appearing under a variety of titles, including ‘Al-Risāla al-Wujūdiyya’ and ‘Kitāb al-Ajwiba’. Translation is from Margaret Smith, (1950) *Readings from the Mystics of Islam*. London: Luzac & Co., pp. 98-101. [Small changes were made to improve style, but unfortunately, I wasn’t able to make it gender-inclusive, given the predominance of pronouns.]

and all your attributes to be His attributes and your essence to be His essence, though you do not thereby become He or He you, in either the greatest or the least degree. “Everything is perishing save His Face,” that is, there is nothing except His Face, “then, whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of *Allah*.”

Just as he who dies the death of the body, loses all his attributes, both those worthy of praise and those worthy of condemnation alike, so in the spiritual death all attributes, both those worthy of praise and those to be condemned, come to an end, and in all the man’s states what is Divine comes to take the place of what was mortal. Thus, instead of his own essence, there is the essence of *Allah* and in place of his own qualities, there are the attributes of *Allah*. He who knows himself sees his whole existence to be the Divine existence, but does not realise that any change has taken place in his own nature or qualities. For when you know yourself, your “I-ness” vanishes and you know that you and *Allah* are one and the same.

## ✠ Meister Eckhart, selections [c. 1300 CE]<sup>8</sup>

### From *Sermon 4*

...And so in truth, if you would find this noble birth, you must leave the crowd and return to the source and ground whence you came. All the powers of the soul, and all their works—these are the crowd. Memory, understanding, and will, they all diversify you, and therefore you must leave them all: sense perceptions, imagination, and especially all that you have in mind or in view. Only then you may find this birth—but not otherwise...

Accordingly, the question arises whether it is possible to experience this birth through certain things which, although they are divine, yet they come in through the senses from without? I refer to certain ideas of God, such as, for example, that God is good, wise, merciful, or other ideas that are creatures of the reason, and yet divine. Can one have the experience [of the divine birth] by means of these? No! Truly no. Even though [these ideas] are all good and divine, still they are conveyed through the senses from without. If the divine birth is to shine with reality and purity, it must come flooding up and out from God within you, while all your own efforts are suspended and all the soul's agents are at God's disposal.

This accomplishment, when it is perfect, will be due solely to God's action while you have been passive. If you really forsake your own knowledge and will, then surely and gladly God will enter with God's knowledge shining clearly. Where God achieves self-consciousness, your own knowledge is of no use, nor has it standing. Do not imagine that your own intelligence may rise to it, so that you may know God. Indeed, when God divinely enlightens you, no natural light is required to bring that about. This [natural light] must in fact be completely extinguished before God will shine in with divine light; God will bring inside with God whatever you have given up a thousand times over—and God will bring a new form that contains everything within itself.

...[N]either knowledge of all creatures nor your own wisdom nor all your knowledge can bring you so far as to know God in a *divine* way. If you wish to know God in a divine way, your knowledge must become pure ignorance and forgetfulness of yourself and all creatures.

Now you might say, "Well sir, what use is my intellect then, if it is supposed to be empty and functionless? Is that the best thing for me to do—to raise my mind to an unknowing knowledge that can't really exist? For if I knew anything at all it would not be ignorance, and I should not be empty and bare. Am I supposed to be in total darkness?" Certainly! You cannot do better than to place yourself in darkness and in unknowing. "Oh sir, must everything go then, and is there no turning back?" No indeed, by rights there is no returning. "But what is this darkness? What do you call it? What is its name?" The only name it has is 'potential receptivity', which certainly does not lack being nor is it deficient, but it is the potential of receptivity in which you will be perfected. That is why there is no turning back from it. But if you do turn back, that is not on account of any truth, but because of something else—the senses, the world, or the devil.

...Do you ask how *useful* it is to realize this potential, to keep yourself empty and bare, to give yourself up solely to this this darkness and ignorance, without turning back? It offers the chance to gain that which is all things. And the more barren you are of self and ignorant of all things, the nearer you are to that estate. Of this barrenness it is said in Hosea "I will lead my

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<sup>8</sup> Translated by Matthew Fox, (1980) *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, Doubleday. [Small changes were made to improve style, to be gender-inclusive, etc.]



beloved into the wilderness and will speak to her in her heart.” The true word of eternity is spoken only in solitude, where people are made desolate and alien to themselves and all multiplicity...

Now you might say “Oh sir, is it really always necessary to be barren and estranged from everything, outward and inward: the powers and their work, must that all go? It is a grievous matter for God to leave one without support, as the prophet says ‘Woe is me that my exile is prolonged’ (Ps. 120: 5). It is difficult if God prolongs my exile here, without either enlightening or encouraging me or working within me, as your teaching implies.”

“If one finds oneself in *this* way in pure nothingness, is it not better to do something to beguile the gloom and desolation, such as praying or listening to sermons or doing something else that is virtuous, so as to help himself?” No! Understand this truly that remaining quite still for as long as possible is best for you. You cannot exchange this state for any other without harm. That is certain... You cannot think or desire to prepare yourself more quickly than God can move in to prepare you. But even if it were shared, so that you did the preparing and God did the working or the infusion—which is impossible—then you should know that God must act and pour Godself into you the moment you are found ready. Do not imagine that God is like a human carpenter, who works or not as desired, who can do or leave undone at whim. It is different with God: as and when God finds you ready, God has to act, to overflow into you, just as when the air is clear and pure the sun has to burst forth and cannot refrain. It would surely be a grave defect in God if God performed no great works in you and did not pour great goodness into you whenever you were found thus empty and bare.

In the same sense the masters write that in the very instant the material substance of the child is ready in the mother's womb, God at once pours into the body its living spirit which is the soul, the body's form. It is one instant, the being ready and the pouring in. When nature reaches her highest point, God gives *grace*: the very instant the spirit is ready, God enters without hesitation or delay. In the Book of Revelation it says that our Lord declared to humanity “I stand at the door knocking and waiting; whoever lets me in, with that person I will sup” (Rev. 3:20). You need not seek God here or there, God is no further than the door of your heart, there standing and waiting patiently for whoever is ready to open up. No need to call to God from afar: God can hardly wait for you to open up. God longs for you a thousand times more than you long for God: the opening and the entering are a single act.

Now you might say “How can that be? I can't feel God.”—Pay attention. Your being thus aware is not in your power but in God's. When it is suitable, God self-discloses, and God can hide when God wishes. This is what Christ meant when he said to Nicodemus “The spirit breathes where it will: you hear its voice but do not know where it comes from, or where it is going” (John 3:8). In so speaking he contradicted himself: “You hear, yet you *do not know*.” After all, it is by hearing we come to know. Christ meant that by hearing it is imbibed or absorbed, as if to say, you receive it, but unawares. You should know, God cannot leave anything void or unfilled, God and nature cannot endure that anything should be empty or void. And so, even if you think you can't feel God and are wholly empty of the Divine, that is not the case. For if there were anything empty under heaven, whatever it might be, great or small, the heavens would either draw it up to themselves or else, bending down, would have to fill it with themselves. God, the Lord of nature, does not allow that anything be empty or void. Therefore, stand still and do not waver from your emptiness; for at this time you can turn away, never to turn back again.

**From *Sermon 22*:**

...we are not wholly blessed, even though we are looking at divine truth; for while we are still looking at it, we are not in it. As long as you have an object under consideration, you are not one with it. Where there is nothing but One, nothing but One is to be seen. Therefore, no one can see God except when blind, nor know God except through ignorance, nor understand God except through folly.

**From *Sermon 23*:**

The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one and the same—one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving.

**From *Sermon 12*:**

These three dimensions represent three kinds of knowledge. The first is sensual: the eye sees things at a distance. The second is intellectual and is much higher in rank. The third represents [the function of] that aristocratic agent of the soul, which ranks so high that it communes with God, face to face, as God is. This agent has nothing in common with anything else. It is unconscious of yesterday or the day before, and of tomorrow and the day after, for in eternity there is no yesterday nor any tomorrow, but only Now, as it was a thousand years ago and as it will be a thousand years hence, and is at this moment, and as it will be after death. This agent reaches God in God's hiding space, or as the Scripture says: in God, above God and through God.

☆ **Moses Cordovero, *Shi'ur Qomah* (excerpts) [c. 1550 CE]**<sup>9</sup>

There is nothing that is not pervaded by the power of divinity. If there were, Ein Sof would be limited, subject to duality. Rather, God is everything that exists, though everything that exists is not God. It is present in everything, and everything comes into being from it. Nothing is devoid of its divinity. Everything is within it; it is within everything and outside of everything. There is nothing but it...

Anything visible, and anything that can be grasped by thought, is bounded. Anything bounded is finite. Anything finite is not undifferentiated. Conversely, the boundless is called Ein Sof, Infinite. It is absolute undifferentiation in perfect, changeless oneness. Since it is boundless, there is nothing outside of it. Since it transcends and conceals itself, it is the essence of everything hidden and revealed. Since it is concealed, it is the root of faith and the root of rebellion... The philosophers acknowledge that we comprehend it only by way of no...<sup>10</sup>

Ein Sof cannot be conceived, certainly not expressed, though it is intimated in every thing, for there is nothing outside of it. No letter, no name, no writing, no thing can confine it. The witness testifying in writing that there is nothing outside of it is: "I am that I am." Ein Sof has no will, no intention, no desire, no thought, no speech, no action—yet there is nothing outside of it.

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<sup>9</sup> Translated by Matt, Daniel C. (1995). *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism*. Harper Collins, pp. 24, 29-30.

<sup>10</sup> This is a reference to the apophatic or "negative theology" in writers like Pseudo-Dionysius, Moses Maimonides, etc.