

## ॐ Excerpts from the *Upaniṣads*

### From *Isā Upaniṣad*

*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 that surrendered, thou mayest enjoy [well-being].  
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...
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...
9. Into blind darkness enter they  
That worship non-knowledge;  
Into darkness greater than that, as it were, they  
That delight in knowledge.
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.

**From *Kena Upaniṣad***

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

1. By whom impelled soars forth the mind projected?  
By whom enjoined goes forth the earliest breathing?  
By whom impelled this speech do people utter?  
The eye, the ear—what god, pray, them enjoineth?

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

2. That which 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 [say they] understand It.  
It is understood by those who [say they] understand It not. (ii.3)

## From *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*

### *Brahman as life, joy, and the void*

4. ...Then they said to him:

5. “*Brahman* is life [*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.4-5)

### *In sleep one reaches Being*

1. “Now, when one is sound asleep; composed, serene, and knows no dream—that is the Self [*Ātman*] said he. “That is the immortal, the fearless. That is *Brahman*... (vm.xi.1)

### *The unitary World-Self, the immanent reality of all things and of man*

1. “As the bees, my dear, prepare honey by collecting the essences of different trees and reducing the essence to a unity, as they are not able to discriminate ‘I am the essence of this tree,’ ‘I am the essence of that tree’—even so, indeed, my dear, all creatures here, though they reach Being, know not ‘We have reached Being.’

4. “That which is the finest essence—this whole world has that as its self. That is Reality. That is the Self. That art thou [*Tat tvam asi*], Śvetaketu—” (vi.ix. 1, 4)

### *Progressive worship of Brahman up to the universal Self*

1. That [*Brahman*], 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. (vn.xxv.1-2)

## ☯ Lao-Tzu, *Tao-te Ching* (excerpts)

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 he does not turn away from them.  
He produces them, but does not take possession of them.  
He acts, but does not rely on his own ability.  
He accomplishes his task, but does not claim credit for it.  
It is precisely because he does not claim credit that his accomplishment remains with him...
  
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...
  
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.  
He does not show himself; therefore he is luminous...

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...

63. Act without action.  
Do without ado.  
Taste without tasting...  
Therefore the sage never strives for the great,  
And thereby the great is achieved...

64. ...the sage takes no action and therefore does not fail.  
He grasps nothing and therefore he does not lose anything...  
Therefore the sage desires to have no desire.  
He does not value rare treasures.  
He learns to be unlearned, and returns to what the multitude has missed (Tao).  
Thus he supports all things in their natural state but does not take any action...

81...The sage does not accumulate for himself.  
The more he uses for others, the more he has himself.  
The more he gives to others, the more he possesses of his own.  
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, *Mūlamadhyamakā-kārikā* (excerpts)

### 1. *Investigation of Conditions*

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...

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...

### 15. *Investigation of Essences*

The Buddha, through knowledge of reality and unreality,  
In the discourse with Katyayana,  
Negated both existence and non-existence...

Existence is the grasping at permanence; non-existence is the view of annihilation.  
Therefore, the wise do not dwell in existence or non-existence...

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

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.”

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* [“ultimate reality”]

Everything is real and is not real,  
Both real and not real,  
Neither real nor not real.  
This is Lord Buddha’s teaching...

### 25. *Investigation of Nirvāṇa*

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*?

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*?

No letting go, no attainment, no annihilation, no permanence, no cessation, no birth: that is spoken of as *nirvāṇa*.

*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.

If *nirvāṇa* were a thing, *nirvāṇa* would be a conditioned phenomenon. There does not exist any thing anywhere that is not a conditioned phenomenon.

If *nirvāṇa* were a thing, how would *nirvāṇa* not be dependent? There does not exist any thing at all that is not dependent.

If *nirvāṇa* were not a thing, how could it possibly be nothing? The one for whom *nirvāṇa* is not a thing, for him it is not nothing.

If *nirvāṇa* were nothing, how could *nirvāṇa* possibly be not dependent? There does not exist any nothing which is not dependent.

Whatever things come and go are dependent or caused. Not being dependent and not being caused is taught to be *nirvāṇa*.

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.

If *nirvāṇa* were both a thing and nothing, it would follow that it would be a thing and nothing. That is incorrect.

If *nirvāṇa* were both a thing and nothing, *nirvāṇa* would not be not-dependent, because it would depend on those two.

How could *nirvāṇa* be both a thing and nothing? *Nirvāṇa* is unconditioned; things and nothings are conditioned.

How could *nirvāṇa* exist as both a thing and nothing? Those two do not exist as one. They are like light and dark.

The presentation of neither a thing nor nothing as *nirvāṇa* will be established [only] if things and nothings are established.

If *nirvāṇa* is neither a thing nor nothing, by who could “neither a thing nor nothing” be perceived?

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.”

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”.

*Samsāra* [“cyclic existence”] does not have the slightest distinction from *nirvāṇa*. *Nirvāṇa* does not have the slightest distinction from *samsāra*.

Whatever is the end of *nirvāṇa*, that is the end of *samsāra*. There is not even a very subtle slight distinction between the two...

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?

Is there identity? Is there difference? Is there permanence? Is there impermanence? Is there both permanence and impermanence? Is there neither?

Completely quieting all referents and completely ending fixations is peace. The Buddha nowhere taught any doctrine [*dharma*] to anyone.



## A few kōans from Zen Buddhism...

- Two hands clap and there is a sound, but what is the sound of one hand?
- A monk asked Zhàozhōu, “Does a dog have Buddha nature or not?” Zhàozhōu said, “Wú” [trans: “Nothing”]
- A monk asked Zhàozhōu, “What is the meaning of the ancestral teacher’s coming from the west?” Zhàozhōu said, “The cypress tree in front of the hall.”
- 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?”
- What was your original face before your father and mother were born?
- The Master 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.
- A monk asked Ummon, “What is the Dharma Kaya [the ultimate formless timeless reality]?” Ummon replied: “A garden of medicinal flowers.” The monk then said, “Is that all I need to understand?” Ummon replied: “If that isn’t enough, then you’ll need to see the mythical Golden-Haired Lion.”
- Said Ummon to his disciples, “I do not ask you to say anything about before the fifteenth day of the month, but say something about after the fifteenth day of the month.” Because no monk could reply, Ummon answered himself and said, “Every day is a good day!”
- Said Ummon to his disciples, “However wonderful a thing is, it may be that it is better not to have it at all.”
- A monk asked Ummon, “What is the kind of talk that transcends Buddhas and Patriarchs?” Ummon replied: “Rice cake!”
- A monk asked Dongshan Shouchu, “What is Buddha?” Dongshan said, “Three pounds of flax.”
- If you meet the Buddha, kill him.

## ☉ Ibn Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (excerpt)<sup>1</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 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

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<sup>1</sup> This is from chapter 1 of Arabi’s book, but it also found in a separate treatise appearing under a variety of titles, e.g. ‘*Al-Risāla al-Wujūdiyya*’, ‘*Kitāb al-Ajwiba*’, etc.

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.

## Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*

### CHAPTER I: *What is the Divine Darkness?*

“Supernal Triad, Deity above all essence, knowledge and goodness; Guide of Christians to Divine Wisdom; direct our path to the ultimate summit of your mystical knowledge, most incomprehensible, most luminous and most exalted, where the pure, absolute and immutable mysteries of theology are veiled in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness, and fill our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories surpassing all beauty.”

Let this be my prayer; but do, dear Timothy, in the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and nonbeing, that you may arise by unknowing towards the union, as far as is attainable, with it that transcends all being and all knowledge. For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of yourself and of all things you may be borne on high, through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential Radiance of the Divine Darkness.

But these things are not to be disclosed to the uninitiated, by whom I mean those attached to the objects of human thought, and who believe there is no superessential Reality beyond, and who imagine that by their own understanding they know it that has made Darkness Its secret place. And if the principles of the divine Mysteries are beyond the understanding of these, what is to be said of others still more incapable thereof, who describe the transcendental First Cause of all by characteristics drawn from the lowest order of beings, while they deny that it is in any way above the images which they fashion after various designs; whereas they should affirm that, while it possesses all the positive attributes of the universe (being the Universal Cause) yet, in a more strict sense, it does not possess them, since it transcends them all; wherefore there is no contradiction between the affirmations and the negations, inasmuch as it infinitely precedes all conceptions of deprivation, being beyond all positive and negative distinctions.

Thus the blessed Bartholomew asserts that the divine science is both vast and minute, and that the Gospel is great and broad, yet concise and short; signifying by this, that the beneficent Cause of all is most eloquent, yet utters few words, or rather is altogether silent, as having neither (human) speech nor (human) understanding, because it is super-essentially exalted above created things, and reveals itself in Its naked Truth to those alone who pass beyond all that is pure or impure, and ascend above the topmost altitudes of holy things, and who, leaving behind them all divine light and sound and heavenly utterances, plunge into the Darkness where truly dwells, as the Oracles declare, that ONE who is beyond all.

It was not without reason that the blessed Moses was commanded first to purify himself and then to separate himself from those who had not undergone purification; and after the entire purification heard many trumpets and saw many lights streaming forth with pure and manifold rays; and that he was thereafter separated from the multitude, with the elect priests, and pressed forward to the summit of the divine ascent. Nevertheless, he did not attain to the Presence of God

itself; he saw not it (for it cannot be looked upon) but the Place where it dwells. And this I take to signify that the divinest and highest things seen by the eyes or contemplated by the mind are but the symbolical expressions of those that are immediately beneath it that is above all. Through these, Its incomprehensible Presence is manifested upon those heights of Its Holy Places; that then It breaks forth, even from that which is seen and that which sees, and plunges the mystic into the Darkness of Unknowing, whence all perfection of understanding is excluded, and he is enwrapped in that which is altogether intangible, wholly absorbed in it that is beyond all, and in none else (whether himself or another); and through the inactivity of all his reasoning powers is united by his highest faculty to it that is wholly unknowable; thus by knowing nothing he knows That which is beyond his knowledge.

## ***CHAPTER II: The necessity of being united with and of rendering praise to it that is the Cause of all and above all.***

We pray that we may come unto this Darkness which is beyond light, and, without seeing and without knowing, to see and to know that which is above vision and knowledge through the realization that by not-seeing and by unknowing we attain to true vision and knowledge; and thus praise, superessentially, it that is superessential, by the transcendence of all things; even as those who, carving a statue out of marble, abstract or remove all the surrounding material that hinders the vision which the marble conceals and, by that abstraction, bring to light the hidden beauty. It is necessary to distinguish this negative method of abstraction from the positive method of affirmation, in which we deal with the Divine Attributes. For with these latter we begin with the universal and primary, and pass through the intermediate and secondary to the particular and ultimate attributes; but now we ascend from the particular to the universal conceptions, abstracting all attributes in order that, without veil, we may know that Unknowing which is enshrouded under all that is known and all that can be known, and that we may begin to contemplate the superessential Darkness which is hidden by all the light that is in existing things.

## ***CHAPTER III: What are the affirmations and the negations concerning God?***

In the Theological Outlines we have set forth the principal affirmative expressions concerning God, and have shown in what sense God's Holy Nature is One, and in what sense Three; what is within It which is called Paternity, what Filiation, and what is signified by the name Spirit; how from the uncreated and indivisible Good, the blessed and perfect Rays of its Goodness proceed, and yet abide immutably one both within their Origin and within themselves and each other, co-eternal with the act by which they spring from it; how the superessential Jesus enters in essential state in which the truths of human nature meet; and other matters made known by the Oracles are expounded in the same place.

Again, in the treatise on Divine Names, we have considered the meaning, as concerning God, of the titles of Good, of Being, of Life, of Wisdom, of Power, and of such other names as are applied to it; further, in Symbolical Theology we have considered what are the metaphorical titles drawn from the world of sense and applied to the nature of God; what is meant by the material and intellectual images we form of it, or the functions and instruments of activity attributed to it; what are the places where it dwells and the raiment in which it is adorned; what is meant by God's anger, grief and indignation, or the divine inebriation; what is meant by God's oaths and threats, by Its slumber and waking; and all sacred and symbolical representations. And it will be observed how far more copious and diffused are the last terms than the first, for the theological doctrine and the exposition of the Divine Names are necessarily more brief than the Symbolical Theology.

For the higher we soar in contemplation the more limited become our expressions of that which is purely intelligible; even as now, when plunging into the Darkness that is above the intellect, we pass not merely into brevity of speech, but even into absolute silence of thoughts and of words. Thus, in the former discourse, our contemplations descended from the highest to the lowest, embracing an ever-widening number of conceptions, which increased at each stage of the descent; but in the present discourse we mount upwards from below to that which is the highest, and, according to the degree of transcendence, so our speech is restrained until, the entire ascent being accomplished, we become wholly voiceless, inasmuch as we are absorbed in it that is totally ineffable. But why, you will ask, does the affirmative method begin from the highest attributions, and the negative method with the lowest abstractions? The reason is because, when affirming the subsistence of That which transcends all affirmation, we necessarily start from the attributes most closely related to It and upon which the remaining affirmations depend; but when pursuing the negative method to reach That which is beyond all abstraction, we must begin by applying our negations to things which are most remote from It.

For is it not more true to affirm that God is Life and Goodness than that God is air or stone; and must we not deny to God more emphatically the attributes of inebriation and wrath than the applications of human speech and thought?

#### ***CHAPTER IV: That it that is the pre-eminent Cause of all things sensibly perceived is not itself any of those things.***

We therefore maintain that the universal and transcendent Cause of all things is neither without being nor without life, nor without reason or intelligence; nor is it a body, nor has it form or shape, quality, quantity or weight; nor has it any localized, visible or tangible existence; it is not sensible or perceptible; nor is it subject to any disorder or inordination nor influenced by any earthly passion; neither is it rendered impotent through the effects of material causes and events; it needs no light; it suffers no change, corruption, division, privation or flux; none of these things can either be identified with or attributed unto it.

**CHAPTER V: *That it that is the pre-eminent Cause of all things intelligibly perceived is not itself any of those things.***

Again, ascending yet higher, we maintain that it is neither soul nor intellect; nor has it imagination, opinion reason or understanding; nor can it be expressed or conceived, since it is neither number nor order; nor greatness nor smallness; nor equality nor inequality; nor similarity nor dissimilarity; neither is it standing, nor moving, nor at rest; neither has it power nor is power, nor is light; neither does it live nor is it life; neither is it essence, nor eternity nor time; nor is it subject to intelligible contact; nor is it science nor truth, nor kingship nor wisdom; neither one nor oneness, nor godhead nor goodness; nor is it spirit according to our understanding, nor filiation, nor paternity; nor anything else known to us or to any other beings of the things that are or the things that are not; neither does anything that is know it as it is; nor does it know existing things according to existing knowledge; neither can the reason attain to it, nor name it, nor know it; neither is it darkness nor light, nor the false nor the true; nor can any affirmation or negation be applied to it, for although we may affirm or deny the things below it, we can neither affirm nor deny it, inasmuch as the all-perfect and unique Cause of all things transcends all affirmation, and the simple pre-eminence of Its absolute nature is outside of every negation- free from every limitation and beyond them all.

## † Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (excerpts)

The problem we are considering is not the truth of Christianity but the individual's relation to Christianity. Our discussion is not about the scholar's systematic zeal to arrange the truths of Christianity in nice tidy categories but about the individual's personal relationship to this doctrine, a relationship which is properly one of infinite interest to him. Simply stated, "I, Johannes Climacus [= Kierkegaard, using a pseudonym], born in this city, now thirty years old, a decent fellow like most folk, suppose that there awaits me, as it awaits a maid and a professor, a highest good, which is called an eternal happiness. I have heard that Christianity is the way to that good, and so I ask, how may I establish a proper relationship to Christianity?"

I hear an intellectual's response to this, "What outrageous presumption! What egregious egoistic vanity in this theocentric and philosophically enlightened age, which is concerned with global history, to lay such inordinate weight on one's petty self."

I tremble at such a reproof and had I not already inured myself to these kinds of responses, I would slink away like a dog with his tail between his legs. But I have no guilt whatsoever about what I am doing, for it is not I who is presumptuous, but, rather, it is Christianity itself which compels me to ask the question in this way. For Christianity places enormous significance on my little self, and upon every other self however insignificant it may seem, in that it offers each self eternal happiness on the condition that a proper relationship between itself and the individual is established.

Although I am still an outsider to faith, I can see that the only unpardonable sin against the majesty of Christianity is for an individual to take his relationship to it for granted. However modest it may seem to relate oneself in this way, Christianity considers such a casual attitude to be imprudent. So I must respectfully decline all theocentric helpers and the helpers' helpers who would seek to help me through a detached relationship to this doctrine. I would rather remain where I am with my infinite concern about my spiritual existence, with the problem of how I may become a Christian. For while it is not impossible for one with an infinite concern for his eternal happiness to achieve salvation, it is entirely impossible for one who has lost all sensitivity to the relationship to achieve such a state.

The objective problem is: Is Christianity true? The subjective problem is: What is the individual's relationship to Christianity? Quite simply, how may I, Johannes Climacus, participate in the happiness promised by Christianity? The problem concerns myself alone; partly because, if it is properly set forth, it will concern everyone in exactly the same way; and partly because all the other points of view take faith for granted, as trivial...

### **The Objective Problem of the Truth of Christianity.**

...The inquiring, philosophical, and learned researcher raises the question of the truth, but not the subjective truth, that is, the truth as appropriated. The inquiring researcher is interested, but he is not infinitely, personally, and passionately interested in a way that relates his own



eternal happiness to this truth. Far be it for the objective person to be so immodest, so presumptuous as that!

Such an inquirer must be in one of two states. Either he is already in faith convinced of the truth of Christianity—and in such a relationship he cannot be indefinitely interested in the objective inquiry, since faith itself consists in being infinitely concerned with Christianity and regards every competing interest as a temptation; or he is not in faith but objectively considering the subject matter, and as such is not in a condition of being infinitely interested in the question. I mention this in order to draw your attention to [this]..., namely, that the problem of the truth of Christianity is never appropriately set forth in this objective manner, that is, it does not arise at all, since Christianity lies in decision. Let the scholarly researcher work with indefatigable zeal even to the point of shortening his life in devoted service to scholarship. Let the speculative philosopher spare neither time nor effort. They are nevertheless not personally and passionately concerned. On the contrary, they wouldn't want to be but will want to develop an objective and disinterested stance. They are only concerned about objective truth, so that the question of personal appropriation is relatively unimportant, something that will follow their findings as a matter of course. In the last analysis what matters to the individual is of minor significance. Herein precisely lies the scholar's exalted equanimity as well as the comedy of his parrotlike pedantry.

### **The Historical Point of View.**

...When one raises the historical question of the truth of Christianity or of what is and what is not Christian truth, we come directly to the Holy Scriptures as the central document. The historical investigation focuses first on the Bible.

...[L]et us assume first that the critics have established everything that scholarly theologians in their happiest moments ever dreamed to prove about the Bible. These books and no others belong to the canon. They are authentic, complete, their authors are trustworthy—it is as though every letter were divinely inspired (one cannot say more than this, for inspiration is an object of faith and is qualitatively dialectical...).

...And so it comes to pass that everything we hoped for with respect to the Scriptures has been firmly established. What follows from this? Has anyone who didn't previously have faith come a single step closer to faith? Of course not, not a single step closer. For faith isn't produced through academic investigations. It doesn't come directly at all, but, on the contrary, it is precisely in objective analysis that one loses the infinite personal and passionate concern that is the requisite condition for faith, its ubiquitous ingredient, wherein faith comes into existence.

Has anyone who had faith gained anything in terms of faith's strength and power? No, not the least. Rather, his prodigious learning which lies like a dragon at faith's door, threatening to devour it, will become a handicap, forcing him to put forth an even greater prodigious effort in fear and trembling in order not to fall into temptation and confuse knowledge with faith. Whereas faith had uncertainty as a useful teacher, it now finds that certainty is its most dangerous enemy. Take passion away and faith disappears, for certainty and passion are

incompatible. Let an analogy throw light on this point. He who believes that God exists and providentially rules the world finds it easier to preserve his faith (and not a fantasy) in an imperfect world where passion is kept awake, than in an absolutely perfect world; for in such an ideal world faith is unthinkable. This is the reason that we are taught that in eternity faith will be annulled.

Now let us assume the opposite, that the opponents have succeeded in proving what they desired to establish regarding the Bible and did so with a certainty that transcended their wildest hopes. What then? Has the enemy abolished Christianity? Not a whit. Has he harmed the believer? Not at all. Has he won the right of being free from the responsibility of becoming a believer? By no means. Simply because these books are not by these authors, are not authentic, lack integrity, do not seem to be inspired (though this cannot be demonstrated since it is a matter of faith), it in no way follows that these authors have not existed, and above all it does not follow that Christ never existed. In so far as faith perdures, the believer is at liberty to assume it; just as free (mark well!); for if he accepted the content of faith on the basis of evidence, he would now be on the verge of giving up faith. If things ever came this far, the believer is somewhat to blame, for he invited the procedure and began to play into the hands of unbelief by attempting to prove the content of faith.

Here is the heart of the matter, and I come back to learned theology. For whose sake is the proof sought? Faith does not need it. Yes, it must regard it as an enemy. But when faith begins to feel ashamed, when like a young woman for whom love ceases to suffice, who secretly feels ashamed of her lover and must therefore have it confirmed by others that he really is quite remarkable, so likewise when faith falters and begins to lose its passion, when it begins to cease to be faith, then proof becomes necessary in order to command respect from the side of unbelief.

So when the subject of faith is treated objectively, it becomes impossible for a person to relate himself to the decision of faith with passion, let alone with infinitely concerned passion. It is a self-contradiction and as such comical to be infinitely concerned about what at best can only be an approximation. If in spite of this, we still preserve passion, we obtain fanaticism. For the person with infinite passionate concern every relevant detail becomes something of infinite value. The error lies not in the infinite passion but in the fact that its object has become an approximation.

As soon as one takes subjectivity away—and with it subjectivity's passion—and with passion the infinite concern—it becomes impossible to make a decision—either with regard to this problem or any other; for every decision, every genuine decision, is a subjective action. A contemplator (i.e., an objective subject) experiences no infinite urge to make a decision and sees no need for a commitment anywhere. This is the falsity of objectivity... Objectively speaking, this method produces results in great supply, but it does not produce a single decisive result. This is as is expected, since decisiveness inheres in subjectivity, essentially in passion and maximally in the personal passion that is infinitely concerned about one's eternal happiness.

## **Becoming Subjective.**

...Philosophy teaches that the way to truth is to become objective, but Christianity teaches that the way is to become subjective, that is, to become a subject in truth. Lest we seem to be trading on ambiguities, let it be said clearly that Christianity aims at intensifying passion to its highest pitch; but passion is subjectivity and does not exist objectively at all.

...For an objective reflection the truth becomes an object, something objective, and thought points away from the subject. For subjective reflection the truth becomes a matter of appropriation, of inwardness, of subjectivity, and thought must penetrate deeper and still deeper into the subject and his subjectivity. Just as in objective reflection, when objectivity had come into being, subjectivity disappeared, so here the subjectivity of the subject becomes the final stage...

In order to elucidate the difference between the objective way of reflection and the subjective way, I shall now show how subjective reflection makes its way back into inwardness. The highest point of inwardness in an existing person is passion, for passion relates to truth as a paradox, and the fact that the truth becomes a paradox is grounded in its relation to an existing subject...By forgetting that we exist as subjects, we lose passion and truth ceases to be a paradox, but the knowing subject begins to lose his humanity and becomes fantastic and the truth likewise becomes a fantastic object for this kind of knowledge...

The existing individual who chooses the objective way enters upon the entire approximation process that is supposed to bring God into the picture. But this in all eternity cannot be done...The existing individual who chooses the subjective way...comprehends this dialectical difficulty in all its pain because every moment without God is a moment lost—so important is the matter of being related to God. In this way God certainly becomes a postulate but not in the useless sense in which it is often taken. It becomes the only way in which an existing individual comes into a relation with God—when the dialectical contradiction brings passion to the point of despair and helps him embrace God with the category of despair (faith). Now the postulate is far from being arbitrary or optional. It becomes a life-saving necessity, so that it is no longer simply a postulate, but rather the individual's postulation of the existence of God is a necessity.

...When subjectivity is truth, subjectivity's definition must include an expression for an opposition to objectivity, a reminder of the fork in the road, and this expression must also convey the tension of inwardness. Here is such a definition...: the objective uncertainty, held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth available for an existing subject. There where the way swings off (and where that is cannot be discovered objectively but only subjectively), at that place objective knowledge is annulled. Objectively speaking he has only uncertainty, but precisely there the infinite passion of inwardness is intensified, and truth is precisely the adventure to choose objective uncertainty with the passion of inwardness.

When I consider nature in order to discover God, I do indeed see his omnipotence and wisdom, but I see much more that disturbs me. The result of all this is objective uncertainty, but

precisely here is the place for inwardness because inwardness apprehends the objective uncertainty with the entire passion of infinity...

Now the above definition...is an equivalent description of faith. Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of inwardness and objective uncertainty. If I can grasp God objectively, I do not believe, but because I cannot know God objectively, I must have faith, and if I will preserve myself in faith, I must constantly be determined to hold fast to the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the ocean's deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, and still believe.

...What is the absurd? The absurd is that the eternal truth has entered time, that God has entered existence, has been born, has grown, and so on, has become precisely like any other human being, quite indistinguishable from other humans. The absurd is precisely by its objective repulsion the measure of the inwardness of faith. Suppose there is a man who desires to have faith. Let the comedy begin. He desires to obtain faith with the help of objective investigation and what the approximation process of evidential inquiry yields. What happens? With the help of the increment of evidence the absurd is transformed to something else; it becomes probable, it becomes more probable still, it becomes perhaps highly and overwhelmingly probable. Now that there is respectable evidence for the content of his faith, he is ready to believe it, and he prides himself that his faith is not like that of the shoemaker, the tailor, and the simple folk, but comes after a long investigation. Now he prepares himself to believe it. Any proposition that is almost probable, reasonably probable, highly and overwhelmingly probable, is something that is almost known and as good as known, highly and overwhelmingly known—but it is not believed, not through faith; for the absurd is precisely faith's object and the only positive attitude possible in relation to it is faith and not knowledge...

Subjectivity culminates in passion. Christianity is the paradox; paradox and passion belong together as a perfect match, and the paradox is perfectly suited to one whose situation is to be in the extremity of existence. Indeed, there never has been found in all the world two lovers more suited to each other than passion and paradox, and the strife between them is a lover's quarrel, when they argue about which one first aroused the other's passion. And so it is here. The existing individual by means of the paradox has come to the extremity of existence. And what is more wonderful for lovers than to be granted a long time together with each other without anything disturbing their relation except that which makes it more inwardly passionate? And this is what is granted to the unspeculative understanding between the passion and paradox, for they will dwell harmoniously together in time and be changed first in eternity.

But the speculative philosopher views things altogether differently. He believes but only to a certain degree. He puts his hand to the plow but quickly looks about for something to know. From a Christian perspective, it is hard to see how he could reach the highest good in this manner.