

A READING FROM THE KATHA UPANISHAD

There is an eternal pipal tree
 with its roots above, its branches below.
 It is the bright; it is Brahman;
 it is called the immortal.
 On it all the worlds depend:
 no one goes beyond it.
This is that.

Whatever there is that moves,
 the breath impels it as it is sent forth.
 It is a great terror, an upraised thunderbolt.
 They who know this become immortal. ...

In oneself it appears as though in a mirror;
 in the world of the ancestors, as though in a dream;
 in the world of *gandharvas*,¹ as though it appeared in water;
 in the world of Brahma, as though in a bright light and shadow.

(6:1-2, 5)²

A READING FROM THE BHAGAVAD GITA

This yoga is not for those who overeat,
 nor for those who do not eat at all.
 Neither is it for those who are addicted to sleep,
 and those who want to be forever awake.

They only acquire the yoga that ends sorrow
 who are disciplined in eating and relaxation,
 disciplined in acts,
 disciplined in sleep and wakefulness.

When thought is checked and the mind focuses on God alone,
 then a person is called a yogi,
 freed from all desires.

A lamp in a windless place has a still flame.
 This is the traditional image for the disciplined mind of the yogi
 who practices the meditation on the Atman.

(6:16-19)

¹ Skt. gods who are half-human half-bird, sometimes associated with musicians of the gods or guardians of the intoxicating juice offered to gods and ingested by brahmans called *soma*.

² Trans. Roebuck.

A READING FROM THE TAO TE CHING

People barely know the very highest.
 Then comes that which they know and love.
 Then that which is feared.
 Then that which is despised.

Those who do not trust enough will not be trusted.

Hesitate and guard your words.
 When their work succeeds
 let people think they did it.

(#17)

A READING FROM THE DHAMMAPADA

Everybody fears being struck by a rod.
 Everybody fears death.
 Therefore, knowing this, feeling for others as for yourself,
 do not kill others or cause others to kill.

Everybody fears being struck by a rod,
 life being dear to all.
 Therefore, knowing this, feeling for others as for yourself,
 do not kill others or cause others to kill.

If one, pursuing happiness, strikes
 living beings who also strive to live happily
 with a rod or other instrument,
 they will reap an unwholesome harvest.

If one pursues one's own happiness,
 while causing no harm to other living beings
 who also strive to live happily,
 they will reap a wholesome harvest.

Avoid harsh speech.
 Angry words backfire upon the speaker.
 By making yourself as still as a cracked cymbal,
 not retaliating, you achieve *nirvana*.
 As a cowherd leads the cattle to pasture,
 so do old age and death
 drive the life of all beings.

(10:1-7)³

³ Trans. Ananda Maitreya, altered for inclusive language.

FROM THE WRITINGS OF DOGEN-ZEJI

Right transmission of the Great Way is handed down through the experience and practice of enlightenment; it passes from Patriarch to Patriarch without alteration and through them the Great Enlightenment manifests itself and never ceases. But do not become attached to the idea of Great Enlightenment; if you do, your practice will stagnate. You must be completely detached from the notion of Great Enlightenment and never seek or crave it. Such expressions as “without enlightenment,” or “abandon enlightenment and walk freely” reveal that to attain freedom we must transcend the concept of Great Enlightenment. Great Enlightenment is the daily activity of the Buddhas and Patriarchs but they never think about it. Their enlightenment controls time, includes time, and is controlled by time. This is the purpose of Great Enlightenment. Ordinary people cannot grasp this point because they are attached to many things, but Buddhas can open the gate to enlightenment with the key of complete freedom.

(Daigo)⁴

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Hear, my child, and accept my words,
 that the years of your life may be many.
 I have taught you the way of wisdom;
 I have led you in the paths of uprightness.
 When you walk, your step will not be hampered;
 and if you run, you will not stumble.
 Keep hold of instruction; do not let go;
 guard her, for she is your life.
 Do not enter the path of the wicked,
 and do not walk in the way of evildoers.
 Avoid it; do not go on it;
 turn away from it and pass on.
 For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong;
 they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.
 For they eat the bread of wickedness
 and drink the wine of violence.
 But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,
 which shines brighter and brighter until full day.
 The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;
 they do not know what they stumble over.

(4:10-19)

⁴ *Shobogenzo*, 34.

17.7

FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE HASIDIM

The root of everything is mediation.⁵ It is a very great and lofty concept, making a person worthy of all holiness. When one meditates, one is clothed with holiness. When one meditates, one is also attached to God, even with regard to mundane bodily needs.

(*Rabbi Chaim Yoese David Azzulai*)⁶

17.8

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him,

to receive a gift in return?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

(11:33-36)

17.9

FROM THE WRITINGS OF MEISTER ECKHART

Now pay attention: God is nameless, because no one can say anything or understand anything about him . . . So if I say: “God is good,” that is not true. I am good, but God is not good . . . And if I say: “God is wise,” that is not true. I am wiser than he. If I say: “God is being,” it is not true; he is a being transcending being and a transcending nothingness . . . So be silent, and do not chatter about God; for when you chatter about him, you are telling lies and sinning.⁷

Predigt 83

17.10

FROM DELIVERANCE FROM ERROR BY AL GHAZALI

The complete mystic way includes both intellectual belief and practical activity; the latter consists in getting rid of the obstacles in the self and in stripping off its base characteristics and vicious morals, so that the heart may attain to freedom from what is not God and to constant recollection of God. What is most distinctive of mysticism is something that cannot be apprehended by study, but

⁵ Hb, *hitbodedut*.

⁶ Sephardic Leader and Kabbalist, (1724-1806). Quoted in *Meditation and the Bible*, 15.

⁷ Trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, and Defense*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1981) 206-207.

only by *dhawq*—tasting, by ecstasy and by a moral change. What a difference there is between being acquainted with the definition of drunkenness—namely that it designates a state arising from the domination of the seat of the intellect by vapors arising from the stomach—and being drunk! Indeed, the one who is in the condition of being drunk does not know the definition of drunkenness, nor the scientific account of it; they have not the very least scientific knowledge of it. Someone who is sober, on the other hand, knows the definition of drunkenness and its basis, yet is not drunk in the very least. Again, doctors, when they themselves are ill, know the definition and causes of health and the remedies to restore it, and yet are lacking in health. Similarly, there is a difference between knowing the true nature and causes and conditions of the ascetic life, and actually leading such a life and forsaking the world.

(Part Three, #3)⁸

17.11

FROM THE POEMS OF MIRABAI

You cannot call this true devotion,
 To bathe one's forehead and apply the *tilak*⁹
 Without cleansing the impurities of the heart.
 That cruel cur desire
 Has bound me with the cord of greed.
 The butcher of anger remains within me.
 How can I meet Gopal?¹⁰
 The greedy senses are like a cat,
 And I keep on giving them food.
 Weakened by my hunger for sense objects
 I do not take the Name of God.
 I worship not God but myself,
 And glow with ecstasy.

Now that I have built up
 This towering rock of pride,
 Where can the water of true wisdom collect?
 You cannot deceive [the One] who knows
 The inmost recess of your soul.
 The Name of Hari does not enter my heart,
 Though I tell with my lips
 The beads of my bejewelled rosary.
 Learn to love the compassionate Lord,
 Give up faith in the world.¹¹

(#158)

⁸ Adapted for inclusive language.

⁹ The mark worn on the head either as an ornament or to indicate caste or sect.

¹⁰ A name for Krishna.

¹¹ Trans. A J Watson, *The Devotional Poems of Mira-Bai* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), 99.

FROM THE SACRED WRITINGS OF THE SIKHS

This is the greatest sickness of the soul,
 to forget even for a second the Beloved.
 There is no comfort hereafter
 for those whose hearts are empty of God.
 Through the grace of the Guru
 the tired soul has refreshment;
 the praise of God banishes inner desire.
 Day and night, O anxious heart of mine,
 say and repeat: Praise be to God.
 But they are rare in deed
 who never forget the name of God.

When the human soul blends with Universal Light,
 and the human mind commingles
 with the Mind of all things,
 then our petty being,
 with its violence, doubt and sorrow disappears.
 Through the grace of the Guru
 such spiritual union takes place.
 Blessed are they in whose hearts reside the Lord.

*(Sri Rag)*¹²

¹² From "The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs," 67. Adapted for modern and inclusive language.