

A READING FROM THE MUNDAKA UPANISHAD

Take up the bow of the *upanishad*¹—that mighty weapon;
 set to it an arrow sharpened by adoration,
 draw the bow with a heart wholly devoted to the contemplation of That,
 and penetrate into it as your target, into the Immutable.

OM is the bow and the soul is the arrow,
 and That, the very Brahman, is said to be the target.
 That must be pierced with an unfaltering aim;
 one must be absorbed into That as an arrow is lost in its target.

(2.II.3-4)

A READING FROM THE BHAGAVAD GITA

The mind is restless no doubt, difficult to curb,
 but it can be brought under control by repeated practice
 and by the exercise of dispassion.
 Yoga is difficult to achieve for one whose mind is not subdued.
 However, it can be easily attained through practice
 by those who have the mind under control
 and who are ceaselessly striving.
 Such is my conviction.

Yogis who make a serious effort,
 purified of sin and perfected—
 they reach the transcendent goal.

Yogis are superior to ascetics,
 superior even to the wise.
 They are superior to those who do the work of ritual.
 Therefore be a yogi!

And of all yogis,
 those who worship me with faith,
 the inmost self absorbed in Me,
 I hold most fully united.

(6:35-36; 45-47)

¹ "The secret teaching."

A READING FROM THE TAO TE CHING

The expression of the vast power²
 comes entirely from the Tao.
 Tao as a thing is entirely illusive and evasive.
 Though evasive and illusive,
 in it there is image.
 Though illusive and evasive,
 in it there is form.
 Though dark and dim,
 in it there is life seed.
 Its life seed being genuine,
 in it there is a heart.

As it is today, so it was in the days of old.
 Its name has never changed
 so that we may know the source of origins.
 How do I know the source of origins?
 Because of this.

(#21)

A READING FROM THE DHAMMAPADA

How many lives, how many rounds of rebirth
 have I experienced
 without finding the builder of the house?
 Now I see you, O builder,
 all of your rafters are broken, your ridgepole is shattered.
 Never again need you build a house for me.
 My mind has gone beyond the transitory, the conditioned,
 and has achieved the extinction of craving.

Those who do not find their way to a higher life,
 or who fail to earn wealth during their youth,
 look back with regret in their old age,
 like large old wading birds beside a dried pond.

Having attained neither the higher life of the seeker,
 nor having acquired wealth and power in their youth,
 they lie like spent arrows that have missed their mark,
 bewailing their misspent past.

(11:8-11)³

² Ch. *te*.

³ Trans. Ananda Maitreya.

FROM THE WRITINGS OF DOGEN-ZENJI

Our body is not really ours. Our life is easily changed by time and circumstances and never remains static. Countless things pass and we will never see them again. Our mind is also continually changing. Some people wonder, "If this is true, on what can we rely?" But others, who have the resolve to seek enlightenment, use this constant flux to deepen their enlightenment. However, we cannot get this understanding by any personal effort. This is very important... It is useless to worry about attaining enlightenment. Nevertheless, worry itself is already a step towards enlightenment. Do not be surprised to hear this. It is the only way to enlightenment.

(Immo)⁴

A READING FROM THE SONG OF SONGS

The voice of my beloved!
 Look, he comes,
 leaping upon the mountains,
 bounding over the hills.
 My beloved is like a gazelle
 or a young stag.
 Look, there he stands
 behind our wall,
 gazing in at the windows,
 looking through the lattice.
 My beloved speaks and says to me:
 'Arise, my love, my fair one,
 and come away;
 for now the winter is past,
 the rain is over and gone.
 The flowers appear on the earth;
 the time of singing has come,
 and the voice of the turtle-dove
 is heard in our land.
 The fig tree puts forth its figs,
 and the vines are in blossom;
 they give forth fragrance.
 Arise, my love, my fair one,
 and come away.
 O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
 in the covert of the cliff,
 let me see your face,
 let me hear your voice;
 for your voice is sweet,

⁴ *Shobogenzo*, 58.

and your face is lovely.
Catch us the foxes,
the little foxes,
that ruin the vineyards—
for our vineyards are in blossom.'

(2:8-15)

21.7

FROM THE WRITINGS OF RABBI ELAZAR ALKAZRI⁵

The Talmud teaches that the early saints would wait an hour before praying in order to concentrate their thoughts upon God. The commentaries explain that this means that they would empty their minds of all mundane thoughts, and would bind their consciousness to the Master of all, with fear and love.

These saints would then pray for an hour, and finally wait another hour after their prayers, so that they would spend a total of three hours on each of the three daily services. It thus came out that they would take off a total of nine hours each day from their sacred studies in order to engage in meditation,⁶ binding themselves to God. The Light of the Divine Presence would appear over their heads as if it were spread around them, with them sitting in the midst of the Light.⁷

21.8

A READING FROM THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. That is not the way you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

(Eph. 4:17-24)

⁵ 1522-1600, moralist and mystic.

⁶ Hb. *hitbodedut*.

⁷ In *Meditation and the Bible*, 14.

FROM THE CONFESSIONS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

If to anyone the tumult of the flesh has fallen silent, if the images of earth, water, and air are quiescent, if the heavens themselves are shut out and the very soul itself is making no sound and is surpassing itself by no longer thinking about itself, if all dreams and visions in the imagination are excluded, if all language and everything transitory is silent—for if anyone could hear then this is what all of them would be saying, “We did not make ourselves, we were made by him who abides for eternity.”⁸

That is how it was when at that moment we extended our reach and in a flash of mental energy attained the eternal wisdom which abides beyond all things.⁹

FROM DELIVERANCE FROM ERROR BY ABU HAMID AL-GHAZALI

In general, what mystics manage to achieve is nearness to God; some, however, would conceive of this as *hulul*—inherence, some as *ittihad*—union, and some as *wusul*—connection. All that is erroneous. Those who have attained the mystic state need do no more than say:

Of the things I do not remember, what was, was.
Think it good; do not ask an account of it.¹⁰

The miraculous powers given to the saints are in truth the beginning of the prophets; and that was the first state of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) when he went out to Mount Hira, and was given up entirely to his Lord, and worshiped, so that the Bedouin said, “Muhammad loves his Lord passionately.”

3:3¹¹

⁸ Psalm 79:3,5

⁹ *Confessions*, IX, 25, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991), 171-171.

¹⁰ Hamid al-Ghazali is quoting Ibn al-Mu'tazz.

¹¹ Trans. Watt.

21.11

FROM THE POEMS OF RUMI

I died as mineral and became a plant,
 I died as plant and rose to animal,
 I died as animal and I was human.
 Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
 Yet once more I shall die as a human being,
 To soar with angels blest;
 But even from angelhood I must pass on:
All except God perishes.
 When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,
 I shall become what no mind ever conceived.
 Oh, let me not exist!
 For non-existence proclaims in organ tones,
 "To God we shall return!"¹²

21.12

FROM THE SACRED WRITINGS OF THE SIKHS

O my heart, listen:
 Love God as the Sheldrake in the fable loves the sun;
 it does not sleep for a moment:
 at night it cannot see,
 it considers the Beloved, who is close, to be far.
 The self-willed are involvd in calculations,
 but what the Lord ordains comes to pass.
 And however hard one endeavors,
 who can tell God's bounds?
 Only through the Guru's teaching is this revealed;
 in truth alone is our peace.

(Sri Rag)¹³

¹² Trans. Reynold A. Nicholson in *Rumi, Poet and Mystic* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950).

¹³ From "The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs," 72. Adapted for modern and inclusive language.