

A READING FROM THE SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD

The powerful one¹ bears the whole, united,
 the perishable and the imperishable, the manifest and the Unmanifest.
 The powerless self is bound through being an enjoyer.
 Once it knows God it is free from all bonds.

There are two billy goats—knower and unknowing, powerful and
 powerless;
 and one nanny goat—yoked to the enjoyer and the objects of enjoyment.
 When one knows this triad, this is *Brahman*,
 the infinite Self who possesses all forms, not an actor

Primal matter is perishable,
 but God² is the immortal imperishable,
 and has power over both perishable (matter) and self.
 Through meditation on God, through practice,
 through being suchness³ and more,
 in the end the whole artifice⁴ ceases.

When one knows God, all fetters are cast off,
 afflictions have faded, birth and death are ended;
 through meditation, there arises a third state:
 where the power of the All is, and one has all:
 for one is one with the ONE.⁵

(3:8-11)

A READING FROM THE BHAGAVAD GITA

My shape is Unmanifest,
 but I pervade the whole universe.
 All beings have their being in me,
 but I am not limited by them.

Behold the power of my Yoga:
 Those beings do not really dwell in me.
 Though the sustainer and creator of beings,
 my self in reality is not confined within them.

¹ Skt. *Īsha*.

² Roebuck, "the taker."

³ Skt. *tattva*.

⁴ Skt. *mâyâ*.

⁵ Roebuck, "...on the break up of the body, lordship over all; absolute, one attains one's desire."

As the storm wind
which resides in the ether,
likewise, remember this:
all beings move in me.

During the final dissolution
all creatures return to unmanifested nature⁶;
at the beginning of creation,
I send them forth again.
Establishing my own nature⁷,
I release this host of being forth,
time after time, without their will,
according to their nature.

These actions do not bind me.
I am like an onlooker,
detached in the midst of this work.
Under my watchful eye,
nature brings forth the whole creation,
both sentient and insentient beings.
That is how the world keeps turning.

(9:4-10)

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A READING FROM THE TAO TE CHING

Trying to rule the universe by force⁸?
I see it cannot be done.

The universe is a spirit vessel,
which cannot be forced.
To force it is to harm it.
To grasp it is to lose it.

Some move forward, some follow.
Some sigh, some draw a deep breath.
Some grow stronger, some weaken.
Some destroy, some are destroyed.

Therefore,
the sage avoids extremes,
shuns extravagance,
and avoids excess.

(#29)

⁶ Skt. *prakritim*.

⁷ Skt. *prakritim*.

⁸ Ch. *wei*, can be "improve it" or "act on it." The opposite of *wu-wei*, the Taoist ideal of "not-acting" and *wei wu wei*, "acting by not acting."

A READING FROM THE DHAMMAPADA

There is blindness all around.
 Only very few can see,
 Many are like birds trapped in a net,
 only few escape and achieve liberation.

Swans fly in the sky.
 Those possessed of psychic powers
 glide through the air.
 The wise, controlling self, proceed to nirvana.

Those who violate even one spiritual law,
 who are dishonest and tell lies,
 unconcerned with the life hereafter,
 there is not evil such a one dares not do.

Those closed off from generosity
 do not enter the realm of the gods.
 Fools do not praise generosity.
 The wise rejoice in generosity
 and by that will be happy after death.

Better than the sole rulership over the world,
 better than going to heaven,
 better than lordship over all the worlds,
 is the fruition of the streamwinner's path.

(13:8-12)

FROM THE WRITINGS OF KICHIBEI

When all the idea of self-power based upon moral values and disciplinary measures is purged, there is nothing left in you that will declare itself to be the hearer, and just because of this you do not miss anything you hear.⁹

⁹ D. T. Suzuki, *Living by Zen* (London: Rider, 1950), 130.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

... Israel camped in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words you shall speak to the Israelites."

So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. The people all answered as one: "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do." Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord. Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust in you ever after."

(Ex 19:2b-9)

FROM THE SAYINGS OF THE HASIDIM

Moses wanted to reveal more to the people, but he was not allowed. For it was God's will that the people make an effort of their own. Moses was to say just these words to them, no more and no less, so that they might feel: Something is hidden here, and we must strive to discover it for ourselves. That is why, further on, we read: "And he set before them all these words." No more, no less.¹⁰

A READING FROM THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Jesus said, "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

¹⁰ Adapted from Buber *Rungs*, 62.

FROM THE WRITINGS OF EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS

When the soul has been purified by the full complement of the virtues, it stabilizes the attitude of the mind and prepares it to receive the desired state. Prayer is the communion of the mind with God. What sort of state does the mind need so that it can reach out to its Lord without turning back and commune with him without intermediary? If Moses, when he tried to approach the earthly burning bush, was held back until he removed his sandals from his feet,¹¹ how can you, who wish to see and commune with the one who is beyond all representation and sense perception, not free yourself from every mental representation tied to the passions?

(Prayer, 2-4)¹²

FROM THE WRITINGS OF AL-GHAZZALI

The Sufis do not abandon the world, nor do they hold that human appetites must be done away with. They only discipline those desires that are in discordance with the religious life and the dictates of sound reason.

They don't throw away all things of this world, nor do they go after them with a vengeance. Rather, they know the true value and function of everything upon the earth. They save as much as is necessary. They eat as much as they need to stay healthy.

They nourish their bodies and simultaneously set their hearts free. God becomes the focal point toward which their whole being leans. God becomes the object of their continual adoration and contemplation.¹³

¹¹ Ex 3:5

¹² *Evagrius of Pontus, The Greek Ascetic Corpus*. Translated, Introduction, and Commentary by Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 193

¹³ Quoted in *Essential Sufism*, ed. James Fadiman and Robert Frager (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 37.

FROM THE POEMS OF RUMI

the weeping flute
remembers
the riverbed

the stick beats the drum
'I was once green,
a living branch.'

the skin on the lute
trembles
like living flesh

the lovers turn
bewildered
like Jacob seeking Joseph

if you heard their cries
your heart would shatter
like glass¹⁴

FROM THE SACRED WRITINGS OF THE SIKHS

Five prayers, five times a day,
with five different names.
Make the first prayer truth,
the second to lawfully earn your daily bread,
the third charity in the Name of God.
Fourth: purity of mind.
Fifth: adoration of God.
Practice these five virtues,
and let good deeds be your article of faith: the Kalmâ.
Then you can truly call yourself a Muslim.

By the practice of hypocrisy, Nânak,
one is deemed false through and through.

(Rag Majh ki Var)¹⁵

¹⁴ Trans. Daniel Liebert, in *Rumi Poems: Selected and Edited by Peter Washington*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 63.

¹⁵ Adapted from *The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs* for modern idiom, 77.