

A READING FROM THE KATHA UPANISHAD

Subtler than the subtle, greater than the great,
the Self is hidden in the cave of the heart.
When senses are at rest, free from desire,
we find the Self and move beyond sorrow.

Though sitting, the Self travels far;
though sleeping, it goes everywhere.

Those who know the all-pervading Self—
bodiless among the embodied,
stable among the changing—
go beyond sorrow.

The Self is not known through discourse,
nor by intelligence or learning however great.
The Self can be won by the one whom it loves,
and takes that one's body as its own.
Neither the wicked, nor those without concentration,
nor those without peace
can find the Self, no matter their learning.

(2:20-24)

A READING FROM THE BHAGAVAD GITA

What is action and what is inaction?
Even people of intelligence are puzzled over this question.
Therefore, I shall expound to you this truth about action,¹
knowing which you will be freed from its evil effect.²

The truth about action must be known,
and the truth about inaction also must be known;
even so the truth about prohibited action must be known.
For mysterious are the ways of action.

Those who see inaction in action,
and action in inaction,
are wise among people;
they are yogis who have performed all actions.

Even the wise call them sages
whose undertaking are all free from desire and thoughts of the world,

¹ Skt. *karma*.

² I.e., its binding nature.

and whose actions are burnt up by the fire of wisdom.

They who no longer depend on the world,
having totally given up attachment to actions and their fruit,
are ever content do nothing at all,
though fully engaged in action.

They who perform sheer bodily action,
with mind and body subdued,
free from craving,
having given up all objects of enjoyment,
do not incur sin.

(4:16-21)

8.3

A READING FROM THE TAO TE CHING

The best are like water,
nurturing the ten thousand things
without competing,
flowing into places people scorn,
and so very much like the Tao—
making the earth a dwelling place,
cultivating the heart and mind,
practicing benevolence,
speaking with truth,
governing with equity,
serving skillfully,
acting in a timely way,
and, because without contentiousness,
free of blame.

(#8)

8.4

A READING FROM THE DHAMMAPADA

Pay no attention to harsh words uttered by others.
Do not be concerned with what others have done or have not done.
Observe your own actions and inactions.

Like a beautiful brightly colored flower with fragrance
is the well-spoken word without action.
Like a beautiful brightly colored flower full of fragrance
is the well-spoken word and the deed that matches the word.

Someone born to this world should do many good deeds,
as a garland maker makes garlands from a heap of flowers.

Just as a sweet-smelling lotus blooms
beside the highway upon a heap of filth,
so does the disciple of the perfect Buddha
rise above those bound blindly
to the limitations of the world.

(4:7-10, 15-16)³

8.5

A READING FROM THE ANGUTTARA NIKAYA AND SAMYUTTA NIKAYA

All formations are transient; all formations are subject to suffering; all things are without a self.

Therefore, whatever there be of form, of feeling, perception, mental formations, or consciousness, whether past, present, or future, one's own or external, gross or subtle, lofty or low, far or near, one should understand according to reality and true wisdom: 'This does not belong to me; this am I not; this is not my Self.'⁴

8.6

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

Where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Mortals do not know the way to it,
and it is not found in the land of the living.
The deep says, 'It is not in me,'
and the sea says, 'It is not with me.'

Where then does wisdom come from?
And where is the place of understanding?
It is hidden from the eyes of all the living,
and concealed from the birds of the air.

God said to humankind,
'Truly the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
and to depart from evil is understanding.'

(28:12-14, 20-21, 28)

³ Trans. Ananda Maitreya, slightly altered for inclusive language.

⁴ Trans. Nyantiloka, in *Teachings*.

8.7

FROM THE WRITINGS OF ABRAHAM MAIMONIDES

It is written, "Love the Lord your God, and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."⁵ We have already demonstrated numerous times that the love of God is identical with one's perception of God. As a result of this love, one is led to a state of worship which our sages call "service of the heart."

In my opinion, this means that one should concentrate all one's thoughts on the First Intellect, meditating⁶ on it according to one's ability.⁷

8.8

A READING FROM THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Jesus said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

(6:22-23)

8.9

FROM A HOMILY BY SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT

Jesus sends his disciples out to preach two by two, because the precept of charity is twofold—love of God and of one's neighbor. The Lord sends his disciples out to preach in two's in order to teach us silently that whoever fails in charity toward one's neighbor should by no means take upon oneself the office of preaching. Rightly it is said that he sent them ahead of him into every city and place where he himself was to go. For the Lord follows after the preachers, because preaching goes ahead to prepare the way, and then when the words of exhortation have gone ahead and established truth in our minds, the Lord comes to live within us.

(Hom. 17)⁸

⁵ Deut 11:13

⁶ Hb. *hitboded*.

⁷ In *Meditation and the Bible*, Aryeh Kaplan (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc.: 1978), 10.

⁸ *Office of Readings*, 1600-1601.

A READING FROM THE DISCOURSES OF RUMI

Someone said, "There is something I have forgotten." There is one thing in the world that should not be forgotten. You may forget everything except that one thing, without there being any cause for concern. If you remember everything else but forget that one thing, you will have accomplished nothing. It would be as if a king sent you to a village on a specific mission. If you went and performed a hundred other tasks, but neglected to accomplish the task for which you were sent, it would be as though you had done nothing. The human being therefore has come into the world for a specific purpose and aim. If one does not fulfill that purpose, one has done nothing. "We proposed the faith unto the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: and they refused to undertake it, and were afraid of it; but the human being undertook it: and yet truly, they were unjust to themselves, and foolish."⁹

FROM THE POEMS OF GHALIB

Let the ascetics sing of the garden of Paradise—
we who dwell in the true ecstasy can forget their vase-tamed bouquet.

In our hall of mirrors, the map of the one Face appears
as the sun's splendor would spangle a world made of dew.

Hidden in this image is also its end,
as peasants' lives harbor revolt and unthreshed corn sparks with fire.

Hidden in my silence are a thousand abandoned longings:
my words the darkened oil lamp on a stranger's unspeaking grave.

Ghalib, the road of change is before you always:
the only line stitching this world's scattered parts.¹⁰

⁹ Qur'an 33:72. From *Collection*. This is Kabir Helminski's modified versions of Wheeler Thackston, Jr.'s translations of a collection known as *Fili ma fih*—"In it what is in it," in Thackston's *Signs of the Unseen*.

¹⁰ Trans. Jane Hirshfield in *The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred Poetry*, edited by Stephen Mitchell (New York: Harper & Row: 1989), 106.

FROM THE PRAYERS OF THE SIKHS

O Mortal,
you dwell in the world that is as a pool
whose waters God has made as hot as fire.
Stuck in the mire of worldly love,
your feet cannot move forward.
I have seen people drowning in this swamp!

O heart, O foolish heart,
why do you not think on the One?
Through forgetting your Lord,
your virtues have melted away.

I am not chaste nor honest;
I am not even a scholar.
Foolish and ignorant I came into this world.
O Lord, Nanak prays ever to seek
the sanctuary of their gathering
who have not forgotten you.

(Evening Prayer #8)