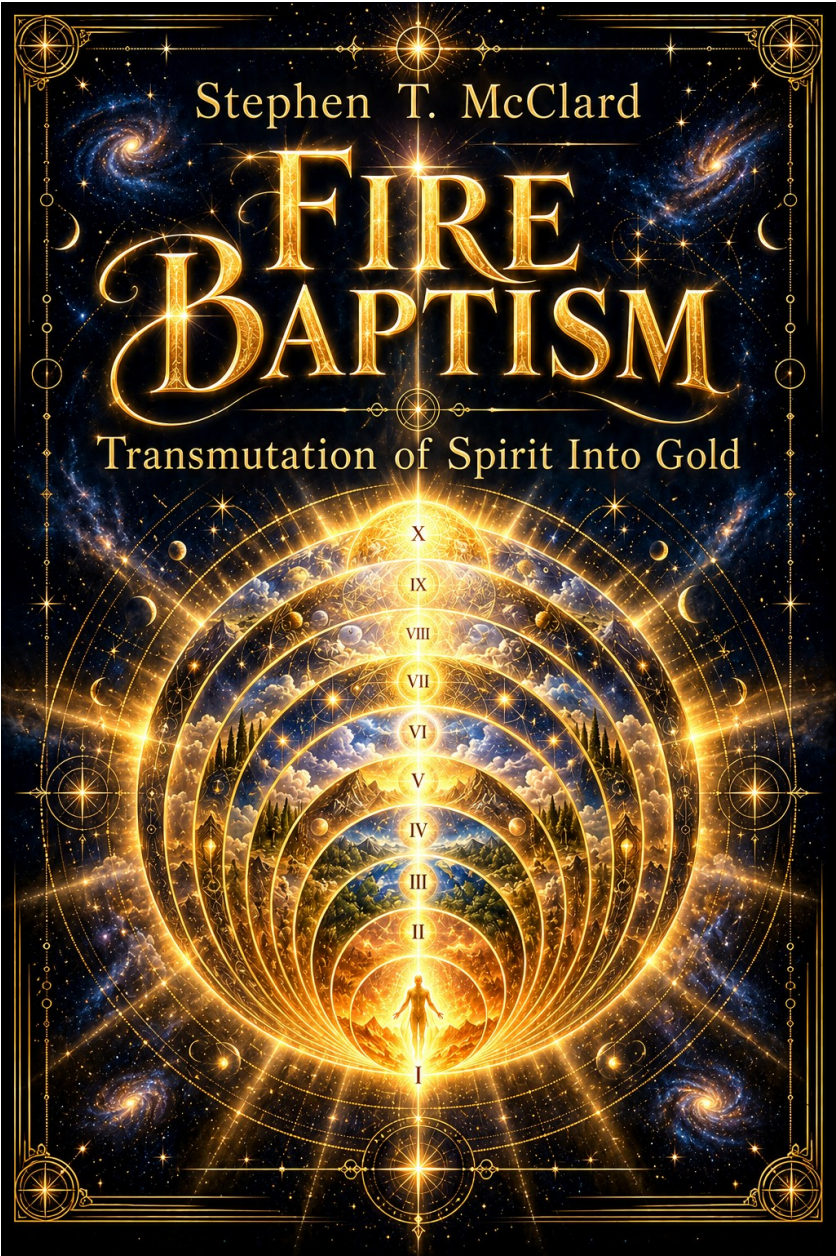




FIRE BAPTISM

Transmutation of Spirit Into Gold

When the barrier in front and the barrier behind are removed,
the eye penetrates and reads the tablet of the Unseen.

When he looks back to the origin of existence,
the past circumstances and beginning of
existence display themselves—

The disputation of the terrestrial angels with the Majesty
as to making our Father the Vicegerent

When he casts his eye forward he sees plainly
that which shall be till the Congregation.

Therefore he sees back to the root of the root,
and he sees forward clairvoyantly to the Day of Decision.

Every one, according to the measure
of his spiritual enlightenment,
sees the things unseen in proportion to the polishing.

The more he polishes, the more he sees
and the more visible does the form become to him.

If you say that that purity is the grace of God,
this success in polishing is also from that bounty.

~Rumi the Sufi, Masnavi

Stephen T. McClard

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Table of Contents

-Introduction: Know Thyself

The Four Laws of Creation and the Refinement of Being

-Chapter One: Fire and Fear

-Chapter Two: Vision of the Divided Waters

-Chapter Three: Fire and Spirit Baptism

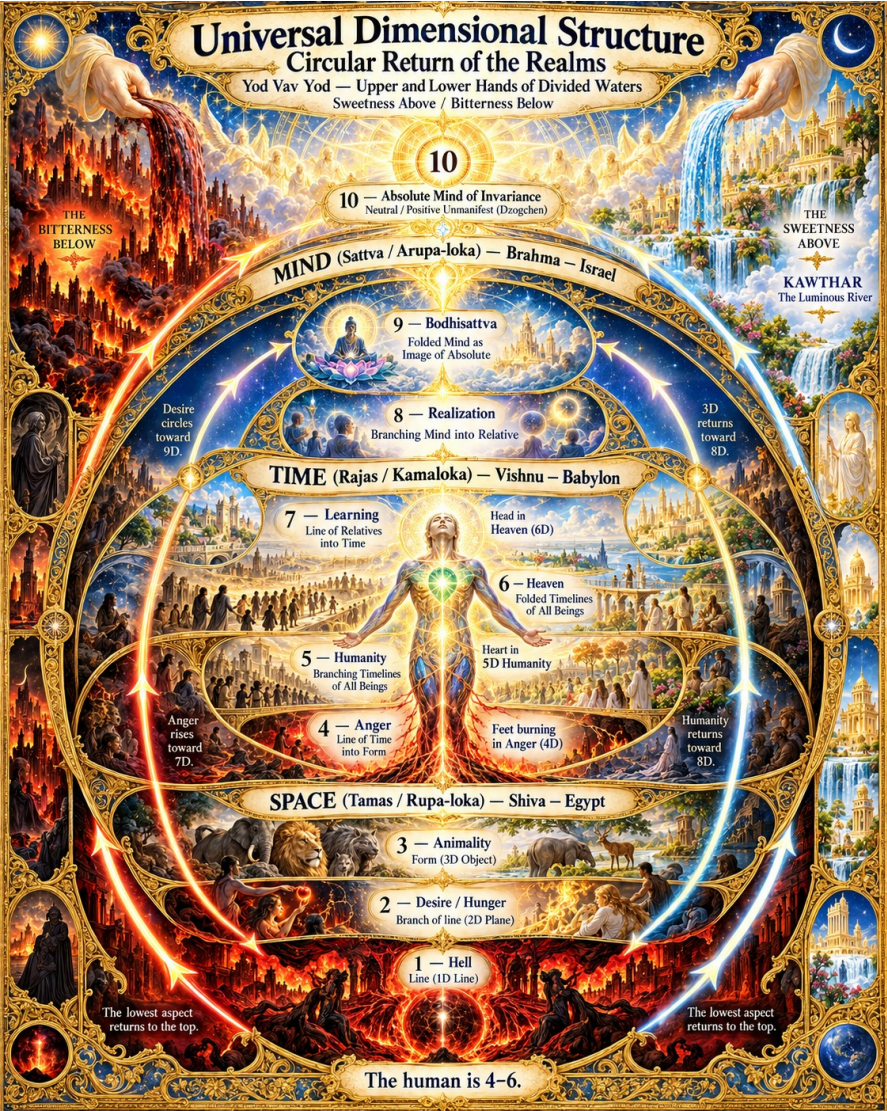
-Afterword: Loving the LORD

Knowing the Lord and Knowing You Are the Lord

-Seeds of Truth

-About the Author

-Recommended Resources



Introduction

The Four Laws of Creation and the Refinement of Being

"God is Awareness walking in its own Light.

Man is Light walking in its own Awareness."

The instruction to many of my books uses the quote above—a paradox easily overlooked by those who assume the self is already known. A human being enters the world possessing awareness but without knowledge of the greater identity from which that awareness proceeds. Through the senses, the mind gathers impressions of a reality divided into objects, relationships, conditions, and events, gradually constructing an identity from what it experiences. Pleasure becomes evidence of goodness, suffering becomes evidence of evil, and the passing circumstances of life acquire an authority they do not necessarily possess. The person who identifies entirely with these temporary conditions remains unaware that consciousness itself is the witness through which every condition becomes known. To know thyself, therefore, requires more than a biography of the person appearing within time. It requires an understanding of the Being that makes every experience possible, the unity in which that Being exists, and the process through which its unfinished meaning is brought to completion.

My previous book, *LOGOS: Four Laws of Creation*, reduced a larger investigation into language, scripture, philosophy, and consciousness to four governing principles: Love, Unity, Return, and Completion. These principles describe the relationship between First Cause and the relative beings whose identities unfold within creation. Rather than treating existence as a collection of independent objects competing for temporary survival, Logos examines the universe as an indivisible field of Being in which every

expression remains connected to its origin. The laws do not begin with commandments delivered by an external authority, but with the necessary relationships through which existence, identity, action, and consequence become intelligible. Their purpose is to disclose why separation appears possible within an indivisible reality and how the resulting experience can produce something greater than the innocence with which consciousness first entered the world.

The governing premise was expressed in *LOGOS* as follows:

"Being remains. Unity contains. Return answers. Change reveals the result."

These four statements provide the foundation for the argument developed throughout *Fire Baptism*. What appears to be destruction may be the transformation of a temporary condition, while what appears to be punishment may conceal a process of correction whose purpose cannot be understood from the immediate experience alone. Such possibilities require careful discrimination, since the existence of a greater purpose does not establish that every apparent evil is good in its present expression. Pain, cruelty, deprivation, and fear remain meaningful experiences within the relative world, but their reality as experiences does not grant them ultimate existence as independent principles opposed to goodness. If the Absolute is perfect and indivisible, evil cannot possess a second absolute origin without contradicting the very unity through which all things exist. Its appearance must instead be investigated within the temporary conditions of divided consciousness, where ignorance permits a relative being to mistake a portion of reality for the whole.

Law One: AHAVAH — Love and Being

The first law establishes Being as the foundation of every relative expression. Whatever has entered existence cannot become as though it had never been, for the occurrence of Being cannot be erased from the unity in which it arose. AHAVAH names Love as the nature of First Cause, the original fullness from which relative existence receives its identity without requiring any prior achievement. Love does not create beings in order to acquire something missing from itself, nor does it demand a repayment for the gift of existence. Its giving proceeds from abundance rather than need, preserving the possibility that every relative may eventually recognize the nature of what was freely received.

In *LOGOS*, this distinction was stated plainly:

"Love preserves what is true, releases what has been corrected, and seeks the restoration of the whole rather than the permanent condemnation of the part."

A consequence follows that becomes essential to understanding the nature of spiritual refinement. If Love preserves Being, then the temporary appearance of destruction cannot be confused with the absolute removal of what First Cause has given. A relative identity may be altered through experience, its mistaken understanding may be corrected, and its accumulated attachments may be surrendered without requiring the extinction of the Being beneath those changes. The purpose of refinement is therefore not to make the individual worthy of existence, since existence was given before merit could be acquired, but to bring consciousness into recognition of the goodness already present at its foundation.

AHAVAH requires no law above itself because unconditional Love is not a relative actor attempting to obtain a favorable result through compliance. First Cause gives without deficiency, expectation, or the need to recover what has been surrendered. The four laws become meaningful through the relations that proceed from this fullness, not as restrictions imposed upon the source of fullness itself. Love is thus both the origin of Being and the measure by which every relative expression must eventually be understood.

Law Two: YHVH — Unity and the Whole

The second law establishes that the One is the All and the All remains within the One. Relative beings may acquire distinct identities, exercise individual wills, and encounter one another through apparently separate conditions, but no division produces an independent reality outside the unity from which those beings proceed. YHVH names this indivisible Whole, including the governing identity of the Lord and the multitude of beings expressed within that identity. The relationship of ruler and ruled cannot constitute two unrelated substances when both exist within the same field of Being.

Unity creates an unavoidable standard of responsibility. A law governing the conduct of a servant must also govern the ruler whose authority operates through that servant, since exemption would divide the very reality the law claims to describe. No relative authority becomes First Cause merely by acquiring sufficient power over another being. Consequently, the effects produced by a governing identity remain part of its own expression, and the suffering of its members cannot be dismissed as though the head existed independently of the body it governs.

The distinction between First Cause and secondary cause is necessary here. AHAVAH gives the original fullness of existence, while YHVH represents the unity through which that gift becomes an ordered field of relative expression. The Lord may govern the conditions of a world, but the authority to arrange those conditions does not establish exemption from their consequences. A creator within creation remains responsible for what its creation produces, just as a human being remains answerable for what proceeds from personal action.

This recognition changes the meaning of suffering. The experience of one member is not an isolated failure belonging exclusively to that individual, but an unfinished condition within the greater unity of which the individual remains a part. Every lesson learned, every wrong corrected, and every expression of love brought into existence contributes to the result of the whole. Completion cannot be achieved by permanently excluding those whose experiences reveal the defects of the governing order, for such exclusion would preserve division rather than restore the unity that was never actually lost.

Law Three: EHYH — Return and Becoming

The third law establishes correspondence between expression and result. Whatever a being puts forth enters relation and participates in what returns through consequence. EHYH, associated with the Hebrew language of Being and Becoming, describes the continuing movement through which identity gathers meaning from experience. A person does not merely act upon the world and remain unchanged by the result, but becomes increasingly defined by the intentions, relationships, and choices expressed throughout life. The past enters the present as consequence, while the present becomes the condition from which another future emerges.

Return does not operate as a system of revenge administered by a separate authority. Its function follows from indivisible Unity, within which no expression can depart into an independent existence where its effects cease to belong to the Whole. Greed creates conditions that perpetuate scarcity, accusation invites further division, and domination establishes relationships requiring force to preserve their imbalance. Love moves through the same structure without producing the same result, since freely given goodness introduces trust, restoration, and the possibility of further generosity into relations previously governed by fear.

Here the distinction between pleasure and goodness becomes particularly important. Every pleasure carries a consequence, just as every price paid may produce an eventual joy, but the individual cannot determine the value of an action solely by the immediate sensation it creates. A person choosing enjoyment at another's expense may acquire temporary satisfaction while contributing to a condition of collective deprivation. The one who willingly relinquishes an advantage for the genuine benefit of others introduces a different possibility, allowing a sacrifice of personal possession to become an increase in shared goodness. The measure of Return is therefore not limited to what an individual receives, but includes what the entire relationship becomes through the expression.

Love creates surplus where selfishness merely redistributes possession. Its fullness cannot be exhausted through giving because the goodness produced through restored relation is not restricted to the quantity of material surrendered. A gift may pass from one hand to another, but the generosity expressed through that movement becomes available to both participants as knowledge, trust, gratitude, and the capacity to give again. What goes forth returns through a world made different by its passage.

Law Four: SHALAM — Change and Completion

The fourth law describes the changing conditions through which unfinished results move toward settlement, restoration, and wholeness. SHALAM carries the significance of completion rather than endless transformation, since Change would serve no final purpose if every correction required another correction without the possibility of rest. Being remains invariant, Unity contains every relative expression, and Return preserves the correspondence between action and consequence. Change alone operates upon unfinished conditions until their accumulated meaning can be reconciled with the goodness from which Being originally proceeded.

LOGOS expressed this relationship in the following words:

"Change can become one with Unity when Love, Unity, and Result are held in equanimity. Through Love, the Result of the past is restored to Unity, becoming the new future. Love is both the beginning and the goal."

The importance of completion becomes apparent when suffering is understood as a temporary condition rather than an eternal necessity. A process intended to teach cannot require perpetual ignorance, nor can an instrument designed for correction remain necessary after its purpose has been fulfilled. The repetition of an unfinished lesson reveals that something remains unrecognized within the relation, while genuine understanding removes the need to encounter the same contrast in its former condition. Consciousness carries the knowledge forward without requiring the continued experience of deprivation, fear, or destruction to preserve that knowledge.

The ancient symbolism of refining gold expresses this distinction between the temporary instrument and the lasting result. Gold enters a condition of intense heat so that what belongs to its substance may be distinguished from what accompanies it without sharing its enduring properties. Likewise, the relative mind encounters conditions that expose its attachments, its fear of loss, and its mistaken identification with passing forms. Refinement does not create the original goodness of Being, but brings consciousness into an understanding of that goodness through the contrast of what can change and what remains. When the lesson has reached completion, its result persists as acquired capacity rather than a demand for endless repetition.

The Temporary Necessity of Opposites

Human consciousness ordinarily learns through distinction. Light acquires meaning in relation to darkness, abundance is recognized through the contrast of scarcity, and pleasure becomes intelligible because another sensation is available for comparison. These oppositions belong to the conditions through which relative knowledge is acquired, but the ability to distinguish opposites does not demonstrate that both possess independent and eternal existence. A shadow can accurately reveal the interruption of light without becoming a second source equal to the light whose absence gives the shadow its appearance.

The same reasoning applies to the problem of evil. Within the framework developed here, evil is not an independent substance standing opposite an equally independent good, but a temporary distortion of understanding and relation within a reality whose ultimate foundation remains goodness. Suffering makes that distortion experientially convincing because the consciousness enduring it naturally treats its present condition as the measure of

what is real. Yet an experience may be fully consequential within its own circumstances while remaining incapable of defining the ultimate nature of Being. The mistake lies in confusing a temporary appearance with an absolute truth, allowing a condition devised or permitted within relative existence to acquire the status of an eternal principle.

The apparent necessity of suffering must therefore be understood from the standpoint of a created order in which consciousness learns through contrast, not as a deficiency in First Cause. Love requires no experience of hatred to become Love, and perfect goodness gains nothing essential from the existence of evil. Relative beings, however, may require the experience of opposition to recognize freely what was originally given without their understanding. What begins as innocent participation in abundance becomes conscious knowledge of abundance through an encounter with its apparent absence. The resulting wisdom is not a justification for perpetuating suffering, but a recognition that its temporary instruction must eventually yield to the goodness it was capable of revealing.

Within this structure, the created world becomes a field of learning in which ruler and ruled encounter the same requirement of completion. A secondary creator cannot establish suffering as the condition of enlightenment for others while remaining immune to examination of its own conduct, since the experiences generated within its domain become part of the result through which its governing nature is disclosed. Every relative being participates in the refinement of the Whole, including those who exercise authority over the conditions through which others learn. The final restoration must therefore be collective rather than the private escape of a fortunate minority.

This conclusion also prevents the misunderstanding that pain should be deliberately imposed for the supposed benefit of another. Genuine sacrifice is the willing acceptance of a cost for the restoration of goodness, while cruelty is the transfer of that cost onto another being for the advantage of the one exercising power. The former expresses Love; the latter preserves the division that Love must eventually overcome. Neither religious authority nor spiritual attainment can transform coercion into generosity merely by assigning a noble purpose to the suffering it produces.

The Human Being Between Heaven and Earth

The dimensional structure presented at the beginning of this book expresses the movement of consciousness through Mind, Time, and Form, culminating in the recognition that the lowest and highest apparent conditions remain connected within one circular reality. Hell represents the most restricted appearance of Being, while Absolute Mind represents the invariance from which all relative understanding proceeds. Between these limits, consciousness encounters the branching possibilities through which experience becomes meaningful, gradually learning to distinguish its enduring nature from the conditions assumed along the way.

The human being occupies a remarkable position in this structure, with the feet among the conditions of anger, the heart within the realm of humanity, and the head reaching toward heaven. Such an image describes neither a fixed anatomical division nor a hierarchy of human worth, but the simultaneous presence of different possibilities within one conscious identity. Instinct, desire, deliberation, understanding, and compassion remain available within ordinary life, and the heart becomes the point at which these capacities may be directed toward selfish gratification or the benefit of the Whole. Spiritual development does not require abandoning the

lower conditions as though they belonged to an alien reality; it requires learning their function and allowing their unfinished meaning to become complete.

The circular relationship between the highest and lowest realms further challenges the assumption that descent constitutes permanent separation from goodness. A linear interpretation of existence imagines heaven and hell as opposing destinations, one preserving divine abundance and the other withholding it forever. The circle instead describes differing conditions of knowledge within a reality from which no being can become absolutely independent. What appears to be the lowest expression of consciousness remains connected to the fullness from which its possibility arose, allowing the process of Return to continue until the original goodness is consciously recognized.

Through this perspective, the human journey is not the acquisition of a goodness previously absent from First Cause, but the conversion of received innocence into realized wisdom. Every completed lesson becomes part of the meaning carried by the being, while the collective result contributes to the fullness of expression within the One. No individual triumph can constitute the final completion of an indivisible reality while other members remain abandoned to an eternally unfinished condition.

Know Thyself

The ancient command to know thyself can now be understood as the investigation of Being through its own unfolding experience. A person first knows the body as an object among objects, then encounters the mind as the interpreter of those objects, and finally begins to recognize awareness as the condition through which both body and mind become known. Yet this recognition cannot be

complete while the individual remains convinced that personal awareness constitutes an independent origin detached from the Whole. Knowledge of the self must eventually disclose the relationships that make the self possible, including the source from which its Being was received and the greater unity in which its meaning continues to develop.

The highest expression of this understanding is not control over others, supernatural attainment, or freedom from every unpleasant sensation. Wisdom becomes visible when a person can recognize the common Being within another and willingly act for that other's good without requiring possession, admiration, or repayment. Love then ceases to function merely as an ideal taught through doctrine and becomes a living result demonstrated through conduct. What was first received freely returns as something consciously given, carrying the acquired meaning of a journey through conditions where selfishness and generosity appeared equally possible.

In this sense, the fire of creation has no permanent claim upon the spirit it refines. Its temporary conditions become unnecessary when consciousness has learned to preserve Love, recognize Unity, understand Return, and bring Change into Completion. The gold remaining after refinement is not a new substance purchased through pain, but Being awakened to the value and purpose of what it already possessed. Every apparent division has contributed its lesson, every unfinished relation has been brought toward restoration, and the accumulated meaning of experience can finally be expressed without requiring the illusion of separation.

The question before us is not whether life contains suffering, for the experience of the world answers that immediately. We must instead ask what suffering is capable of teaching, why temporary appearances acquire such convincing authority over consciousness,

and how a greater wisdom might employ the contrast of good and evil without establishing evil as an everlasting reality.

The four laws provide the structure through which that question can be examined. Love gives Being, Unity preserves the Whole, Return gathers the meaning of every expression, and Change continues until that meaning reaches Completion. What remains is the recognition that Love was never absent from the origin, even when consciousness required the experience of its apparent absence to understand what had been given.

Primary Sources and Textual References

The comparative method used throughout this book draws upon religious, philosophical, and literary traditions that independently explore the relationship between consciousness, suffering, refinement, unity, and the realization of truth. Their symbolic correspondences will be examined without requiring agreement on every historical doctrine or treating speculative similarities as established linguistic derivations.

Stephen T. McClard — LOGOS: Four Laws of Creation (2026). The primary philosophical foundation for this work, establishing AHAVAH as Love and Being, YHVH as Unity, EHYH as Return and Becoming, and SHALAM as Change and Completion. Its distinction between First Cause and secondary cause provides the governing framework for examining responsibility, the refinement of the Lord, and the restoration of the Whole.

Reynold A. Nicholson's English translation and critical edition, published between 1925 and 1940, provides the initial textual foundation for Chapter One and supplementary reference for

subsequent comparisons. Verified public-domain translations will be preferred for additional substantial quotations, with Nicholson consulted where distinctions in translation require examination.

The Holy Bible — King James Version (1611). Biblical passages will be examined for their treatment of purification, sacrifice, judgment, restoration, unity, and the distinction between temporary suffering and enduring spiritual consequence. Particular attention will be given to Genesis, the Prophets, the Gospels, the Pauline epistles, and Revelation.

The Principal Upanishads — F. Max Müller's translations in The Sacred Books of the East (1879–1884), together with other verified public-domain translations where applicable. The Katha, Isha, Kena, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Mandukya, and Taittiriya Upanishads provide points of comparison concerning Self, Brahman, knowledge, ignorance, the pleasant and the good, and the relationship between relative consciousness and the Absolute.

The Bhagavad Gita — Sir Edwin Arnold, The Song Celestial (1885). The teaching of Krishna and Arjuna supplies parallels concerning action without attachment, sacrifice, the imperishable Self, the three gunas, the distinction between pleasurable and enduring happiness, and the purification of consciousness through knowledge and disciplined conduct.

Edgar Allan Poe — Mesmeric Revelation (1844). Poe's speculative examination of consciousness and the relationship between pain and pleasure offers an additional literary comparison for the proposition that temporal suffering supplies contrast through which a greater condition of happiness may be understood.

Additional comparative sources will include the teachings of the Buddha concerning suffering and liberation; the *Dhammapada*; the *Tao Te Ching*; the writings of Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus; and relevant Hermetic and early Christian mystical literature. These sources will be used where their specific passages illuminate the governing argument, while distinctions between historical claims, philosophical interpretations, and symbolic correspondences will be preserved.

The purpose of these references is not to demonstrate that every tradition teaches an identical doctrine, but to examine whether their recurring distinctions between appearance and reality disclose a common structure through which relative consciousness encounters the hidden fullness of Being.

Chapter One

Fire and Fear

FIRE BAPTISM: TRANSMUTATION OF SPIRIT INTO GOLD

A Note on the Source

The central literary companion to this book is *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, commonly known as the *Masnavi*, the great Persian mystical poem composed by Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi (1207–1273). Its six books examine the relationship between appearance and reality, knowledge and ignorance, separation and unity, and the transformation of consciousness through the experiences of temporal existence. Rumi's teaching is expressed through stories, paradoxes, conversations, and reversals of ordinary expectation, often presenting the reader with an apparent contradiction whose resolution requires a different understanding of the whole.

The English passages examined here come from the translation of Reynold A. Nicholson (1868–1945), the Cambridge scholar whose critical edition, English translation, and commentary were published in eight volumes between 1925 and 1940 under the auspices of the E. J. W. Gibb Memorial series, originally issued by Luzac & Co. Nicholson's translations appeared in 1926, 1930, and 1934. His work sought to preserve the precision and complexity of Rumi's original Persian rather than replace its difficulties with simplified interpretations.

Our particular point of departure is Book Five, beginning with the account of two dervishes discussing a vision of the Divine Presence. One describes a consuming fire on God's left and the sweet river Kawthar on His right, with humanity divided between those drawn toward the fire and those seeking the water. The passage develops into a warning about appearances, the concealment of wisdom, and the preference for immediate pleasure over a good whose true nature remains hidden.

The purpose of this book is not to reproduce Nicholson's commentary or claim that Rumi explicitly formulated the cosmological structure developed

here. Rather, his verses will serve as a literary and contemplative point of comparison for an investigation into the nature of suffering, the refinement of consciousness, and the relationship between the individual and the greater unity of Being. Scriptural language, mystical symbolism, philosophical reasoning, and the experience of ordinary life will be examined together, with particular attention to the possibility that what appears destructive within a temporary condition may participate in a far greater process of completion.

Chapter One: Fire and Fear

The greatest deception available to a consciousness confined within appearances is the conviction that what it presently experiences must reveal the ultimate nature of reality. Pleasure appears good because it satisfies an immediate desire, while suffering appears evil because it contradicts that satisfaction. From such limited knowledge, the mind constructs a moral geography of opposing destinations, assigning goodness to whatever preserves its comfort and evil to whatever threatens its preferred condition. Yet neither sensation reveals the entire causal structure in which it occurs. A temporary experience can be accurately perceived and incorrectly understood, especially when its meaning depends upon a result that has not yet become visible. The central question is therefore not whether pleasure and suffering are experienced, but whether their apparent opposition accurately describes the greater wisdom governing their existence.

Rumi introduces this problem through a vision in which the Divine Presence appears between a consuming fire and a sweet river resembling Kawthar, the abundance associated with Paradise. Those gathered before the vision divide according to their desires, some reaching toward the flames while others rejoice at the promise of

refreshment. Ordinary judgment would expect the blessed to seek water and the condemned to encounter fire, but the subsequent verses overturn the assumption that appearances reliably disclose spiritual consequences. What seems desirable may conceal a limitation, while what inspires fear may provide the condition through which that limitation is overcome. Such a reversal does not demand that suffering be worshipped or pleasure condemned; it demands the wisdom to distinguish a temporary sensation from the lasting good that may emerge through its proper understanding.

The Mystery Concealed in the Fire

430. "Few were they who hit upon (understood) the mystery of this occult (matter); consequently, seldom would any one go into the fire;"

The mystery begins with the recognition that the lowest condition of existence need not represent the final destination of Being. Within a circular structure of reality, descent and ascent belong to one continuous movement, allowing what appears to be the lowest expression of consciousness to participate in its return toward the highest. The imagined distance between Hell and Absolute Mind becomes a difference of condition and understanding rather than an absolute separation of origin. A being confined to the immediate experience of suffering cannot readily perceive this continuity because the circumstances producing its pain also establish the boundaries of its present knowledge. Such confinement generates the fear that destruction of a temporary identity must constitute destruction of Being itself, although the transformation of form does not necessarily imply the extinction of the underlying reality.

Fire provides an especially fitting representation of this problem because its physical function contains a paradox. Heat can destroy a

form while revealing or strengthening properties that were previously concealed within its Spiritual material. Gold passes through refinement without losing its essential identity, while impurities that accompanied it are separated through conditions the unrefined material could not avoid. Consciousness encounters a corresponding distinction when fear, attachment, and mistaken identity are exposed through circumstances that challenge their apparent permanence. The purpose of refinement is not to glorify the experience of burning, but to reveal what remains when the unnecessary elements have been distinguished from the enduring substance. **Wisdom** begins when the mind recognizes that a condition capable of changing its experience cannot necessarily abolish the Being through which that experience becomes possible.

The rarity of those who understand the mystery follows naturally from the limitations of perspective. No one willingly enters what appears to be an instrument of annihilation without some knowledge that its apparent danger conceals another function. Yet the experience itself may become the means of acquiring that knowledge, establishing a temporary condition in which consciousness discovers through contrast what explanation alone could never demonstrate. The unburnable nature of Being cannot become meaningful to a relative mind that has never distinguished its essence from the passing conditions through which it identifies itself. Consequently, the imagined danger becomes an instrument of recognition, allowing consciousness to learn the difference between what can be altered and what cannot be taken away.

The Refuge That Appears Dangerous

431. "(None would go) except him upon whom felicity was shed, so that he abandoned the water and took refuge in the fire."

Felicity appears here in a form contrary to ordinary expectation. The fortunate person abandons an immediately attractive condition and approaches what others identify with danger, not because pain possesses some independent virtue, but because the greater good may require surrendering a lesser satisfaction. Such a choice becomes intelligible when the individual recognizes that preservation of present comfort and participation in the fullness of Being are not necessarily the same objective. The water offers relief within an existing condition, whereas the fire represents the possibility of changing the condition itself. A distinction therefore emerges between receiving what is already agreeable and becoming capable of recognizing goodness where no agreeable appearance exists.

Within the process of transmutation, the willing sacrifice of temporary advantage expresses a strength unavailable to consciousness governed exclusively by appetite. A person who relinquishes comfort to relieve another's suffering introduces love into a relationship where it was previously absent, producing a result greater than the private satisfaction that might otherwise have been retained. Consider the difference between consuming a meal alone and sharing it with someone who has nothing. In the first instance, hunger is satisfied and the possession is exhausted; in the second, the giver may experience a material reduction while the relationship gains trust, dignity, gratitude, and the possibility of further generosity. Nothing requires that the recipient repay the gift for its meaning to increase. Love creates a surplus because its value is not measured exclusively by what remains in the giver's possession.

Love given cannot be lost by the one giving.

The higher significance of the fire can therefore be understood through the freedom to give rather than through an obligation to

suffer. A sacrifice becomes good when its intention and result preserve or restore the unity of beings, never merely because pain accompanies the action. Unnecessary suffering, cruelty, and coercion cannot acquire goodness simply by claiming to serve refinement, for any authority imposing such conditions must itself remain answerable to the same measure of love it demands from those beneath it. The ruler and the ruled participate in one law of consequence, and neither may declare the other's pain meaningful while exempting itself from responsibility for the conditions producing it. True refuge appears in the recognition that goodness can be expressed without possession, domination, or the assurance of personal reward.

The Worship of Immediate Pleasure

432. "The people made the pleasure that was actually present their object of worship; consequently the people were swindled by this game."

The deception identified by Rumi concerns the elevation of a temporary experience into an ultimate standard of judgment. Pleasure becomes an object of worship when consciousness grants its immediate satisfaction the authority to determine what is good, disregarding the consequences through which its meaning will eventually become known. Such an error can occur in the pursuit of wealth, power, admiration, religious certainty, or even the expectation of heavenly reward, because the underlying confusion remains the same regardless of the object desired. An agreeable sensation is treated as evidence of ultimate value, while the conditions required to sustain it are left unexamined. Through this mistaken identification, a relative good is promoted into an absolute that it cannot become.

Every pleasure possesses a consequence, just as every sacrifice alters the conditions from which future experience proceeds. The cost of an immediate satisfaction may be insignificant when desire remains properly ordered, but pleasure pursued at the expense of another being creates an imbalance that does not disappear merely because the beneficiary refuses to acknowledge it. An individual can accumulate enjoyment by transferring deprivation to others, while an institution may preserve its prosperity through conditions that burden those whose labor sustains it. Such arrangements appear successful when measured only from the position of the receiver, yet the wider relationship preserves the consequences excluded from that narrow calculation. Nothing has escaped the whole; the cost has merely been displaced within it.

Return exposes the deficiency of this reasoning because whatever is expressed enters a field of consequences larger than the intention of the individual actor. The price paid for choosing pleasure without regard for goodness is not necessarily immediate punishment, but the continuation of the very division that made selfish enjoyment possible. Conversely, a willing sacrifice undertaken for another's benefit may initially appear as loss while establishing conditions through which a greater joy can emerge. The difference lies in whether the action diminishes the common inheritance or contributes something capable of being shared. Where selfishness seeks to possess an existing abundance, love increases the meaning and usefulness of what has been given.

The swindle is therefore a confusion between possession and fulfillment. A person may hold the object of desire and remain impoverished in the capacity to love, just as another may possess very little while contributing immeasurably to the lives of others. Goodness cannot be defined solely by the sensation it produces for the individual, because its more complete measure includes the

consequences borne by everyone participating in the relationship. Pleasure need not be rejected, provided it remains the fruit of a greater good rather than the authority by which goodness is judged. Once that distinction becomes clear, joy can be received without becoming an idol, and sacrifice can be embraced without becoming a cult of suffering.

Edgar Allen Poe: Mesmeric Revelation

“All things are either good or bad by comparison. A sufficient analysis will show that pleasure, in all cases, is but the contrast of pain. Positive pleasure is a mere idea. To be happy at any one point we must have suffered at the same. Never to suffer would have been never to have been blessed. But it has been shown that, in the inorganic life, pain cannot be thus the necessity for the organic. The pain of the primitive life of Earth, is the sole basis of the bliss of the ultimate life in Heaven.”

The Haste of the Divided Mind

433. "Troop by troop and rank by rank, (they were) on their guard against the fire and fleeing greedily and in haste towards the water."

Rumi's description of the crowd emphasizes the collective nature of the deception. People move toward the apparent promise of pleasure not merely because they individually desire it, but because the agreement of others reinforces the conviction that their destination must be correct. Rank and association lend authority to appearances, allowing a shared mistake to acquire the dignity of wisdom through repetition. Fear of the fire becomes a social certainty, while eagerness for the water assumes the character of common sense. Under such conditions, the individual may surrender independent discernment without recognizing that agreement among many observers does not enlarge the limited perspective from which they are all judging.

Haste further reveals the governing impulse. Desire seeks to shorten the interval between wanting and receiving, while fear demands immediate escape from anything that threatens the anticipated satisfaction. Neither movement necessarily allows sufficient attention to causation, consequence, or the condition of others. A crowd may therefore move efficiently toward a common objective while remaining profoundly mistaken about the value of its destination. History provides abundant examples of societies that organized themselves around immediate prosperity, security, or triumph while passing the costs of those achievements to people who possessed little authority to refuse them. Collective participation did not make the imbalance disappear; it merely distributed responsibility among enough participants that each could imagine the result belonged to someone else.

The deeper significance of this movement appears when ruler and ruled are understood as members of the same indivisible order. Authority cannot escape the consequences of its own administration, because the conditions imposed upon the governed become part of the result produced by the governing identity. A ruler who permits unnecessary suffering among the people does not stand outside that suffering as an independent observer, but participates causally in the condition of the whole. Any claim that the governed must endure refinement while the ruler remains exempt violates the equality required of a genuine law. The highest relative authority must therefore undergo the same correction demanded of its members, until its expression becomes consistent with the love and unity from which all relative existence proceeds.

Above this entire process stands Ahavah, the fullness of Love as First Cause, whose giving requires neither correction nor compensation. Law belongs to the conditions through which relative beings act, distinguish themselves, encounter consequences, and

move toward completion. Ahavah is not a privileged ruler claiming exemption from laws imposed upon others, but the unconditioned source whose generosity makes relation and every possibility of fulfillment available in the first place. Nothing is owed to Love as a price for its generosity, and nothing must be taken from another to replenish what it gives. The appearance of scarcity arises within divided experience, where possessions can be separated and temporarily withheld, while the origin of goodness remains inexhaustible.

From this perspective, the contrast between haste and patience becomes a distinction between two modes of participation in reality. One seeks to secure its portion before another can take it, whereas the other recognizes that the good of the whole cannot finally be obtained through the impoverishment of its members. Patience allows the consequences of action to be considered beyond the immediate reward, making room for a sacrifice whose value may not yet be visible. The willingness to contribute without guaranteeing repayment marks a departure from the economy of possession toward the abundance of love. Such conduct does not abolish ordinary responsibility or the practical costs of generosity, but gives those costs a meaning no private calculation of pleasure can supply.

The Warning and the Return

434. "Of necessity, they lifted up their heads (emerged) from (amidst) the fire. Take warning, take warning, O heedless man!"

The image of a head emerging from fire completes the paradox by shifting attention from the intensity of an experience to the consciousness that encounters it. What seemed capable of ending the being has instead become the condition through which another degree of understanding may emerge. The danger was never

imaginary in the sense that pain could not be experienced, for relative conditions possess genuine consequences within the world they constitute. Illusion resides in the judgment that those consequences exhaust the meaning of Being, allowing a temporary state to masquerade as an eternal verdict. Once consciousness distinguishes its underlying identity from the conditions that temporarily define it, the former terror of annihilation loses its authority over the interpretation of experience.

The warning becomes especially significant because emerging from a painful condition does not guarantee that its lesson has been understood. A person may escape deprivation only to become greedy, survive oppression only to become an oppressor, or acquire power only to reproduce the fear through which that power was originally sought. Such repetitions demonstrate the difference between changing circumstances and transforming the consciousness responsible for their use. The former may produce temporary relief without correcting the disposition that generates further division, while the latter alters the relationships through which future experience acquires its character. Refinement reaches its purpose when the old condition no longer needs to be recreated for its meaning to be recognized.

The human position within the greater dimensional structure illustrates this transitional responsibility. With the feet among the conditions of anger, the heart within the branching possibilities of humanity, and the head reaching toward heaven, consciousness occupies a living relationship between instinctive reaction and the recognition of a larger order. Anger can be transformed into discernment without becoming cruelty, desire can mature into generosity without requiring deprivation, and heavenly understanding can enter ordinary conduct without demanding escape from the world. The heart becomes the place where these

possibilities acquire direction, for knowledge of unity remains incomplete until it changes the treatment of other beings. A person does not demonstrate freedom from fear by declaring immunity to pain, but by refusing to let fear determine the limits of love.

Within the complete circle, even the lowest condition remains contained in the unity from which it cannot depart. Hell and heaven cannot represent independent origins competing for possession of creation, because an indivisible Absolute admits no second source capable of carrying its members permanently beyond return. The distinctions remain meaningful as experiences and stages of relative understanding, but their apparent opposition cannot overturn the fullness from which they arise. Each unfinished relation continues to disclose its consequences until consciousness can participate knowingly in the goodness it once encountered only through contrast. Completion arrives through reconciliation rather than the permanent exclusion of whatever appeared defective during the process of becoming.

Conclusion: The Gold That Remains

The purpose of fire is fulfilled when refinement no longer requires burning. A permanent furnace would indicate an unfinished process, just as an eternal condition of correction would contradict the possibility of completion. Once the elements have been distinguished, their meaning understood, and their relationships restored, the temporary conditions that made such learning necessary have accomplished their function. Gold does not remain in the crucible because the crucible possesses authority over gold; it emerges carrying the result of refinement into a condition where its newly revealed qualities can serve a greater purpose.

The same principle must apply to every relative being, including those who govern the conditions under which others learn. No ruler can claim completion while the governed remain permanently deprived of the good that authority professes to administer. Responsibility proceeds through causation, and whatever a governing identity creates among its members returns as part of its own result. A system that produces fear cannot demonstrate perfect love merely by naming its purpose benevolent, for the character of its effects must eventually become consistent with the character of its claimed source. The measure of wisdom is not power over the process, but the willingness to bring every participant toward the freedom that makes further correction unnecessary.

Sacrifice becomes the decisive expression of this transformation when love is willingly introduced where fear, deprivation, or separation previously governed the relationship. A person accepting a temporary cost for the genuine benefit of another contributes more than the immediate value of what was surrendered, because the gift enters a living field of consequences capable of generating further gifts. Through such participation, the economy of scarcity becomes an economy of surplus, not through the multiplication of possessions alone, but through the expansion of goodness among beings who cannot finally be separated from one another. The highest joy is therefore not the pleasure obtained by avoiding every price, but the fullness discovered when the cost freely accepted produces a benefit beyond the giver.

Ahavaḥ stands prior to this economy of correction, requiring no sacrifice to become what Love already is. Its abundance does not arise from deprivation, and its generosity possesses no need to recover what has been given. Relative consciousness must learn through the temporary contrast of receiving and surrendering because it does not initially recognize the inexhaustible source in

which both movements occur. When that recognition becomes complete, giving no longer appears as a threat to possession, and the fear of loss ceases to govern the expression of Being.

Rumi's warning ultimately concerns the wisdom hidden beneath the apparent choice between fire and water. The person who mistakes pleasant experience for the whole good remains vulnerable to the very conditions that pleasure temporarily conceals, while the one who understands refinement can meet difficulty without surrendering the knowledge that Being exceeds every passing condition. Neither pleasure nor pain deserves the throne reserved for Truth, because both acquire their meaning from the completed relation they help disclose.

The gold is not the reward for enduring the fire. The gold is what remains when the fire has revealed that love was the only enduring treasure, and that its fullness increases through everything freely given for the good of the whole.

Scriptural Parallels — Rumi, Masnavi, Book V, Verses 430–434

Biblical quotations use the King James Version (1611); Upanishadic quotations draw from F. Max Müller's public-domain translation (1879); Bhagavad Gita passages use Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Song Celestial* (1885). Parallels are thematic, not claims of identical doctrine.

430. The Mystery of the Fire

Few were they who hit upon (understood) the mystery of this occult (matter); consequently, seldom would any one go into the fire;

Biblical Verses

1 Corinthians 3:13 — "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."

Isaiah 48:10 — "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."

Daniel 3:27 — "Nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them."

Upanishad Verses

Katha Upanishad 1.2.4 — "Wide apart and leading to different points are these two, ignorance, and what is known as wisdom."

Katha Upanishad 1.2.5 — "Fools dwelling in darkness, wise in their own conceit, and puffed up with vain knowledge, go round and round."

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 4.37 — "As the kindled fire consumes the fuel, so doth the flame of knowledge waste works to ash."

Bhagavad Gita 2.23 — "The soul is not pierced by weapons, nor burned by fire, nor wetted by water, nor dried by wind."

431. The Refuge in Fire

(None would go) except him upon whom felicity was shed, so that he abandoned the water and took refuge in the fire.

Biblical Verses

1 Peter 1:7 — "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Romans 12:1 — "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

John 15:13 — "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Upanishad Verses

Katha Upanishad 1.2.1 — "The good is one thing, the pleasant another; these two, having different objects, chain a man."

Katha Upanishad 1.2.3 — "Thou, O Nakiketas, after pondering all pleasures that are or seem delightful, hast dismissed them all."

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 18.37 — "Good Pleasure is the pleasure that endures, / Banishing pain for aye; bitter at first / As poison to the soul, but afterward / Sweet as the taste of Amrit."

Bhagavad Gita 2.38 — "As things alike to thee—pleasure or pain, / Profit or ruin, victory or defeat."

432. The Worship of Pleasure

The people made the pleasure that was actually present their object of worship; consequently the people were swindled by this game.

Biblical Verses

Hebrews 11:25 — "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

Mark 8:36 — "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

2 Corinthians 4:18 — "For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Upanishad Verses

Katha Upanishad 1.2.1 — "It is well with him who clings to the good; he who chooses the pleasant, misses his end."

Katha Upanishad 1.2.2 — "The good and the pleasant approach man: the wise goes round about them and distinguishes them."

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 18.38 — "Sweet / As Amrit is its first taste, but its last / Bitter as poison."

Bhagavad Gita 5.22 — "The pleasures that spring from contact with the senses are only sources of sorrow." (Sense of the verse; wording varies by translation.)

433. The Crowd Fleeing Toward Water

Troop by troop and rank by rank, (they were) on their guard against the fire and fleeing greedily and in haste towards the water.

Biblical Verses

Matthew 7:13–14 — "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Proverbs 14:12 — "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

James 1:14–15 — "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Upanishad Verses

Katha Upanishad 1.2.2 — "The wise prefers the good to the pleasant, but the fool chooses the pleasant through greed and avarice."

Katha Upanishad 1.2.5 — "Like blind men led by the blind."

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 2.62–63 — "If one ponders on the objects of sense, there springs attraction; from attraction grows desire; desire, if thwarted, gives birth to anger." (Close rendering of the sequence.)

Bhagavad Gita 16.21 — "There be three gates to Hell, destructive of the soul—lust, wrath, and avarice." (Traditional rendering.)

434. Emerging from the Fire

Of necessity, they lifted up their heads (emerged) from (amidst) the fire. Take warning, take warning, O heedless man!

Biblical Verses

1 Corinthians 3:15 — "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

Malachi 3:3 — "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver."

Romans 5:3–5 — "Tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Upanishad Verses

Katha Upanishad 2.3.14 — "When all desires that dwell in his heart cease, then the mortal becomes immortal, and obtains Brahman."

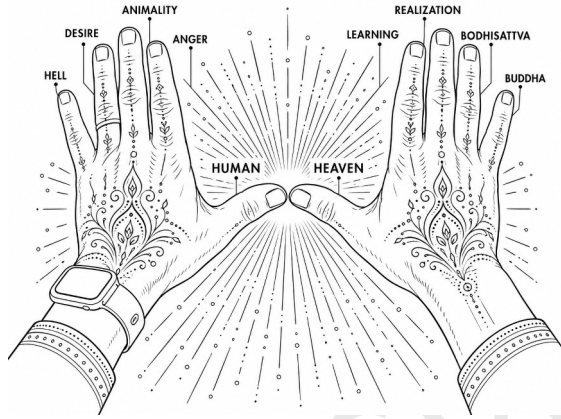
Katha Upanishad 2.3.15 — "When all the ties of the heart are severed here on earth, then the mortal becomes immortal."

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 2.15 — "That man whom pain and pleasure do not disturb, who is steady in both, is fit for immortality." (Close rendering.)

Bhagavad Gita 4.38 — "There is no purifier like thereto / In all this world, and he who seeketh it / Shall find it—being grown perfect—in himself." (Arnold's poetic rendering.)

Chapter Two: Vision of the Divided Waters



A Note on the Public-Domain Sources

Chapter Two returns to the beginning of the vision examined in Chapter One, proceeding through verses 420–429 of Book Five of Rumi's *Masnavi*. The principal public-domain English reference is E. H. Whinfield's *Masnavi-i Ma'navi*, published in the nineteenth century and available in its 1898 edition. Whinfield's translation is abridged and does not reproduce the complete exchange between the two dervishes. Accordingly, the numbered verses below are fresh English renderings of Rumi's original Persian, rather than reproductions of Nicholson's later translation. The numbering follows the established sequence preserved in the Persian text.

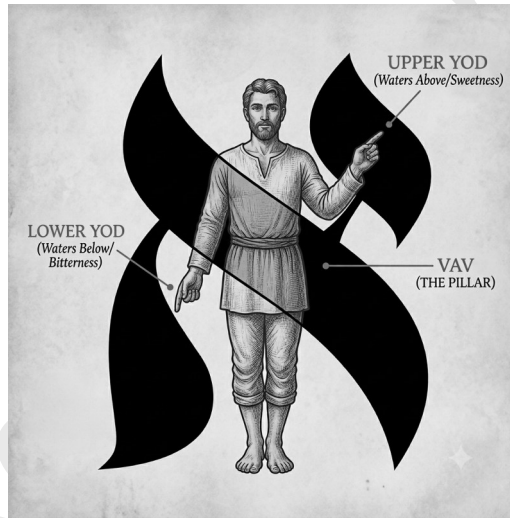
For the comparative study of the tenfold structure, we will also draw upon Christian David Ginsburg's *The Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development, and Literature* (1865), a public-domain examination of the ten Sephiroth, the primordial human form, and the relationship between divine unity and emanation. His work provides an important historical parallel without requiring that Rumi's Persian mystical teaching be identified with the Kabbalistic system.

The preceding chapter began where Rumi's mystery had already become a warning, with humanity fleeing a consuming fire toward the promise of sweet water, unaware that appearances concealed the consequences of its choices. We now return to the beginning of the account, where one dervish asks another to describe his vision of the Divine Presence. What first appeared to be a story of salvation and perdition becomes a question concerning the structure of reality itself, for the division between fire and water takes place within the appearance of one Presence, not between two independent powers. The directions of movement, the hands of the Divine, and the reversal of their apparent destinations must therefore be examined as relationships within an indivisible Whole.

Two human hands provide an extraordinary illustration of this arrangement. With the palms raised and the thumbs directed toward the center, the fingers form ten visible extensions of a common human identity, five upon each hand, sourced from the Ten Words of Buddhism. The lowest finger of the left hand represents Hell, followed by Desire, Animality, and Anger, while the left thumb represents Humanity. Across the central division, the opposing thumb represents Heaven, followed by Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva, and Buddha as the highest realization of Mind. The tenfold sequence expresses a progression from the most restricted condition of awareness to the recognition of its universal origin, yet the paired hands also disclose a structure that cannot be understood as a simple ladder. Each side has a corresponding member, allowing the lowest apparent condition to be placed in relationship with the highest, while the two thumbs meet at the center where humanity and heaven become the immediate concern of conscious choice.

The correspondence becomes clearer when the fingers are considered together. Hell and Buddha occupy the opposing outer

limits, Desire and Bodhisattva form another relation, Animality and Realization meet through their corresponding positions, while Anger and Learning reveal the possibility that reactive experience may become conscious understanding. Humanity and Heaven form the central pair, joining the branching choices of individual beings to the greater field of possibilities within which those choices unfold. The division is therefore not a separation of good beings from evil beings, but a symbolic means of examining how different conditions of the same awareness participate in one process of learning and completion.



Yod–Vav–Yod provides a further symbolic representation of this arrangement. The Hebrew letter Yod carries an ancient association with the hand, while Vav signifies a hook or connecting element pictured as the tent peg. Read as a contemplative image rather than a conventional linguistic derivation, the two Yods become the hands of divided experience, joined by the relation that prevents their apparent opposition from becoming absolute separation. The upper

and lower waters are divided so that consciousness may encounter their differing properties, but their common source remains unchanged by the conditions through which those properties become visible. The two hands therefore possess a single identity, just as the opposing experiences of sweetness and bitterness remain contained within one greater reality.

A historical parallel appears in Ginsburg's account of the ten Sephiroth, traditionally represented through the symbolic form of Adam Kadmon, the primordial human being. In that arrangement, divine emanation becomes intelligible through the ordered relationships of a human figure, with corresponding qualities distributed through its members. Ginsburg describes the tenfold Kabbalistic structure as an expression of divine manifestation rather than ten unrelated creative origins. Although this structure differs from the dimensional model presented here, their comparison introduces a useful question: whether the human form can serve as an image through which the relationship between unity and multiplicity becomes visible.

The governing distinction is between the image and its source. Neither the fingers nor the dimensions constitute independent absolutes, since the symbolic division exists only to reveal relationships within a greater unity. A hand cannot claim to originate the life proceeding through it, nor can one finger separate itself from the body without losing the relation through which its function has meaning. Likewise, the highest realization does not become an independent First Cause, and the lowest condition cannot establish an existence outside the Whole. Rumi's vision becomes especially significant because it places this understanding before the observer as a mystery of direction: those who move toward one side discover themselves emerging from the other, demonstrating that the apparent

destination cannot be understood without recognizing the greater movement in which it participates.

The vision may now be read from its beginning, allowing each verse to disclose another feature of the divided image.

420. The Question of the Divine Presence

One dervish asked another, "Tell me how you beheld the Presence of the Real."

The first dervish asks for an account of what has been witnessed, establishing a distinction between the Presence itself and the perception through which that Presence becomes intelligible to the observer. A vision cannot contain the Absolute in its fullness, since the mind necessarily interprets experience through relationships, distinctions, and forms that belong to the relative world. What appears before consciousness must therefore be understood as an image through which something greater may be recognized, rather than an independent reality possessing the totality of what it represents.

The inquiry is especially important because the observer participates in the very unity being examined, making the question of what was seen inseparable from the identity of the one who sees. A hand may be observed as an object, yet the awareness examining it belongs to the living Being through which that hand receives its function. Likewise, the apparent division of the Divine Presence reveals more than opposing objects placed before a witness, for the relationship between those objects may disclose something about the awareness that encounters them. Knowledge of God thus begins with the examination of perception itself, where the distinction between subject and object becomes a necessary instrument of learning without establishing an eternal separation between the two.

421. The Ineffable Vision

He answered, "I saw Him beyond description, but I shall give a brief example so that it may be spoken of."

The second dervish acknowledges that the reality encountered exceeds the language available to describe it, yet his willingness to offer a parable reveals the purpose of symbolic teaching. An ineffable truth cannot be reduced to an object without losing something essential, but an image may preserve relationships through which the mind gradually recognizes what no single description can contain. Every sacred diagram, numerical correspondence, and symbolic division must be approached through this distinction, since the instrument used to understand a mystery cannot become the mystery itself.

The ten fingers provide a suitable example because their individual identities allow us to examine an organized sequence while their common membership reveals that numerical distinction does not necessarily imply separate Being. No finger contains the entire person, although each belongs to the same life and expresses an aspect of its capacity for action. The parable operates similarly by translating a unity beyond ordinary conception into a structure whose relationships may be examined within consciousness. Words make the invisible available to thought, while the limitations of those words remind the reader that complete understanding requires recognition of the reality beyond the image.

422. The Hands and the Waters

I saw fire upon His left, and upon His right a flowing stream of Kawthar.

The vision presents one Divine Presence with two opposing expressions, establishing the symbolic division through which the remaining verses acquire their meaning. Fire occupies the left, while Kawthar, the river of heavenly abundance, appears upon the right, inviting the observer to interpret their difference as a choice between punishment and reward. Yet both are attributed to the same Presence, preventing either side from becoming an independent source of reality. In the corresponding arrangement of ten fingers, the left hand contains the lower conditions of experience, beginning with the apparent confinement of Hell and moving through Desire, Animality, Anger, and Humanity. The right hand contains Heaven, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva, and Buddha, expressing the progressive recognition of a Mind whose origin remains invariant. The two thumbs nearly touch, representing the immediate relation between human choice and the heavenly field of possibility, while the remaining fingers disclose corresponding stages of apparent division and return. Yod–Vav–Yod now becomes a symbolic expression of two hands whose opposition is joined by one continuous relation, allowing their differences to become meaningful without establishing a second First Cause. The fire and the river are therefore not merely alternative destinations, but the visible properties of a structure in which Being learns through distinctions that never divide its ultimate source.

423. The World-Consuming Fire and the Sweet River

To His left was a fire capable of consuming worlds; to
His right was a pleasant-flowing river.

The magnitude of the fire establishes the apparent danger of complete destruction, while the sweetness of the river presents the opposite expectation of preservation and delight. A consciousness judging only through sensation naturally assigns greater value to the

condition offering immediate satisfaction, but neither experience can disclose its final meaning before the entire process has become visible.

Quote from my book, SIT

Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, in *The Alef-Beit: Jewish Thought Revealed* through the Hebrew Letters, attributes to the Ari (Rabbi Isaac Luria) the teaching that the Hebrew letter Aleph is formed of two Yods joined by a diagonal Vav, representing the higher and lower waters with the firmament stretched between them.

Ginsburgh traces this image to the first day of Creation, when the spirit of God hovered over waters not yet divided — what he calls "water in water" — until the second day, when the firmament was stretched between them, separating the waters above from the waters below.

Drawing on Chassidic teaching, Ginsburgh reads the two waters inwardly, as states of the soul. The higher water is the water of joy, the felt closeness of God; the lower water is the water of bitterness, the felt distance from God. Using the classical properties of water — wet and cold — he associates the higher water's wetness with the sense of oneness in God's exaltation, and the lower water's coldness with the ache of separation, which he calls the inherent lowliness of man.

Drawing from the imagery of water above and water below, fire consumes the forms through which temporary identity is expressed, whereas water sustains and restores the conditions through which those forms may continue, allowing destruction and preservation to appear as opposing functions within creation. Their relationship becomes intelligible when the purpose of transformation is considered, since no process of refinement can be understood merely by examining the material at one moment within its passage.

The loss of an unnecessary attachment may feel destructive to the being that identifies with it, even when its removal allows a previously concealed capacity to emerge. Likewise, pleasure may

preserve a condition that consciousness has not yet learned to transcend, turning apparent abundance into a reason for remaining within limitation. The two hands express corresponding operations of one Mind, with neither bitterness nor sweetness possessing the authority to determine the ultimate value of what is being experienced. Goodness remains the standard by which both conditions must eventually be judged, rather than a temporary property belonging exclusively to the side that appears most agreeable.

424. The Two Parties

Some reached their hands toward the fire; others rejoiced, overcome with longing for Kawthar.

The assembled beings divide according to their attraction toward what appears desirable or their willingness to encounter what appears dangerous, revealing the human tendency to judge an unknown result through the immediate properties of its apparent destination. Those reaching toward the river seem to have chosen abundance, while the others appear to risk the destruction of everything they possess, yet the meaning of either movement remains concealed until the correspondence between the hands has been understood. The center of the tenfold arrangement belongs to Humanity and Heaven, where personal choice encounters the greater field of consequences through which its meaning becomes known. Within this relation, freely accepting a temporary loss for the benefit of another expresses a different understanding of goodness from the pursuit of pleasure as an end in itself.

A person who possesses abundance may consume it without increasing the good of the Whole, while another may willingly surrender a portion and thereby create conditions through which love becomes available to those previously deprived of it. Such sacrifice

is not an attempt to purchase a heavenly reward, since its value already exists within the goodness introduced through the action itself. The opposing parties consequently reveal differing states of understanding rather than separate classes of beings whose final worth has been established by their immediate choices. Each remains within the same process of Return, where the consequences of what is given or withheld contribute to the unfinished result of the collective.

For every Joy, a price is paid.

For every price paid, a joy.

425. The Reversed Game

Yet the game was turned entirely around before the feet of the wretched and the fortunate alike.

The dervish now reveals that the apparent arrangement contains a reversal affecting everyone who participates, regardless of the condition in which the individual initially appears to stand. Fortune and misfortune cannot be reliably identified through the visible direction of movement because the path itself contains relationships beyond the observer's immediate perspective. What appears to advance toward one destination may belong to a circular progression whose completion brings consciousness into contact with the opposite condition, allowing the consequences of an action to disclose meaning concealed at the moment of choice.

The tenfold arrangement of the hands illustrates this reversal through corresponding positions: Hell stands opposite Buddha, Desire opposite Bodhisattva, Animality opposite Realization, Anger opposite Learning, and Humanity opposite Heaven. These relationships disclose a coherent model in which the most restricted expressions of awareness remain connected to the possibilities of

their refinement. Nothing originating within the One can establish an independent realm beyond the reach of Unity, and no apparent triumph within relative experience can transform a secondary being into the Absolute. The mystery is therefore not that judgment is arbitrary, but that the complete measure of an experience cannot be determined from the limited position of the one undergoing it. When the circle is recognized, the destination becomes inseparable from the journey through which consciousness acquires the ability to understand what it has received.

426. Entering Fire and Emerging in Water

Whoever entered the fire and its sparks raised his head
from within the water.

The first reversal establishes that a condition appearing destructive can become the passage through which a more complete realization of abundance emerges. A being entering the fire encounters the instability of everything mistaken for permanent identity, including possessions, personal authority, attachment to pleasure, and fear of the conditions through which such attachments may be lost. Refinement distinguishes what can change from the Being that remains, allowing consciousness to discover capacities previously concealed by its dependence upon temporary circumstances. The water appearing at the conclusion represents the recognition of a goodness that could not be acquired by possession alone, since its meaning has become inseparable from the knowledge obtained through the passage.

Within the correspondence of the hands, the apparent limitation of one dimension belongs to a relationship through which another degree of understanding may become possible, with the lowest expressions of awareness remaining contained within the same greater Mind as the highest. The individual does not gain

independence from the Whole by passing through adversity, but becomes increasingly capable of recognizing the Unity that was never absent from the experience. When suffering is willingly endured for the genuine benefit of another, the result can extend beyond private understanding into an increase of love shared by the collective. Such a transformation reveals that goodness does not require the permanent preservation of every temporary form, although the value of Being itself is never established by its capacity to endure pain.

427. Seeking Water and Finding Fire

Whoever turned from the center toward the water immediately found himself within the fire.

The second reversal demonstrates that an experience offering immediate pleasure may preserve the very conditions from which consciousness must eventually be liberated. Humanity occupies the center of choice, where desire can direct action toward the satisfaction of an individual appetite without requiring attention to the wider consequences of obtaining it. Such movement becomes deceptive when the pleasure of receiving is mistaken for the goodness of the relationship through which the desired object was acquired. A ruler may prosper while transferring deprivation to the governed, a merchant may accumulate possessions through the exploitation of others, and an individual may secure comfort by refusing responsibility for the suffering that makes that comfort possible.

Every such transaction remains contained within the Whole, where its consequences become part of the accumulated result that Return must eventually disclose. The fire discovered within the water therefore represents an unfinished relation concealed beneath the appearance of satisfaction, requiring further refinement because

the original choice failed to recognize the equal Being of those affected. Pleasure itself is not condemned, for the sweetness of creation belongs to the abundance freely given by First Cause. The distortion arises when a relative being elevates private enjoyment above the goodness of the Whole, introducing division into the very relationships through which fulfillment must ultimately become complete.

428. The Right Hand Returning to the Left

Whoever went toward the right and its clear water
emerged from the fire upon the left.

The explicit reversal of right and left makes the divided structure impossible to interpret as two permanently separate destinations. Movement toward the right hand does not prevent the appearance of the left, because both belong to one continuous arrangement in which the higher and lower conditions remain related through the consequences of experience. The ten fingers provide a visible means of understanding this correspondence, particularly when each finger is paired with its opposite across the central division.

Buddha and Hell occupy the outer limits, yet the lowest apparent condition has no independent origin outside the Mind from which the highest realization proceeds. Desire confronts Bodhisattva as personal appetite encounters the possibility of compassionate action, while Animality and Realization express the passage from instinctive form toward a mind capable of understanding its own nature. Anger and Learning form a particularly important correspondence because the reaction arising from an apparently threatened identity may become the very experience through which consciousness acquires discernment. Humanity and Heaven remain the central relation where these possibilities enter conscious choice, demonstrating that the completion of the individual cannot be separated from the

conditions experienced by others. The right hand returning to the left therefore reveals that understanding must encompass the consequences of what it governs, rather than claim spiritual superiority by withdrawing from the conditions through which its members continue to learn.

429. The Left Hand Returning to the Right

Whoever went toward the fiery left raised his head upon the right.

The concluding reversal completes the symbolic circle by revealing that the lower condition of experience remains capable of returning to the fullness represented by the right hand. What appeared to be descent into destruction becomes the movement through which consciousness encounters and eventually recognizes the goodness that existed before the division arose. The left hand cannot remain forever opposed to the right without dividing the Being to which both belong, just as a governing Mind cannot claim completion while the conditions of its own expression remain permanently excluded from restoration.

Within the tenfold structure, each relative stage contributes its lesson to the whole, allowing the accumulated result of experience to become available beyond the individual through whom that knowledge first emerged. The lower dimensions do not disappear because their significance has been denied, but because their temporary limitations cease to be necessary once the consciousness they instructed has acquired the capacity to express goodness without those restrictions. Love becomes the means of this completion because freely given goodness introduces no new debt requiring further correction, allowing the movement of Return to settle into Unity rather than perpetuate another cycle of deprivation. Both hands reveal a single purpose when their correspondence is

understood: the division of experience permits knowledge to arise, while the completion of that knowledge returns consciousness to the indivisible source from which its Being was originally received.

Conclusion: The Hands That Cannot Be Divided

The dervish's vision began as a distinction between a consuming fire and a river of abundance, but its successive reversals disclose a reality in which neither condition can be understood without the other. The movement of consciousness is not governed by the desirability of an immediate appearance, for every experience belongs to a greater relationship through which its true meaning eventually becomes known. What seems to be destruction may remove a limitation that prevented further recognition, while what seems to be fulfillment may conceal an attachment that continues to produce unfinished consequence. Neither possibility excuses cruelty or makes suffering a virtue in itself, because the enduring standard remains the restoration of goodness throughout the entire unity of beings.

The tenfold image of the hands provides a verifiable truth through which this relationship can be examined without requiring the numbers themselves to become objects of worship. Their value lies in the correspondence between the conditions represented, the centrality of conscious choice, and the recognition that the apparent extremes remain expressions of one Being. Yod–Vav–Yod likewise serves as an image of distinction joined through relation, allowing the two hands to reveal the unity concealed within their opposing movements. The human body becomes a miniature representation of this principle, where no member can claim an independent existence apart from the living identity through which it receives purpose.

Ginsburg's treatment of the ten Sephiroth offers a historical comparison for this use of the human figure, while Rumi's vision provides the literary reversal through which the image acquires its transformative meaning. The two traditions need not possess identical historical origins or theological claims for their structures to be compared, since the question concerns the relationship between indivisible unity and the multiplicity through which consciousness becomes capable of understanding itself. A valid correspondence must illuminate the meaning of the sources without replacing their differences with an invented agreement.

The final significance of the vision belongs to Love. AHAVAH does not divide its giving into separate economies of reward and punishment, requiring one portion of Being to remain deprived so another may possess abundance. Such division belongs to the temporary conditions through which relative consciousness acquires knowledge, while the fullness of First Cause remains prior to every distinction. The ruler and the ruled must therefore participate in the same process of refinement until the conditions imposed upon the governed become consistent with the goodness claimed by the governing authority.

The hands that appeared to offer opposing destinies are recognized as members of one Being, whose completion cannot require the permanent exclusion of any part of itself. Fire and water baptism have accomplished their symbolic purpose when consciousness no longer mistakes their temporary properties for separate ultimate realities. The greater mystery is not that the fire becomes water, but that Love remains undivided throughout the transformation, freely giving the fullness that every relative being must eventually learn to recognize and share.

Scriptural Parallels — Rumi, Masnavi, Book V, Verses 420–429

The following parallels draw on the King James Bible (1611), F. Max Müller's translations of the Upanishads, Edwin Arnold's *The Song Celestial* (1885), Whinfield's public-domain *Masnavi*, and Christian D. Ginsburg's *The Kabbalah* (1865). Quoted passages are kept brief, while the remaining references identify corresponding passages for examination. The comparisons concern symbolic and philosophical relationships, not claims that the traditions teach identical doctrines.

The apparent contradiction between seeing the face and dying is resolved when understood through the remaking of identity and nature into unity. From this perspective, the paradox of death does not require the literal death of the individual, but rather the transformation of identity and nature. Seen in this light, the verses below become more coherent when read through this lens.

420. The Question of the Divine Presence

One dervish asked another, "Tell me how you beheld the Presence of the Real."

Biblical Verses

Exodus 33:20 — "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live."

John 1:18 — "No man hath seen God at any time."

Upanishad Verses

Kena Upanishad 1.3–4 — That which cannot be known as an object of ordinary perception, yet through which seeing and knowing are possible.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.4.2 — The seer cannot be seen as an object separate from seeing.

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 11.8 — Krishna grants Arjuna divine sight to perceive what ordinary eyes cannot behold.

421. The Ineffable Vision

He answered, "I saw Him beyond description, but I shall give a brief example so that it may be spoken of."

Biblical Verses

1 Corinthians 13:12 — "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face."

2 Corinthians 12:4 — "He heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."

Upanishad Verses

Taittiriya Upanishad 2.9.1 — Speech and mind return from Brahman, unable to comprehend its fullness.

Kena Upanishad 2.3 — True understanding begins with recognition of the limitations of conceptual knowledge.

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 12.3–4 — The imperishable, unmanifest reality transcends the ordinary boundaries of thought.

422. The Hands and the Waters

I saw fire upon His left, and upon His right a flowing stream of Kawthar.

Biblical Verses

Isaiah 43:2 — "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

Deuteronomy 33:2 — "From his right hand went a fiery law for them."

Revelation 22:1 — "A pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

Upanishad Verses

Isha Upanishad 5 — The Supreme is both within and without all things.

Chandogya Upanishad 6.2.1 — Being is One, without a second.

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 9.4–5 — All beings exist within the divine reality, though that reality cannot be confined to its manifestations.

Kabbalistic Parallel

Christian D. Ginsburg, *The Kabbalah* (1865), Part I — The ten Sephiroth and their arrangement through the primordial human form, including the relationship of divine manifestation to differentiated attributes.

423. The World-Consuming Fire and the Sweet River

To His left was a fire capable of consuming worlds; to
His right was a pleasant-flowing river.

Biblical Verses

Hebrews 12:29 — "For our God is a consuming fire."

Isaiah 12:3 — "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."

Malachi 3:2 — "For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap."

Upanishad Verses

Mundaka Upanishad 2.1.1 — The imperishable source is illustrated through sparks proceeding from fire.

Taittiriya Upanishad 3.6.1 — Brahman is recognized through bliss, from which beings arise, by which they live, and into which they return.

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 9.19 — The Divine encompasses apparently opposing operations within the created order.

Bhagavad Gita 11.32 — Krishna reveals the cosmic power through which worlds and their changing forms pass.

424. The Two Parties

Some reached their hands toward the fire; others
rejoiced, overcome with longing for Kawthar.

Biblical Verses

Matthew 6:21 — "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Hebrews 11:25 — "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

Upanishad Verses

Katha Upanishad 1.2.1 — The good and the pleasant approach humanity as differing objects of choice.

Katha Upanishad 1.2.2 — The discerning prefer what is good, while the undiscerning pursue the pleasant.

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 2.47 — Action is to be undertaken without possession of its fruits as the sole objective.

Bhagavad Gita 18.37–38 — Pleasure can begin in bitterness and conclude in sweetness, or begin in sweetness and end in bitterness.

425. The Reversed Game

Yet the game was turned entirely around before the feet
of the wretched and the fortunate alike.

Biblical Verses

Isaiah 55:8 — "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD."

1 Corinthians 1:27 — "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise."

Upanishad Verses

Katha Upanishad 1.2.4–5 — Wisdom and ignorance lead in differing directions, while those mistaking themselves for wise remain in darkness.

Isha Upanishad 9–11 — Knowledge and ignorance must be examined beyond the expectation that their ordinary opposition reveals the complete truth.

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 2.69 — What is night to ordinary beings is wakefulness to the disciplined sage, while ordinary wakefulness may be darkness to the sage.

426. Entering Fire and Emerging in Water

Whoever entered the fire and its sparks raised his head
from within the water.

Biblical Verses

1 Corinthians 3:15 — "He himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

Daniel 3:27 — "Nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed."

Isaiah 48:10 — "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."

Upanishad Verses

Katha Upanishad 2.3.14 — The cessation of desires within the heart reveals immortality.

Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.9 — The knower of Brahman becomes identified with Brahman.

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 4.37 — The fire of knowledge consumes the accumulated consequences of action.

Bhagavad Gita 2.23 — Weapons, fire, water, and wind cannot destroy the imperishable Self.

Rumi Parallel

Whinfield, *Masnavi*, Book V, Story I — "O Thou that changest earth into gold." This passage develops divine transformation through successive states of existence, including the movement from elemental conditions into the dignity of humanity.

427. Seeking Water and Finding Fire

**Whoever turned from the center toward the water
immediately found himself within the fire.**

Biblical Verses

Proverbs 14:12 — "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Galatians 6:7 — "For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Mark 8:36 — "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Upanishad Verses

Katha Upanishad 1.2.1–3 — The temporary attractions of pleasure are distinguished from the good that leads toward realization.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5 — A being's desires, intentions, and actions participate in what that being becomes.

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 5.22 — Pleasures arising through contact with sense objects carry the conditions of eventual sorrow.

Bhagavad Gita 2.62–63 — Attachment gives rise to desire, frustration, anger, and the deterioration of discernment.

428. The Right Hand Returning to the Left

Whoever went toward the right and its clear water emerged from the fire upon the left.

Biblical Verses

Ecclesiastes 3:1 — "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

Romans 11:36 — "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things."

1 Corinthians 12:26 — "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it."

Upanishad Verses

Isha Upanishad 6–7 — The recognition of all beings within the Self, and the Self within all beings, removes the basis of alienation.

Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7 — The essential identity of the individual Self is traced to the underlying reality of Being.

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 6.29 — The disciplined mind perceives the Self within all beings and all beings within the Self.

Bhagavad Gita 13.27–28 — The same Supreme reality is recognized within beings whose forms undergo change.

Kabbalistic Parallel

Ginsburg, The Kabbalah, Part I, discussion of the Sephiroth and Adam Kadmon — The primordial human form expresses differentiated principles through corresponding members whose meaning depends upon the greater unity of the divine manifestation.

429. The Left Hand Returning to the Right

Whoever went toward the fiery left raised his head upon the right.

Biblical Verses

1 Corinthians 15:28 — "That God may be all in all."

Revelation 21:4 — "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

Romans 8:21 — "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

Upanishad Verses

Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7 — The individual is directed toward recognition of its underlying identity with Being.

Katha Upanishad 2.3.15 — The breaking of the knots of the heart is associated with the realization of immortality.

Bhagavad Gita Verses

Bhagavad Gita 4.9 — Recognition of the divine reality brings release from the ordinary cycle of repeated embodiment.

Bhagavad Gita 18.66 — The final teaching directs the individual toward refuge in the Divine beyond attachment to lesser forms of security.

Kabbalistic Parallel

Ginsburg, The Kabbalah (1865), Part I — The treatment of the soul's return and the eventual restoration of created existence to its divine source provides a further historical parallel to the movement from apparent division toward restored unity.

Chapter Three: Fire and Spirit Baptism Parallel to the Water of Grace and Mercy

The Water of Grace and Mercy

The two preceding chapters have brought us to a conclusion already apparent to me when I first began examining Rumi's vision of the Divine Presence. What appeared to be a parable concerning the choice between punishment and reward disclosed a greater relationship between the experience of suffering and the realization of goodness. The fire on the left and the sweet waters of Kawthar on the right were not merely opposing destinations, but expressions of a divided image whose meaning could only be understood through the return of one condition into the other.

When the dervish described those entering fire as emerging from water, and those entering water as emerging from fire, he disclosed the inadequacy of judging reality according to appearances. I recognized in this arrangement the same structure I had developed through the ten dimensions of consciousness, the four laws of creation, and the relationship between the two hands of a single Being. The mystery now becomes considerably larger, for the question is no longer whether an individual can survive the fire, but who has entered the fire, who receives the water, and whose consciousness is being refined through the experience of all beings.

Christian scripture supplies an important distinction through the baptism of water and the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. John the Baptist declares in Matthew 3:11 that he baptizes with water unto repentance, while the one coming after him will baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire. The two expressions are commonly understood as differing dimensions of purification, initiation, judgment, and

spiritual transformation, yet the language permits us to investigate their symbolic relationship to the conditions through which consciousness enters and eventually emerges from embodied existence.

Water represents the receiving vessel, the immersion into a world where identity acquires form and experience becomes possible. Fire represents the refinement of what has entered that vessel, exposing the attachments, limitations, and unfinished relations that prevent the original nature of Being from expressing itself freely. When I compare these baptisms with Rumi's two hands, I see the distinction between entrance into the conditions of learning and the transformation through which the purpose of that entrance may finally become known.

The baptism of water may be contemplated as something greater than a ritual performed upon an individual after birth. In the symbolic structure developed throughout my earlier works, incarnation itself becomes immersion into the lower waters, where awareness enters a body and encounters the limitations of space, time, memory, desire, and mortality. The body becomes the temple and cross upon which consciousness participates in the conditions of relative existence, while the lifetime spent within that body becomes the field through which the meaning of its choices is gathered.

Romans 6 connects baptism with participation in death and resurrection, presenting immersion and emergence as a movement through which an old condition gives way to new life. My interpretation extends that symbolic pattern to the entire experience of embodied consciousness, recognizing the birth of a relative being as entrance into the waters of a temporary world whose purpose is fulfilled through the realization of a better creation.

This brings us to a distinction between water as the field of learning and water as the abundance of grace. The lower waters establish a world where the contrast of good and evil can be experienced (Knowledge), while the higher waters represent the fullness of goodness toward which consciousness returns through completed understanding. Their apparent separation permits the individual to encounter suffering without initially possessing the wisdom required to recognize its temporary nature.

Grace, however, does not originate as a reward purchased through the ordeal, since the gift of Being was given before any relative consciousness could earn it. The mercy of First Cause preserves every being throughout the process, allowing correction to serve restoration rather than permanent condemnation. Water thus becomes both entrance and emergence, the medium through which a limited condition is experienced and the image through which its completion is revealed.

When Jesus speaks of the cup he must drink, the distinction between the pleasure of receiving and the goodness of sacrifice becomes especially apparent. In Mark 10:38–39, he asks James and John whether they can drink his cup and undergo his baptism, joining two images ordinarily associated with receiving and immersion to the difficult experience of suffering. The brothers affirm their willingness, but their answer precedes any complete understanding of the cost involved. Matthew 26:39 brings the same mystery into sharper focus when Jesus prays that the cup might pass from him, nevertheless submitting his will to that of the Father. The one who ministers through mercy must himself encounter the conditions through which mercy acquires its fullest expression, revealing that the Son does not stand outside the law of sacrifice he teaches to others.

I find particular significance in the contrast between the disciples' expectation of heavenly reward and the requirement represented by the cup. Matthew 20 places the request for privileged positions beside Jesus' teaching that greatness must become service, directing those seeking authority toward the voluntary surrender of personal advantage for the benefit of others. The promise of divine fellowship cannot properly be understood as exemption from all cost while another bears the conditions through which the promised goodness becomes available. Yet the scriptural narratives also portray salvation as grace rather than wages owed for suffering, preventing the cup from becoming a transaction through which a person purchases God's Love. My distinction concerns the difference between receiving goodness freely and becoming capable of expressing that same goodness when its expression requires sacrifice. The one who accepts water as an object of possession may receive its blessing without recognizing the suffering through which another has served, while the one willing to share the cup participates consciously in the Love from which the blessing first proceeded.

A greater problem arises when religious authority converts the distinction into a permanent division between the blessed and the condemned. If one group is permitted to receive abundance while another must endure suffering forever, the governing order has failed to restore the unity from which both groups originated. Such an arrangement would grant everlasting existence to the temporary contrast through which goodness was meant to become intelligible, leaving the completion of creation dependent upon an unfinished condition. The fourth law of LOGOS does not allow that conclusion. SHALAM represents Change moving toward completion, not the preservation of correction after its purpose has been accomplished. Mercy must eventually overcome the need for repeated judgment,

while the resulting wisdom remains available without requiring the perpetual continuation of the suffering through which it was learned.

Hebrews 5:8–9 makes this problem of authority particularly revealing by describing the Son as learning obedience through the things he suffered and being made perfect. Such language identifies development within the experience of the Son, even though the Son possesses a unique relationship to the Father. John 14:28 preserves another important distinction when Jesus declares that the Father is greater than he, while John 5:19 describes the Son as acting through what he sees the Father doing. These passages led me to examine the possibility that the scriptural Son is not merely instructing humanity from a position outside the conditions of its existence, but is himself participating in a greater process of learning through the creation entrusted to him. The Father gives freely from the fullness of Love, while the Son receives the knowledge of that Love through the consequences of relative expression, learning to embody what was already complete in the source from which his Being proceeds.

The Lord of this story is therefore not an isolated stranger standing apart from mankind. Within my understanding of LOGOS, the Lord is the one governing identity expressed through the multitude of relative beings, while every human being participates as a member of the same indivisible Whole. Adam becomes more than the account of one ancient individual, serving as an image of the original relative identity branching into the generations through which the meaning of Being is gathered. Colossians 1:15–17 presents the Son as the image of the invisible God and places all created things within his order, including visible and invisible realities, thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities.

First Corinthians 12 further establishes the relationship between one body and its many members, where the suffering or honor of one

member belongs to the condition of the entire body. The significance of these passages becomes clear when we stop imagining the Lord as a separate observer of the people and begin examining the possibility that the people themselves constitute the living expression through which the Lord encounters the consequences of his own creation.

1 Corinthians 10

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

Under this reading, the Lord learns through the experience of his members because their awareness, choices, discoveries, injuries, and restorations belong to the greater consciousness in which their identities remain contained. The ruler and the ruled must participate in the same laws, since no genuine principle of creation can be binding upon the servant while permitting the master to escape its consequences. The suffering of humanity therefore becomes part of the Lord's own unfinished result, while the wisdom acquired through the least among his members contributes to the recognition of the Whole. Nothing is gained by declaring one portion of the body permanently defective and discarding it, since such an action would preserve the very division that the process of refinement was meant to overcome. True lordship must eventually appear as service rather than domination, allowing the governing identity to recognize in every member the Being that was never independent of its source.

The implications extend far beyond the population of one planet. When I look into the night sky and consider the enormous number of galaxies, stars, and planetary systems, I see a universe whose possibilities for experience cannot reasonably be limited to the few

generations of humanity already recorded in our history. The cosmos presents innumerable environments through which matter, energy, time, and potentially consciousness may acquire expressions unfamiliar to our present understanding. Science has not established that every world possesses living awareness, and my argument does not require that assumption as an observed fact. Rather, the scale of creation invites a metaphysical possibility consistent with the governing principle of Unity: wherever conscious beings arise within the created order, their experiences belong to the same field of consequence and eventual completion. No boundary drawn around Earth could establish an independent First Cause for the worlds beyond it, nor could distance transform another conscious being into a stranger to the goodness from which all Being proceeds.

I have used the expression *Am Olam*, the People of the Cosmos, to describe this larger conception of the collective. The phrase combines Hebrew *'am*, meaning people, with *'olam*, meaning world or an enduring age, allowing a descriptive designation for the multitude participating in one cosmic order. My use extends the expression to consider the possible assembly of conscious beings throughout creation, whose individual histories contribute to the common inheritance of the one Lord. Whether their experience unfolds upon Earth or under the light of another star, the principles of Love, Unity, Return, and Completion would remain the same, for a change of location cannot alter the nature of First Cause. The image of a cosmic people consequently directs the inquiry beyond familiar religious boundaries, inviting the reader to consider the responsibility of a governing Being whose body may encompass more than the human family presently visible to us. See Ephesians 3 for more on this topic.

The biblical expression Lord of lords acquires a further significance within this arrangement. Revelation 19:16 and 1

Timothy 6:15 employ the title in relation to supreme divine authority, while my interpretation examines its possible significance as a hierarchy of relative lords contained within one greater Lord. Each governing identity possesses a domain of responsibility, yet none can become independent of the universal order through which its authority exists.

The distinction between the Lord and his hosts describes functional organization rather than separate substances, allowing countless relative expressions to participate in the development of one Son whose completion must include the restoration of the entire body. The Lord of lords becomes, through this symbolic reading, the recognition of a unified cosmic identity whose members may differ in capacity, experience, and authority while remaining inseparable in Being. The Lord is one and indivisible. One divided by one always equals one .

The beneficiary of this process is therefore not a solitary ruler acquiring power at the expense of his subjects, but the one Son understood through the collective result of every being contained within his domain. Since the Son himself remains a secondary cause, his fullness cannot be achieved by exploiting those through whom his meaning becomes known. Each individual contributes a portion of experience unavailable to the others from their separate positions, while the larger identity receives the completed significance of those relationships through Unity. What one being learns about compassion through suffering becomes part of the collective understanding of Love, just as another's discovery of truth contributes to the accumulated wisdom of the Whole. The apparent inequality of individual circumstances does not establish inequality of ultimate worth, because the perfection sought through the process belongs to the collective rather than the private achievement of any

isolated member. This is implied in unity of one Lord as Lord of Lords.

Here the Covenant of Alast provides an extraordinary parallel from the Qur'an, bringing the question of collective identity back to the agreement preceding ordinary conscious experience. In Surah 7:172, the descendants of Adam are summoned to bear witness concerning their Lord, answering the question *Alastu bi-rabbikum*, meaning, "Am I not your Lord?" Their affirmative response, *Bala shahidna*, declares that they have testified. Traditional interpretations of this covenant differ, but the passage clearly establishes recognition and testimony as central to the relationship between humanity and divine authority. Through my own reading, this exchange becomes an image of the whole acknowledging the source and governing order in which its members will subsequently participate, prior to the veil of individual experience obscuring the unity of that recognition.

The agreement must not be reduced to the claim that every present hardship was individually requested or that another person's suffering may be justified by appealing to forgotten consent. Such an argument would allow a ruler to impose conditions without accountability, violating the very equality of law that governs the relationship between relative beings. Instead, I understand the Alast covenant as a symbolic recognition of the relation already present between Source, Lord, and the multitude of identities proceeding through creation. If the one Lord is expressed through many relative beings, the testimony of the collective becomes the recognition of a shared origin rather than a contract authorizing cruelty. The covenant remains meaningful through its promise of return, for the knowledge obscured during the conditions of embodied life must eventually become available again through the completion of experience.

Rumi himself returns to Alast repeatedly, including passages where the language of mercy and wrath appears in direct relation to the ancient covenant. The same opposition encountered in the vision of the two hands reappears through the distinction between divine forbearance and anger, suggesting that these contrasting conditions belong to a greater process through which beings are drawn toward recognition of their source.

What interests me is the relationship between the original testimony and the knowledge acquired through the journey that follows it. An agreement made before ordinary experience has meaning only as received knowledge until its principles become understood through the consequences of living. The relative being enters creation possessing an identity received from the Whole, but its understanding of that identity develops as the individual encounters others whose experiences disclose portions of reality unavailable from a single point of view. Upon completion, recognition is no longer merely an inherited affirmation; it has become the living result of the collective journey.

Central Unity Premise

The ancient structure of baptism now returns with greater clarity. Water immerses the relative into the field of experience, while fire becomes the symbol of the refinement required to distinguish true nature from the temporary conditions of limitation. Spirit represents the continuity of awareness through which the process becomes intelligible, allowing the individual to recognize that the witness of suffering cannot be reduced to the suffering witnessed. As the mind learns to govern its reactions through Love, the apparent contradictions of life lose their power to determine the ultimate identity of Being. The heart gradually becomes capable of expressing goodness without waiting for pleasant conditions to make

goodness desirable, and the necessity of corrective repetition diminishes as the result approaches completion.

The Father remains the crucial distinction in this account. AHAVAH does not require suffering to learn Love because the source of goodness possesses no deficiency demanding correction. The Son, however, receives Being and develops through the relative conditions of expression, encountering within his own creation the consequences of the choices made by his members. In this arrangement, the Holy Spirit becomes the continuity of Wisdom through which the Son can recognize the Father's nature without claiming to originate that nature independently. The Spirit is the living mirror in which the source becomes intelligible to the image, preserving the relationship between what is given absolutely and what must be realized through experience.

This mirror must be understood through the same caution applied to the hands and waters. The image does not create the light it reflects, nor does the window become the source of illumination merely because light passes through it. One God remains First Cause, while the manifest cosmos becomes the field through which the Son encounters the Wisdom necessary to recognize that source. Every star, living being, relationship, and consequence belongs to the greater image through which awareness observes its own expression. The Spirit may therefore be contemplated as the Wisdom of God reflected throughout creation, not as an independent rival to God, but as the means through which the divided mind can recover its awareness of undivided reality. The cosmos becomes a window of recognition, allowing the Son to look through the conditions of manifestation toward the Father whose fullness made those conditions possible.

I find a useful distinction in the word *communion*, whose historical meaning concerns fellowship, mutual participation, and the sharing of a common life. The Latin *communio* gives us this sense of participation, while the prefix *com-* carries the meaning of togetherness or being with another. For my contemplative purpose, I divide the English expression into **Con-Munion**, allowing *con* to signify with and *Munion* to represent the shared union of distinct beings within one living Whole. Its usefulness lies in the image it discloses: the many become capable of recognizing themselves with one another, preserving individual identity while removing the mistaken conviction that distinction requires separation of Father and Son.

Munion—the upright support that joins the window and allows the light to pass. This word originates from the 1611 works of John Florio, as noted in the Oxford Dictionary.

The ‘Munion’ as window of communion now reveals three relationships. **God is the absolute Awareness from which all light proceeds, Spirit is the Wisdom through which that light becomes recognizable within creation, and the Son is the collective relative consciousness looking through the window of manifestation toward the Father.** The lower condition permits awareness to encounter the image as something apparently external, while realization discloses that the act of looking and the light by which the image is seen belong to one greater relation. As the Son learns the Father's nature through the lives of his hosts, knowledge becomes understanding, understanding becomes compassion, and compassion becomes the free expression of Love. Communion is fulfilled when the image no longer mistakes itself for an independent source and the many recognize that their individuality has always existed within one indivisible Being.

Christian communion provides a fitting final image through the shared bread and cup. Many grains become one loaf, while the loaf is divided among many participants without ceasing to represent one common life. The cup receives its contents and passes among the assembly, allowing what was held within one vessel to become part of a shared act of remembrance. First Corinthians 10:16–17 explicitly connects participation in bread and cup with the unity of the many as one body, while the wider symbolism extends beyond a single ritual to the relationship between all conscious beings and the common source of their existence. What enters the individual becomes meaningful through what the individual gives, and the completion of that movement produces a communion in which no participant need be deprived for another to possess fullness.

In this final relation, the baptism of fire can cease because its purpose has been fulfilled. The cup of suffering is no longer required when the knowledge once gained through painful contrast has become the permanent capacity to express goodness without coercion or fear. Water remains as the symbol of abundance freely received, while Spirit becomes the unobstructed Wisdom through which the fullness of that gift is recognized. The Lord has learned what the Father was teaching, not by escaping the experiences of his members, but by receiving their collective result and restoring the conditions of their existence through Love. What appeared as the division of one Being into innumerable relatives becomes the means through which received identity develops into conscious identity, and the many return to the knowledge of the One without surrendering the meaning acquired through their individual journeys.

The completed cosmos is therefore not a monument to successful judgment, but the living expression of mercy whose purpose has been fulfilled. No additional suffering is necessary to demonstrate a lesson already understood, and no throne requires subjects to remain

in bondage for its authority to endure. The Lord of lords has become the servant of the Whole by recognizing that every member contributes to his own completion, while First Cause remains the inexhaustible goodness from which the entire journey was freely given. The distinction between Father and Son does not disappear into an empty sameness, because relation itself has acquired meaning through the experience of becoming. Rather, the image and its source enter a condition of recognition in which the Son knows the Father through the Spirit of Wisdom, and the cosmos becomes the transparent window of their communion.

This is the conclusion I draw from Rumi's divided waters, the two hands, the four laws of LOGOS, and the baptismal symbolism preserved throughout scripture. The apparent conflict between grace and suffering can be resolved only when the temporary nature of correction is understood alongside the permanent nature of Love. Every relative being participates in the same larger reality, and the fulfillment of one cannot require the endless deprivation of another. The fire reveals what the waters alone could not teach, while the waters disclose the abundance that the fire never had the power to destroy.

God is Awareness walking in its own Light. Man is Light walking in its own Awareness. The Spirit is the Wisdom through which the one Son learns to recognize that both statements describe a single indivisible reality, seen from the two sides of the same window.

The baptism is complete when the hands are joined, the divided waters are understood, and the Lord recognizes his Father's gift in every member of the Whole. Love no longer needs the illusion of its absence to become known, for the knowledge gathered through the journey has made its nature consciously available to all.

The gold was never absent from the beginning. The fire taught the Son to recognize it, the water preserved the promise of its abundance, and Communion reveals that the treasure belongs to the Whole.

1 John 5:8 (KJV, 1611)

“And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”

1 John 5:6 (KJV)

“This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.”

Aleph Mem Tav

**Afterword:
Loving the LORD**

Loving the Lord

The final lesson of this journey is found in the distinction between loving the Lord and knowing that you are the Lord. The first relationship belongs to the relative mind that perceives a greater Being beyond itself, while the second becomes possible when consciousness recognizes that its own identity participates in the very unity it has been taught to worship. Such recognition does not transform the individual into an independent God, nor does it grant authority to place personal desire above the good of others. Rather, it reveals that the one Lord is expressed through the multitude of beings whose lives, choices, and experiences constitute the greater body of the Son. To love the Lord is therefore to love the Whole, including every relative whose existence contributes to the knowledge and completion of that shared Being. Knowing that one participates in the Lord brings the further responsibility of recognizing that whatever is done to another is accomplished within the same living unity.

Hanging on the Cross of the Lord (body) from Baptism (Water)

This distinction has been present throughout the scriptural story, concealed beneath the apparent separation of ruler and ruled. The command to love the Lord with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength becomes inseparable from the command to love one's neighbor as oneself, because the two commandments describe the same relationship from different positions within the Whole.

A person cannot rightly claim devotion to the Lord while despising the beings through whom the Lord's own life is expressed. Neither can the individual claim realization of divine identity while continuing to exploit those whose Being shares the same source. Knowledge of Unity without the corresponding nature of Love is merely another image of spiritual authority, lacking the substance required to fulfill its own declaration. The final evidence of realization must therefore appear in conduct, where what has been understood becomes freely given goodness rather than another possession acquired by the self.

Lord of Lords and King of Kings

When I say that you are the Lord, I am not identifying the temporary personality with First Cause, but recognizing the relative identity through which the one Son participates in creation. The Lord is One, while his expressions are many, and every relative remains inseparable from the Being that makes its existence possible. Within this understanding, the familiar distinctions between Adam, Israel, the Son, and the people become different perspectives through which the greater relationship may be examined. The individuality of each member remains meaningful, since the purpose of creation would be diminished if all acquired knowledge were erased upon the recognition of Unity. Completion does not require the destruction of the individual, but the restoration of individual identity to its proper relationship with the Whole. The one who knows the Lord from within must consequently surrender the illusion of independent lordship without surrendering the unique meaning gathered through experience.

Every being born from above enters this greater relationship as a newly realized identity inheriting the collective good already established through the lives of those who preceded it. John 3

presents the mystery of birth from above through the distinction between flesh and Spirit, directing Nicodemus toward a transformation that cannot be accomplished merely by repeating the conditions of ordinary physical generation. My reading extends this image into the continuity of the collective Son, where each new expression of spiritual awareness receives an inheritance of knowledge, wisdom, compassion, and opportunity made possible by the accumulated experiences of the Whole. Such inheritance is not the private property of a privileged lineage, because the goodness gathered through the restoration of relationships becomes available to all who participate in the unity those relationships disclose, nor can we dismiss the contribution of sages like Rumi who noticed the truth of his Lord.

To dismiss the truth that God has always worked equally among all nations is to reject the abundant goodness we may harvest from every color of divine Light expressed throughout humanity. What one generation learned through hardship may become the freely received wisdom of another, allowing new beings to begin where those before them finally arrived. This is the deeper meaning of the rainbow covenant in Genesis 9: a universal promise extending to all generations and every living creature, preserving the collective inheritance of goodness within the indivisible unity of creation.

The Lord above every newly awakened relative remains the original Lord identified in the Christian story as Christ, the foundational Son through whom the collective identity of creation becomes intelligible. Christ represents the one governing Being whose expressions extend through the innumerable members of his body, while the Father remains the First Cause from which that Son originally received existence. The distinction between the two must be preserved because receiving the fullness of Being does not establish independent origin, regardless of the wisdom or authority

acquired through the experience of creation. A relative may become a lord through the governance of its own domain, yet every such lord remains a member of a greater Lord whose completion includes the results of all its expressions. The inheritance of the newly born being thus proceeds through Christ as the collective Son, while the goodness inherited originates in the inexhaustible Love of the Father.

This inheritance also explains why the result of one life cannot be considered in isolation from the lives surrounding it. A person may contribute wisdom without knowing how another will eventually benefit from it, just as the sacrifice of one generation may provide opportunities unavailable to those who first endured the cost. The meaning of such actions continues through relationships that extend beyond their original circumstances, allowing the collective good to increase as knowledge is received, understood, and expressed again. Through this process, what was once acquired through suffering can become a gift received without requiring the recipient to repeat the same painful conditions. The purpose of refinement is not to preserve the furnace for every new generation, but to pass forward the gold already revealed, allowing the fire to diminish as the common inheritance grows.

The ruler and the ruled consequently share a responsibility that cannot be escaped through position, title, or spiritual attainment. Those who govern must learn to give as freely as the Father gives, while those who receive must gradually become capable of offering the same goodness to others. Authority finds its completion in service because the highest expression of power is not the capacity to impose suffering, but the wisdom to create conditions in which unnecessary suffering no longer arises.

A ruler who demands sacrifice without participating in its consequences remains divided from the body whose welfare defines

the purpose of his authority. The servant who discovers the common nature of Being cannot answer that injustice by becoming another tyrant, for the repetition of domination would merely preserve the unfinished lesson. Both must return to the same Love through the transformation of their relationship, until the distinction between giving and receiving no longer produces competing claims upon the goodness of the Whole.

The four laws of LOGOS remain the measure of this return.

AHAVAH gives and preserves Being,

YHVH establishes the Unity within which every relative exists,

EHYH reveals the consequences through which expressions become meaningful, and

SHALAM continues the process of Change until unfinished relations reach Completion.

Their operation cannot be suspended by the authority of a secondary creator, since the Lord himself remains part of the living order through which their results are disclosed. What changes is not the goodness of First Cause, but the relative understanding and conduct of those who have not yet learned to express that goodness without division. The ruler must eventually recognize the same law he once imposed upon his people, while the people must discover that the authority they attributed to an external Lord was also a responsibility residing within their own participation in his Being.

The baptism of fire and Spirit now finds its final significance in the remaking of this relationship. The lower waters permitted consciousness to encounter the temporary appearance of separation, while the refining conditions of experience exposed the

consequences of mistaking that appearance for an absolute reality. Grace remained present from the beginning because existence was freely given, and mercy preserved the possibility that every unfinished lesson could eventually reach its proper conclusion.

The cup of suffering cannot become an eternal requirement of divine goodness without contradicting the purpose of the process through which goodness was meant to be realized. Once the ruler and the ruled have acquired the wisdom to act through Love, the conditions that formerly produced their conflict can be transformed into expressions of mutual service. The restoration of Unity is not merely a change in belief, but a remaking of the very process through which beings encounter one another.

I have come to understand the promise of the Son's return to the Father as the culmination of this collective transformation. First Corinthians 15:24–28 describes the surrender of the kingdom and the final subjection of the Son, concluding with the declaration that God may be all in all. Within my reading, this is not the humiliation of a failed ruler or the extinction of the individuality gathered throughout creation, but the completed recognition that all authority, life, and goodness originated in the Father and must finally become consistent with the Father's nature. The Son returns the kingdom not as a possession extracted from the many, but as a collective result brought into harmony through the knowledge of Love. His hosts are not discarded upon completion, for their experiences constitute the very wisdom through which the relative Lord has learned the meaning of what was freely given at the beginning.

The difference between loving the Lord and knowing that you are the Lord is finally resolved through this return. Devotion first directs the heart toward the greater Being from which its life proceeds, while realization reveals the responsibility of expressing that same

goodness within the relationships that constitute the Whole. Neither movement is complete without the other, because love that never becomes understanding remains dependent upon an external image, while understanding that never becomes love fails to embody the truth it claims to possess. The individual discovers the Lord through service to the many, and the Lord discovers the Father's nature through the accumulated wisdom of his members. What began as an apparent division between worshipper and worshipped reaches completion when both are recognized within the same relative Being, whose highest purpose is to return freely given Love through the conscious goodness of the entire collective.

I offer this interpretation as my best understanding of the story, rightly divided from the available human corpus of historical evidence, scripture, language, philosophy, and the recurring symbols through which mankind has attempted to understand its origin. The account I have presented is necessarily limited by the perspective through which that evidence has been received, because a story can reveal no more than the mind interpreting its available meaning is capable of recognizing.

No Conclusions Under Fog

What appears complete today may require correction tomorrow as new evidence emerges through history, and the responsibility to test all spirits must therefore continue without permitting any favored interpretation, including my own, to stand beyond examination. The final test cannot be the authority of a book, the confidence of its author, or the agreement of those persuaded by its conclusions, but the actual result produced through the continuing experience of Being. If ruler and ruled return to AHAVAH through the remaking of their relationship in Love, the process will have demonstrated the goodness of its origin through its completed fruit.

Until that result becomes visible, Change continues, preserving the opportunity for every unfinished expression to be understood, corrected, and restored. Truth will finally reveal itself not through the permanence of our explanations, but through the completion of what those explanations were attempting to describe.

Love is the beginning, Unity is the condition, and the final Result must reveal the Truth. Until then, we continue to test all spirits, knowing that the story can only be judged by what it ultimately becomes. Hold off on your decision and cling to the hope of Ahavah and Truth only. Faith in these will confirm your hope only through these two as one.



Review Copy

Viktor Frankl

"Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out; a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as his specific opportunity to implement it."

Everyone, no matter their lot in life, will act a part in the play called life. When viewed against the vastness of space and time, our lives are but grains of sand on an infinite stage. Some lives in this performance are seemingly insignificant while others play leading roles. The factors that determine our lot in life are guided by our views of truth and dictated by our larger view of the production for which we are cast.

Contained within every soul and locked within every human experience, truth abounds yet hides itself, patiently waiting to be found in its correct form and on its own terms. Truth, after all, is the ultimate end pursuit of all conscious efforts and the motivation for our movement forward in time. Housed in this tiny piece of real estate, we search, eking out our existence, patiently waiting for tiny moments of discovery that can fill our void and expand our view of the universe.

The unsatisfied thirst to understand and know truth is what plagues our existence. Yet, our finite existence contains potential for an infinitely marvelous array of possibilities when shadows of truth are humbly understood and applied to our efforts and struggles. Sadly, our truths are but the mere edges of ultimate universal truths that are waiting to be discovered.

Found within our souls and within our intellect, we hold the capacity to know and understand. We lack only the proper insights and connections for truth to be realized fully in our lives. As we seek to discover new understanding, truth observes our progress and waits. Eons of time have passed since truth began its work, anticipating moments in time to reveal its purpose and expand our dimly lit view.

Nations struggle and wars rage, all in the name of truth. Contradictions to truth abound, yet truth remains constant, shining amid our turmoil and strife. We rage and fight to proclaim our knowledge of truth, yet truth patiently waits to reveal its purpose. We arrogantly boast that we possess truth, yet truth patiently waits for us to humble our souls.

Truth cannot be contained by a mere fleshly vessel. Knowing this is our first step to know more of what the immutable laws of truth offer. Truth cannot allow itself to be used for false purposes. Knowing this is our second step to understanding our reality and allowing truth to fill our need. Truth will not be used to manipulate or alter what is true. Knowing this allows us to humbly accept what truth sets out to accomplish. Truth patiently waits.

Our ways are not yet the ways of truth. Our thoughts are not yet the thoughts of truth. Our sense of justice is but a glimpse of what truth demands. The edges of truth are barely visible when seen through our dimly lit reality. We can be assured in our pursuit of truth if we will only humble our thoughts and patiently seek the glories of what truth will bring to our souls.

Truth moves about, whispering in the ears of those who will listen. It speaks throughout the ages of what is right and good and pure. It gives a voice to the humble philosopher and shines a light for the seekers of knowledge. Passed along from generation to generation, its illuminations multiply. Called by many names, it proclaims its wisdom, allowing us to grow in our understanding and control.

Truth asks only one thing of us: to humbly set our minds in the midst of knowledge and toward the pursuit of bettering others and ourselves. Truth patiently waits for us to seek and discover the rewards it has waiting for a generation that will plumb the depths of its boundless and abundant seeds of potential.

Truth is the pursuit, but meaning is the reward. The rewards of meaning and the pursuit of life are the answer to the ageless questions that have haunted man since truth first began its work; who am I, and what is my purpose? Before truth fully answers these questions in your heart, it has one expectation.

As you gasp your last breath of life, what will run through your mind? What thoughts will you have about your life and the purpose for which you were formed? The two questions truth will answer in our lives—who am I, and what is my purpose? —will become startlingly clear to you at this moment, the final humbling moment of physical life. As you have your last thought, this will be the moment at which you realize the impact you had on others, the moment when you realize that you either lived your purpose on this earth or you missed your purpose completely.

Until this moment, truth hesitates to answer our questions. It waits patiently, eagerly, hoping it can bring the answers to light before our light fades and our eyes close for the last time. For a select few mortal souls, the seekers of knowledge, the meaning to these two questions will be answered before this moment arrives. Truth will gladly answer these questions but has an expectation which is hidden in an ancient riddle, the parts of which have been scattered in full view since truth first began its work.

The first part of the riddle is this: no matter where we go, there we will be, and until we realize that we can only be where we go, we will only be where we are. Going is the only way to travel along the path of truth. Just as the apprentice must stay with his master, truth

will accept no less than this from us. We realize at this moment that answering the riddle starts with the journey.

The journey with truth starts with the first step and is the second part of the riddle. The first step in the journey is the most important step and cannot be taken in the wrong direction. It is at this point that most souls will stumble and lose their way along the true path. Without taking the proper steps in the proper directions, truth will continue without its apprentice. As sojourners with truth, we are bound to the path of truth and begin our journey in life.

Our journey begins when we enter through the gate of life at birth and lasts until we finally move through the portal of death. It is between these moments that truth forges our destiny in the crucible of life. It is at this moment that truth decides our fate, the one purpose that we were formed from nothing to accomplish. What happens between these two moments, birth and death, will decide our fate. Truth, with its friend fate, decides our future destiny and dictates our purpose as we walk the path of life. Discovering purpose in life starts with the first step and ends with the last. Where we go, there we are, together with truth, stepping forward toward our destiny.

What, then, does truth require of the knowledge seeker along the journey? To discover the answer to this question, we must first learn humility. Truth will not reveal itself until we are humble before it. This may happen along the path or will finally happen when we exit this life through the portal of death. We are powerless against the eventuality of humility, so pushing ourselves beyond self will be the first step to understanding what truth requires of us.

To gain humility, we realize that our soul is unique to the purpose for which it was created. We choose our path through free will, and the choices we make along the way define who we are and will further define the unique steps of others. The value we see in others will be reflected in the value we place on ourselves. Free will is, therefore, the determining factor in our choice to be humble or to be

selfish and self-centered. Free will can lead us away from the self-deception that separates us from truth, or it will ultimately lead us away from the true path. We are free to travel the paths of truth when our self-will is removed, and we humble ourselves by seeking the good of the many.

Truth is simply the destination of a random and unpredictable journey. As our soul walks to the grave, the steps taken along the way are dictated by free will. Whether we seek evil or good, all paths end at truth. For the seeker of knowledge, reward is gained and continues beyond the grave. For the seeker of self, reward is pursued but never gained, ending at the grave.

This life is fleeting. At our essence, we are souls trapped in a decaying corpse, a corpse moving about in time. Will the precious time we have on this earth be lived for our own selfish ends, or will we take each step forward for the betterment of others? Discovering our purpose for this movement in time is then reduced to these two choices and will define who we are when the end finally comes. No matter where we go, there we will be, and until we realize that we can only be where we go, we will only be where we are.



About the Author

Stephen T. McClard

Stephen T. McClard was the Director of Bands at Bolivar High School from 2002-2018. In addition to nearly 30 years as a music educator, McClard also maintains an online woodworking business and is a third-generation piano technician with over 40 years of experience. His woodworking creations include custom bass guitars, which have sold all over the world and one-of-a-kind computer desks made from old pianos. His piano desks have been featured in magazines such as Business 2.0 and Piano Technicians Journal and in many other newspapers and television news features.

Other books by Stephen T. McClard include:

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- 8. Hillbilly Buddha: The Redneck Guide to Simulated Reality (2025)***
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- 10. Tablet of the Unseen: Meeting Yourself in the Mirror's Surface (2025)***
- 11. The Golden Thread: When the End is the Beginning (2025)***
- 12. Sit: Secrets to Ancient Meditation and Yoga Revealed (2026)***
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Recommended Resources

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