

2.1 GOD AND ETERNITY

HUMAN BEINGS HAVE GIVEN MANY NAMES TO GOD throughout the ages, and have tried in numerous ways to describe the essential indescribability of the supreme Spirit. Some traditions have spoken of a Godhead in which the absolute, aloof and utterly transcendent divine Essence manifests Himself within Himself, so to speak, in various 'aspects', His furthest 'extension' being the Creator and merciful Father of all creation below. The Divine is also described as the eternal, immortal and true home of the soul.

Since many mystics have said that the soul is essentially one with God, some of the epithets of the Divine have also been applied to the God-realized soul or Saint, to the true nature of the soul, and to the divine creative power by which the creation is brought into being.

KEY ENTRIES: Allāh, Ahurā Mazdā, Ayn-Sof, Brahman, Father, God (among the early Greeks), God (in early Christianity), God (in Indian thought), God (in Judaism), Yahweh.

The term also appears as *pārbrahm Paramātmā*, meaning the supreme Soul (*Paramātmā*) beyond (*pār*) *Brahm*. Depending on the context, the term refers either to the ruler of *pārbrahm* or to the supreme, transcendent Lord.

Parameshvar(a) (S/H), Parmesar, Parmeshar (Pu) *Lit.* supreme (*param*) Lord (*Īshvara*); almighty God, the Supreme Being and other deities. In the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, *Parameshvara* is synonymous with *Brahman*:

He is the supreme Lord (*Parameshvara*):

He is the ruler of beings,
and He is the sustainer of beings.

Maitrī Upanishad 7:7

The worlds arise like bubbles in water,
existing and dissolving in the supreme Self (*Parameshvara*);
For that is the cause and sustenance of everything.

Shankara, Ātmabodha 8

He who sees the supreme Lord (*Parameshvara*)
dwelling alike in all beings,
and not perishing when they perish –
Truly, he sees.

Bhagavad Gītā 13:27

Guru Arjun says that the supreme Lord or *Parmesar* lies beyond the knowledge of the *Vedas*:

The *Vedas* know not God's greatness:

Brahmā can realize not His secrets.

The incarnations know not His limit:

infinite is God, the transcendent Lord (*pārbrahm Parmesar*).

Guru Arjun, Ādi Granth 894, MMS

The term also appears in superlative form, as in *pārbrahm pūran Parmesar* (transcendent and perfect Lord). Guru Arjun writes:

The transcendent Lord (*pārbrahm*) is the perfect Master (*pūran Parmesar*):

O my soul (*man*, mind), hold fast to His protection

who has established the universe and continents:

O man, repeat the Name of that God.

Guru Arjun, Ādi Granth 209, MMS

perfect aeon, perfect Blessed One, perfect Light, perfect Mother-Father, perfect One Some of the many epithets of God, found particularly in early Christian gnostic literature.

See **perfection**.

perfection The state of being perfect; the highest degree of any particular quality. Mystically, God has always been described as perfection. Mystics have added that man must acquire the virtues constituting human perfection as a part of the spiritual journey towards union with the divine, human perfection being a reflection of divine perfection. Jesus summarizes the matter in characteristically succinct style:

Be ye therefore perfect,
even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:48, KJV

From God's point of view, His perfection is His oneness, His purity and His love. In Himself, there is only purity and oneness; there is nothing other than Him. He is Himself alone. Consequently, He is perfectly pure, unmixed with anything else. In His creation, He is the author of all, the intelligence within all, the order within all. If it is said that the creation has imperfection, then that is only from the point of view of the creation. From His point of view, it is entirely as He wants it: perfectly imperfect.

Mystics and gnostics more than all others understand these divine qualities, and terms attributing perfection to God are commonly found in the early Christian writings. For instance, the Lord is called the "complete, perfect One",¹ the "holy and perfect Mother-Father",² the "perfect aeon",³ the "self-begotten perfect One",⁴ the "perfect Light",⁵ and so on. He is also described as "good, faultless, perfect, complete",⁶ "perfect, having no defect",⁷ the "blessed and perfect One of the eternal and incomprehensible Father and the infinite Light",⁸ and by other descriptions of the same kind.

Moreover, since God is beyond all the duality of His creation, it can also be said that He is beyond perfection and imperfection. Hence, the writer of the gnostic revelation, *Allogenes* says:

He is perfect, and He is greater than perfect....
[He is prior to perfection]....
He entered into Himself and He manifested,
being all-encompassing,
that universal One who is higher than perfect....
(He is) the God who is beyond perfection.

Allogenes 47, 53, 61; cf. NHS28 pp.196-97, 208-9, 224-25

See also: **aeons** (4.1), **perfection** (<2), **pūrṇa**.

1. *Tripartite Tractate* 53, *NHS22* pp.194–95.
2. *Apocryphon of John* 14, *NHS33* p.85.
3. *Apocryphon of John* 31, *NHS33* p.175.
4. *Gospel of the Egyptians* 66, *NHS4* p.156.
5. *Trimorphic Protennoia* 45, *NHS28* pp.422–23.
6. *Tripartite Tractate* 53–54, *NHS22* pp.196–97.
7. *Eugnostos the Blessed* 72, *NHS27* p.56.
8. *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* 59; cf. *NHS30* pp.172–73.

place of emancipation, place of Life, place of light, place of my inheritance, place of salvation, place of the blessed, place of the true God Also as pure place, holy place and similar variants; terms for the eternal realm or kingdom of God, as in the gnostic text:

Matthew said, “Lord, I want to see that place of Life ...
where there is no wickedness,
but rather there is pure light!”

Dialogue of the Saviour 132:27, *NHS26* p.65

Again, speaking of those who will attain salvation through the “perfect One”, the gnostic writer of the *Gospel of Truth* says that they will find spiritual rest or peace in the “place of the blessed”:

The Father is within them and they are in the Father,
being perfect, being undivided in the truly good One,
being in no way deficient in anything,
but they are set at rest, refreshed in the Spirit.

And they will heed their Root.

They will be concerned with those (things)

in which he will find his Root,
and not suffer loss to his soul.

This is the place of the blessed:
this is their place.

Gospel of Truth 42, *NHS22* pp.116–17

In the gnostic *Pistis Sophia*, the story is told of the soul’s escape from the realms where “destiny” reigns, for she is now going to the “place of my inheritance”:

And that soul dismisses their destiny to them, saying: “Receive back
your destiny; I do not come to your places from this time (forward);

I have become a stranger to you forever, and I shall go to the place of my inheritance.”

Pistis Sophia 289:112, PS pp.578–79; cf. PSGG p.241

Similarly, in the *First Book of Jeu*:

Again you will cross over them all
into the places of those of the innermost,
until you go to the place of the true God.

First Book of Jeu 89:39, BC pp.104–5

Expressions such as the “place of Life” are very common in the Mandaean texts, where “Life” is a term for God. Speaking of the Creative Word as the “Wellspring of Life”, one text says:

This is a Wellspring of Life
which sprang forth from the place of Life.

Mandaean Prayer Book 45, CPM p.41

Another exhorts the soul:

Clothe your souls in garments of radiance
and in good pure vestments of light,
which he (the Saviour) will bring you
from the great place of light
and the everlasting abode.

Mandaean Prayer Book 76, CPM pp.80–81

In another, the Saviour says:

I will deliver you from the wicked,
and save you from sinners.
I will set you in your *shkinta* (inner dwelling),
in the pure place, I will rescue you!

Mandaean Prayer Book 165; cf. CPM p.145

Similar terms are used in the Manichaean literature:

Rest shall be yours in the place of salvation,
in the company of all the gods
and those who dwell in peace.

Manichaean Hymns, Angad Rōshnān VI:73; cf. MHCP pp.152–53

And in another, where the “Law” and “right Law” refer to the creative Power:

Leap with joy, and stand firm by the right Law,
 cultivate industriously your wisdom and kindness,
 and abide by the Law.
 Give up altogether all (religious) practices and customs,
 and decide to rest your minds in the place of emancipation.

Better now freely, for the sake of nature,
 be able to part with all the habits of passion and desire.
 Otherwise when the day of impermanence (death)
 comes suddenly to oppress you, what can help you,
 (even) if you regret and repent at the last moment?

Manichaeon Hymns; cf. LSMH p.186:114–15

See also: **sat pad**.

port See **harbour**.

Prabhu (S/H/Pu), **Prabh** (Pu) *Lit.* lord, ruler, sovereign, owner; one who has complete power; hence, the Almighty; a name of God:

I have sought refuge in Your company, O Lord (*Prabhu*),
 O sustainer and protector of the world.

Ravidās, Vāṇī 115:1, SGRV p.116

And, in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, where the disciple, Arjuna, is talking to his Master, Kṛishṇa:

O supreme Lord (*Parameshvara*),
 You are even as You have declared Yourself to be.
 But now, O best of Beings, I wish to see
 that form of Yours as God of all.
 O Lord (*Prabhu*), if you think me worthy
 of experiencing Your immutable form,
 then, O Master of *yoga*, deign to reveal it to me.

Bhagavad Gītā 11:3–4; cf. BGT

See also: **al-Malik**.

Prabhu Swāmī (H/Pu), **Prabh Swāmī** (Pu) *Lit.* Sovereign (*Prabhu*) Lord (*Swāmī*); the ruling Lord, the supreme Lord; a name of God that epitomizes the Eastern custom of adding superlative to superlative in praise of God or in honour of revered persons.

Prītam (H/Pu) *Lit.* beloved; beloved one, dearest one, favourite one; friend, lover, sweetheart, husband; mystically, the divine Beloved; the Lord or Master, the beloved of the soul:

Thinking that someone will annul my agonies,
 I am tired of making many friends.
 By meeting my Beloved (*Prītam*) my woes ended,
 and I have attained union with the Lord.
 The truthful person has true reputation:
 he possesses the wealth of truth, and truth he earns.
 Having become virtuous, O Nānak,
 they who meet the true *Guru* separate not again.

Guru Amardās, Ādi Granth 37, MMS

See also: **Beloved, Dūst.**

promised land The land of Canaan, promised by God to the Israelites as their heritage, and conquered by them under His direction, according to the story related in *Genesis*, *Exodus* and so on; metaphorically, the heavenly realms, particularly the eternal realm.

Since the soul's essence and source is the Lord, and its true inheritance is eternity, the promised land is an apt metaphor for the home of the soul. It is also called the 'good land' because it is the source of eternal goodness and bliss, and "a land flowing with milk and honey"¹ in the sense that the spiritual realms flow with the sweet nourishment of the spirit.

The metaphor of the promised land first appears in *Genesis* when God promises special land to the offspring of the patriarch Abraham (Abram):

In the same day, the Lord made a Covenant with Abram, saying, "To your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates."

Genesis 15:18, JCL

Later in *Genesis*, the nature of the Covenant is more completely described:

And I will establish my Covenant between me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting Covenant, to be a God to you, and to your seed after you. And I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land where you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Genesis 17:7–8, JCL

Metaphorically, the promise of this land is that of continual spiritual grace, and the attainment of inner spiritual heights. The “Covenant” between God and the “generations” following Abraham symbolizes the relationship of God to man, his descendants signifying, perhaps, his spiritual children or disciples. The *Zohar* says that at the time of the Covenant, Abraham was put in touch with God’s Word or Name. Such contact brings about mystic experience of the inner spiritual regions. Later mystics, such as the third-century Mānī, speak of both the *Torah* (Law) and the Covenant as the Creative Word. It is an “everlasting Covenant” in the sense that the Word is an eternal bond between man and God, and the means of man’s salvation.

The pledge of the promised land is carried forward into *Exodus* and the remainder of the Bible as “a land flowing with milk and honey”, which God promises to the children of Israel if they adhere to the “Covenant”. Understood as an allegory, it means that God has compassion for the souls (the children of Israel), sending them a redeemer or prophet (Moses) who has contact with God, to rescue them from the dominion of the negative power (Pharaoh), who has enslaved the souls in the physical universe (Egypt). Subsequently, they are taken by a narrow crossing (the Red Sea), and embark upon the long and arduous spiritual struggle while still living in the desert of this world (the Sinai desert). During their crossing of this desert, they are frequently tempted, but they spend forty years being fed with *manna* (Bread from heaven, the Creative Word or *Logos*), and are ultimately led by their redeemer to “a land flowing with milk and honey”, the promised land (the eternal realm):

And He said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

And the Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows. And I have come down to save them from the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey; to the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.”

Exodus 3:6–8, JCL

In *Deuteronomy*, using a literary style of the times, God ‘speaks’, promising the children of Israel “a land that flows with milk and honey” in exchange for their love and obedience. The meaning can again be understood allegorically and spiritually:

Therefore shall you keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land which you are going over to possess. And that you may prolong your days in the land, which the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them and to their seed, a land that flows with milk and honey.

For the land, which you enter to possess, is not as the land of Egypt, from where you came out, where you sowed your seed, and watered it with your foot, as a garden of vegetables. But the land, which you are going over to possess, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinks water from the rain of the skies. A land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

Deuteronomy 11:8–12, JCL

Throughout the history of Jewish mysticism, the *Genesis* and *Exodus* stories have been commonly understood allegorically. Philo Judaeus, the first-century Alexandrian Jew and prolific biblical commentator, identifies this Covenant with the *Logos*. Interpreting *Genesis*, he speaks of “His *Logos*, which He calls His Covenant”.² He also says, more generally, that “the Covenant of God is an allegory of His gifts of grace.”³ And he identifies the promised land with Wisdom, another name for the *Logos* or creative Power:

What land does he mean, but ... the land whose fruit is the sure and steadfast apprehension of the Wisdom of God.

Philo Judaeus, Who is the Heir of Divine Things 62, PCW4 pp.444–45

He then extends his interpretation, identifying “Egypt” (as he does in many other places) as the “body” and the river Euphrates as “that truly great River” of Wisdom. That is, the quest for the promised land begins in Egypt, the body, and ends with the Euphrates, the creative Power:

Then he continues, “from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates”. Here he shows how it stands with the perfected. Their perfecting begins with the body and senses and the parts which serve as organs, without which we cannot live, since they are needed for our training while in the life of the body. It ends in the attainment of the Wisdom of God, that truly great River, brimming over with joy and gladness and all other blessings.

Philo Judaeus, Who is the Heir of Divine Things 62, PCW4 pp.444–47