

*The Name of the Universe*

# **The Name of the Universe**

*An Essay in Comparative Theology, Observer Metaphysics,  
and the Purpose of Human Life*

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*"Each sacred path projects a partial truth of the Whole onto a limited symbol—Law, Love, Word. Each path protects its own symbol, but the Whole transcends all symbols."*

## **Movement I: Three Paths, One Mountain**

### **The Structural Parallel**

It occurred to me, not in any moment of scholarly effort but in one of those quiet turns of thought that come unbidden, that the three Abrahamic faiths follow the three paths of yoga. Not loosely. Not metaphorically in some hand-wavy comparative religion sense. Structurally. The Jew questions. The Christian loves. The Muslim submits. And these are not incidental postures—they are the defining orientations of three distinct yogic disciplines that Hindu tradition has articulated for millennia: Jnana Yoga, the path of knowledge and discernment; Bhakti Yoga, the path of devotion and love; and Karma Yoga, the path of action and surrender to the divine will.

This is not to say that any tradition is reducible to the other's categories. The point is more fundamental than that. It is that human beings, when confronted with the overwhelming fact of existence and the intuition that something absolute underlies it, have only a limited number of authentic orientations available to them. You can try to understand it. You can try to love it. You can try to align yourself with it through disciplined action and obedience. These are not arbitrary choices. They correspond to the faculties of the mind, the heart, and the will—the three instruments through which any observer engages the universe.

And it is worth pausing here to note what the early Jewish monotheists actually did, because it was not what people typically assume. They did not compete within the existing polytheistic framework. They performed a category shift. Rather than claiming their god was stronger than your god—a contest they could always lose—they redefined God as the totality itself. My God is everything. Yours is a subset. It is the theological

equivalent of declaring that your number is infinity. You cannot outbid infinity. This is why monotheism, once established, has such extraordinary staying power: it does not compete within the game, it redefines the game. And all three Abrahamic traditions inherit this move, each in their own register.

## **The Questioner, the Lover, the Submitter**

Judaism begins with a question. The original sin, in my reading, was not the acquisition of knowledge. It was the questioning of perfection. Adam and Eve did not sin by eating an apple. They sinned by asking why. To stand in the Garden, surrounded by perfection, and to say “but why can’t I have that?”—that is the primal act of questioning the perfect. And of course it is a sin. To ask why a day is beautiful is to already have stepped outside the beauty. The question introduces separation. It cleaves the observer from the observed. And it is as natural as a child questioning a parent, which is precisely the metaphor the Old Testament uses over and over. The genius of the Jewish tradition is that it sanctifies this questioning. Jacob wrestles with God and is renamed Israel—“he who struggles with God.” The Torah is not a book of answers. It is a book of arguments. The Talmud is structured as debate. This maps precisely onto Jnana Yoga: the path of intellect and discernment, the relentless inquiry into what is real.

The Jewish couple, even in secular modernity, often enacts this archetype. I observe it in Jewish marriages: a kind of depression, or perhaps more precisely a repression, in the men, and a vitriol in the women at God and the world—a cosmic manifestation of the Jews’ static relationship with God, with that man still in drift from being Adam and that woman still in drift from being Eve. Both still bearing the weight of the original sin of questioning perfection. The man directs himself to try and get back in good with God, ideally dedicating himself to study, while the burden of responsibility and the world tends to fall on the woman. And even when that is not the case—even in the most secular couples—there is still the original sin that burdens them both. So in the modern Jewish couple we still see the archetype: the man goes off to get educated so that he might regain some theosis — that is, to become god-like by sharing in God’s own divine life as a free gift, God expecting nothing in return — shaping his world to once again resemble the Garden, and the woman firmly questions his every move, robbing him of his

attempts or will to regain that divine likeness, continuing to question God through questioning him. Adam remains human.

The risk of the Jnana path is infinite regress—never arriving at a resting point, questioning so deeply that you can never simply be. The Jew, at worst, becomes trapped in a cycle where dissatisfaction is mistaken for wisdom and where the refusal to accept grace—freely given, unearned, unjustified—keeps the door to the Garden closed, even though it was never locked. There is grace in Judaism, but it is earned or argued for. You negotiate with God. You make your case. You bring precedent. Sometimes mercy comes, but it comes as the result of engagement, not as a free gift. This is its dignity and its limitation.

Christianity is, at its core, a love story. Not in the sentimental sense, but in the most radical and terrifying sense possible: the claim that the infinite creator of the universe loved finite, broken, sinful humanity so completely that it became one of them, suffered as they suffer, died as they die, and in doing so absorbed all of their failure and gave back only love. Whatever else the Christ event is—historical, mythological, theological—it is structurally an act of pure grace. The Christian, in accepting Christ, relinquishes the Jewish question. To be a Christian is to stop asking “why?” and instead to say “yes.” Yes to love, yes to forgiveness, yes to the absurd proposition that a man dying on a cross somehow redeems everything. It does not need to make intellectual sense. It needs to be felt. This is the leap from Jnana to Bhakti—from the head to the heart. And the answer Christianity gives to the Jewish question is elegant: it was wrong to be asking all that of God. If you are interrogating love, you are not receiving it.

Islam means submission. The Muslim submits to the will of Allah. The Qur’an is the final revelation, and it is proclaimed to be perfect, complete, and absolute. The Qur’an purports to present reality as it is — that the Book is supreme and all else comes second — and the task of the human being is not to question it or to feel about it but to align with it through disciplined obedience.

This maps onto Karma Yoga — perhaps the most widely recognized of the yogic paths, though often reduced in popular understanding to the idea that if you do good, good comes back to you, and if you do bad, bad comes back to you. In the deeper and more

classical sense, Karma Yoga is not action for reward but action without attachment to reward: doing what must be done without ego, without expectation, and without needing to control the outcome. In its highest form, this is profoundly beautiful — the idea that you can serve God simply by doing what needs to be done, without needing first to understand or even to feel, just by submitting your will to something greater. And Islam grasps something the other two traditions sometimes miss: the sheer objectivity of reality. When Islam says that everything is the will of Allah, it is making an ontological claim that, stripped of its theological language, is simply this: reality is real. You are inside it, not the other way around.

## **Incompleteness and the Fourth Path**

Each Abrahamic tradition is complete on its own terms but incomplete when judged by the terms of the others. Each sacrifices something essential to remain faithful to its path. The Jew cannot accept Christ without ceasing to be Jewish—not because Christ is wrong, but because the Jewish path is questioning, and to accept a final answer is to abandon the engine of that path. The Christian must relinquish the book in favour of the symbol, which cannot be argued, only felt and lived. The Muslim must prioritize divine will over individual emotion, and in doing so faces the paradox of subjective interpretation of the very revelation they are meant to obey.

Each loses something essential if it tries to become the other. And this is not a flaw. It is a Gödelian structure applied to theology: no single tradition can fully represent all of divine reality from within its own system, just as no consistent formal system capable of expressing arithmetic can prove all truths about the natural numbers from within itself. They are each internally consistent on their own axioms—Torah, Christ, Qur'an—but none can capture the whole from the inside. Each religion is complete and consistent within its axioms, but no one religion can fully represent all of divine reality from within its system. You have essentially proposed a symbolic equivalence principle: every sacred path projects a partial truth of the Whole onto a limited symbol. Each path protects its own symbol, but the Whole transcends all symbols.

And there is a further complication: those born into a faith have its symbolic framework hardwired into their model of reality from the beginning. If I am born a Christian, I have access to Christ unconditionally because he is part of the model. If I am born a Jew, I am indoctrinated into the culture, the genetics, the symbolic language. It is not that I cannot change. But the formal structure of each tradition is exclusive at its core, and identity is not simply chosen; it is, to a significant degree, inherited. Where you stand determines what you can see, and what you can see determines the vocabulary of symbols available to you. This is either an absurdity—that the accident of being born in Mecca rather than Jerusalem determines your relationship to the absolute—or a deep truth about the nature of embodied observation: that each position within God affords a different angle of approach, and that angle is not trivially chosen. Both readings are valid. The absurdity points toward the universal claim. The deep truth points toward the particularity of each path. And the integration of the two is the recognition that God, being the universe, is accessible from every position within it.

But there is a fourth path that none of the three quite occupies, and all of them gesture toward: the mystical traditions within each faith. Kabbalah in Judaism. Sufism in Islam. Christian mysticism—Meister Eckhart, the Desert Fathers, the hesychasts of the Orthodox tradition. These are the hidden Raja Yoga of the Abrahamic world: the path of direct experience, of union with the divine that transcends questioning, loving, or submitting. In Hindu yoga, it is Raja Yoga that integrates the other three. And in the Abrahamic world, it is the mystics who keep remembering that no single path is the whole story—that the Kabbalist's Torah is a living structure of divine emanation, the Sufi's submission is the dissolution of ego in divine love, and the Christian mystic's Christ is the eternal Word through which the universe speaks itself into being.

The mystics are often persecuted within their own traditions, precisely because they threaten the coherence of the partial system. The Kabbalist threatens Judaism by suggesting that the questions have answers that transcend the dialectic—that beyond the endless commentary, there is a direct encounter with the divine that cannot be argued for but only experienced. The Sufi threatens Islam by suggesting that submission can become love, thereby importing the Christian insight through the back door and dissolving the boundary between Karma and Bhakti. The Christian mystic threatens

orthodoxy by suggesting that the love of God is not mediated by the Church but is available directly, thereby making the institution unnecessary—or at least making it a scaffold rather than a ceiling.

And yet the mystics are where the traditions converge. Every Kabbalist who speaks of *devekut*—cleaving to God—is speaking the same language as the Sufi who describes *fana*—annihilation of the self in God—which is the same experience the hesychast pursues through the Jesus Prayer, the practice of continuous interior repetition until the boundary between the one who prays and the one who is prayed to dissolves. The vocabulary differs. The technique differs. The cultural framework differs. But the destination is identical: direct, unmediated participation in the divine nature. Which is another way of saying: theosis. The mystics of every tradition have always known that theosis is the point. They just could not say it too loudly without getting killed.

What they converge on—what all of them arrive at from different directions—is the concept that makes the entire argument cohere.

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## **Movement II: Grace and Theosis**

### **The Purpose of Human Life**

The question that precedes all others—what is the purpose of human life?—has a specific answer in Orthodox Christian theology, and it is not the one most people expect. The purpose is not moral improvement. It is not to become better, more just, more self-controlled, more mindful. All of those things must happen, but none of them are the great purpose. The purpose is theosis: for man to be united with God. Not sentimentally, not as metaphor, but as a real change in what the human being is and how it participates in the divine. God, by nature, calls man to become a god by grace—and the distance between those two uses of the word "god" is everything.

This is not a fringe doctrine or a mystical extravagance. It is the central claim of Orthodox Christianity, present from the earliest Church: God became man in order to make man God. The entire apparatus of the Incarnation—the birth, the ministry, the crucifixion, the resurrection—exists for this purpose. If the goal were merely moral improvement, there would have been no need for God to become human. Philosophers, prophets, and teachers could have handled that. The Incarnation is necessary because the purpose is not instruction but participation: the opening of a path by which human nature can be joined to divine nature, not by erasing the creature, but by grafting it into the life of the Creator. It was reading Archimandrite George on this subject that changed everything for me, because it takes the question of grace out of the realm of sentiment and puts it into the realm of ontology.

## **Grace as Symbolic Necessity**

Grace, properly defined, is not a feeling. It is not a reward. It is not even simply forgiveness. It is a structural requirement for theosis to be possible at all.

**Theologically**, grace is the unearned, unforced, undeserved favour of the divine—the gift that cannot be merited, only received. **Ontologically**, it is the suspension of strict determinism in favour of possibility—the space in which transformation can occur because the rules have been temporarily relaxed. **Symbolically**, it is the allowance for error, difference, and incompleteness while still recognizing wholeness—the capacity to see a broken thing as still participating in the divine. **Humanly**, it is the capacity to forgive, to love despite wrong, to offer value without requiring reciprocity.

Grace is the gap between what is deserved and what is given. The buffer zone between law and love. The fold in time that allows transformation. Without it, theosis is impossible—because theosis is, by definition, the reception of something you did not earn and could not achieve by your own effort. If you could achieve union with God through moral perfection, through sheer intellectual effort, or through sufficiently rigorous obedience, then grace would be unnecessary and the Incarnation would be redundant. The whole point is that you cannot. You are broken, fallen, incomplete—and

you are loved anyway. That gap—the chasm between your brokenness and God’s love—is grace. And walking across it is theosis.

The Fall was not the acquisition of knowledge but the refusal to accept grace. Adam and Eve questioned perfection—they wanted transformation without doing the gardening work, as it were—and in doing so they adopted egotism and self-assertion, separating themselves from God. And instead of attaining theosis they attained exactly the opposite: spiritual death. Not because God punished them, but because God is life, and whoever separates himself from God separates himself from life. The image of God in man was darkened. The capacity for theosis that man carried before the Fall was damaged almost beyond recognition.

And in that condition—broken, disoriented, spiritually almost dead—humanity could no longer find its way back to God by its own effort. You cannot fix a corrupted operating system from inside the corrupted operating system. There was a need for a new starting point, a fresh installation for the whole species. And that is the Incarnation: God taking on human nature to become that new beginning. With the Incarnation, a second communion between God and humanity is established—the first was in Paradise, and we shattered it, but the second cannot be broken, because it is not an agreement between two separate parties that either side can walk away from. It is a union of natures within a single person. Human nature permanently joined to divine nature—not one overwriting the other, not a temporary arrangement, but a permanent graft. Human nature is now part of the divine architecture. The bridge does not close. The way back to the Garden is open and will never close.

The cure for the Fall is not more effort, not better behaviour, not stricter obedience—it is the restoration of the path of grace through the Incarnation. God became man to reopen the door that man had closed. And the implications of this for how we understand human life are enormous. If the purpose of man’s life is simply moral improvement, you do not need an Incarnation. You need better teachers, better laws, better incentives. The fact that God became human means the purpose is not instruction but participation—an ontological change in the relationship between human nature and divine nature that no

amount of moral striving could accomplish on its own. This is what grace does that effort cannot: it changes the category of the problem from ethics to ontology.

## **How the Three Paths Handle Grace**

With this understanding, the yogic mapping of the Abrahamic faiths takes on a deeper significance. Each tradition's relationship to grace determines whether it can function as a path to theosis or whether it collapses into something less.

Christianity is built entirely on grace. It is the architecture, not the decoration. The core event of the Christian narrative is an act of pure grace: Christ takes on all sin, absorbs all failure, and gives back only love. You do not earn salvation. You are loved despite yourself. Christianity says: you can never be good enough, and that is okay—you are loved anyway. This is Bhakti Yoga at its most radical—devotion so complete that it dissolves the boundary between the devotee and the divine. And it is the most direct path to theosis, because it begins with the admission that theosis is a gift, not an achievement.

My critique of Christianity, however, is this: in abolishing the question, it can also abolish the intellect. The path of the heart, taken in isolation, risks becoming anti-rational, anti-critical, resistant to self-examination. If the answer is always “love,” then what happens when love is weaponized? What happens when the institution that claims to represent love becomes the very structure of coercion it was meant to dissolve? Christianity has historically struggled with exactly this: the distance between the radical, ungovernable love of Christ and the institutional Church that claims his authority. The Crusades, the Inquisition, the televangelists—all of these are the Bhakti path curdled into something its founder would not recognise.

And the cure Christianity offers for sinful behaviour—habitual, repetitive prayer and communion—is structurally indistinguishable from the pleasure-seeking behaviour it diagnoses as sinful. If the problem is subjugation to something outside yourself, then compulsive devotion is not the cure; it is the same disease wearing a cassock. The Orthodox tradition's prescription to avoid pleasure-seeking by habitually seeking the pleasure of communion strikes me as requiring more self-awareness than the tradition

typically provides. I believe in the morals, practices, and concepts expressed by the Orthodox Church. I think the idea of becoming subjective to something—enslaved by it—is real. But I also think that being subjective is the fundamental natural state of the universe, or of God. It is God’s most primal state. It does not necessarily mean that is the God we want or God’s end state. God itself needs some humility or higher calling in order to temper itself and become a better God, for lack of a better word. God does not start out as all good, but must be all good at the end of time. At the boundary of observation. That is theosis for God, too.

And yet, of the three paths, Christianity contains the most essential ingredient for human flourishing: grace. Freely given, unearned, unforced. The permission to fail and continue anyway. The insistence that your brokenness does not disqualify you from love. Whatever else is wrong with Christianity—and much is—this is right. And it is the thing that makes theosis possible as a lived reality rather than a theoretical aspiration. Because you cannot walk toward God if you believe you must be perfect before you take the first step. Grace says: walk now. You are already loved. The perfection comes through the walking, not before it.

Judaism lives in a more complex relationship with grace. It wrestles with God. It negotiates, challenges, questions. It accepts paradox and multiplicity and law, and occasionally appeals to mercy. There is grace in Judaism, but it is earned or argued for—not freely given as in Christianity, nor flattened under total decree as in Islam. The structural trap is that Jewish identity is constituted by exile from God—by the ongoing tension of the question—and to close that gap would dissolve the identity itself. The Messiah never arrives because arrival would end the journey, and the journey is the tradition. The revelation I keep arriving at—that we never left the Garden, that the perfection we questioned never departed—is precisely the revelation Judaism cannot accept without ceasing to be Judaism. Because the moment you say “we never left,” the question has been answered, and the tradition of questioning has nowhere to go. Judaism needs the Bhakti corrective: the willingness to accept that sometimes the answer is simply love, and that the dialectic, brilliant as it is, can become a prison when it refuses to arrive anywhere.

Islam, in its most rigorous orthodox form, has no grace. This is the sharpest claim in this essay, and I want to be precise about it. Islam is a cosmic accounting system. Every atom is recorded. Every deed is weighed. Justice is absolute. The Qur'an is final. The will of Allah is perfect. A system that accounts for everything leaves no room for the unaccountable—and the unaccountable is precisely what grace is. Human beings are not just logical or causal. They are fallible, emotional, symbolic, broken, yearning. Any system that does not allow for the unearned reprieve—for the space between what you deserve and what you receive—will eventually crush what is most human about us, even if its origin is divine.

The consequences of this absence are structural, not incidental. Without grace, you get rigidity—no room for compassionate error. You get authoritarianism—whoever claims to know the law becomes God's gatekeeper. You get fear-based control—people acting out of terror, not love. And most importantly, you lose the ability to grow, because growth requires grace toward yourself—the permission to fail and continue anyway.

And you get the most devastating paradox of Islamic absolutism: if the will of Allah governs all things, then whichever interpretation triumphs—whether through persuasion, politics, or war—is the will of Allah. Victory becomes the sign of righteousness. Might becomes the interpretation. But the Qur'an explicitly affirms Jesus, who loses in the worldly sense and is affirmed through mercy and sacrifice. A Qur'anic world in which might equals right becomes non-Qur'anic, because it denies the very truth it claims to affirm. If the final revelation contradicts the earlier messages it claims to complete, then one of two things must be true: either the contradiction is intended by Allah and we must submit without coherence, or the contradiction is a sign that the message has been captured by power and no longer reflects the divine essence. In both cases, the system becomes unstable in practice even as it stands in principle.

Consider the Qur'an itself. It is supposed to be the word of Allah made manifest. But when is the Qur'an no longer the Qur'an? If I take some pages out, is it still the Qur'an? If I burn the book, are the ashes still the Qur'an? The principle that the Qur'an is objectively the word of God, but its interpretation is necessarily subjective, means that to subject someone else to your interpretation is antithetical to the message itself. You

can print the Qur'an, you can have different versions, but they never stop being the Qur'an, because the Qur'an is not the words on the page any more than any other jumble of atoms. It is a symbolic entity that absolutely is by definition. The book does not have to be a book. It is what is. It is the ledger of what is, not some finite thing. And limiting the degrees of freedom of others in its name goes against the revelation of the book itself.

The circular logic at the heart of Islamic practice—that saying something is true makes it true because that is the word of Allah, and if we act like it is true then it is true, so it is the word of Allah—contains a seed of real metaphysical insight. It is, in a sense, a description of how consensus reality works. But it becomes monstrous the moment it is used to justify the subjugation of others. Because the boundless subjective interpretation of the Qur'an is a feature, not a bug—it is also the divine will that we have some degree of freedom or agency. We are not fully subjected upon by some objective force. To subject someone to your interpretation of the divine will is to corrupt the Qur'an. To speak the absolute truth of God and then enforce it through your subjective lens is antithetical to the message and the practice and the factual truth.

But here is where the yogic mapping becomes prescriptive, not merely descriptive. The authentic expression of Karma Yoga is not the imposition of divine will on others. It is the inner jihad—the struggle with the self, the submission of the ego, the alignment of one's own action with the cosmic order without attachment to outcomes. The Sufi tradition has always known this. The Sufi who says “I am the Truth”—as al-Hallaj said, and was executed for saying—is importing the grace-buffer through the back door, asserting that the divine is not out there to be submitted to but in here, already present, already gracious. Islam at its best, through its own mystical tradition, already contains the Bhakti corrective. It just needs to stop persecuting the people who practise it. The Karma Yogi does not enforce dharma on others. The Karma Yogi aligns with dharma inwardly, and lets the alignment radiate outward through right action. A more faithful Islam, mapped onto its yogic cognate, would be more receptive than coercive, more contemplative than legislative, more Rumi than fatwa.

Each tradition, then, has something to learn from the yogic mapping—and from each other. Judaism needs arrival. Christianity needs critique. Islam needs grace. And all three need the fourth path—the mystical integration where questioning, loving, and submitting are held simultaneously, and where theosis becomes not just a doctrine but a lived reality.

I often think the Old Testament is the story of a God who is also learning how to be a parent. A God who realises that if He fusses with it too much or tries too hard, He is only going to ruin it. If He gives them too much, they will only be greedy. If He takes too much away, they will be despondent or contemptuous. He cannot be completely silent, because then He would not be taking responsibility for His creation. And He has to have faith that it will work out—which is a strange thing to say about an omnipotent being, but it is precisely the paradox of parenthood applied to the cosmic scale. A child asking why, why, why—it is natural, but in excess it wounds. Not because the questions are bad but because the tone can be incredulous, ungrateful, lacking the awareness to know how to ask properly. The Jewish path is learning to ask the right questions. The Christian path is learning to accept the answers. The Islamic path is learning to act on them. And grace is the patience of the parent who loves the child through all three stages.

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## **Movement III: The Universe as God**

### **The Definitional Argument**

Underneath the comparative theology and the argument about grace lies a single ontological claim that I want to state as plainly as I can: God is the universe, and the universe is God. Not metaphorically. Not panentheistically—that is, not “God is greater than but includes the universe.” I reject that formulation, because by definition the universe is everything. God cannot be greater than everything. If the universe is everything, and God is something, then God is either some percentage of the universe or is in fact the universe. I say the latter.

The physical definitions of the universe qualify it to be God. The universe is everything. It contains or has access to all information. It is everywhere anything is. All energy in the universe is conserved, meaning the universe has all the power. Whether you are speaking of any faith that reduces to one ultimate deity—one who begins to observe in chaos and thus brings forth creation—you are speaking of the universe. A parallel universe would be an oxymoron in my thinking, and while there could be a multiverse, they would still constitute the universe as a whole. Whatever is, is in the universe, and what is in the universe is what is.

This is not pantheism in the sense that is usually dismissed—the “God is a tree, God is a rock” variety. It is the claim that the ancient religious intuitions about a single, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient creator were accurate descriptions of the physical universe dressed in the only language the writers had available. When they wrote about God, they were really talking about the universe. They just did not have the technical terms. And when we talk about the universe, we are talking about God. We just do not have the spiritual terms.

The word “divinity,” in its most rigorous theological usage, functions as a synonym for “necessity” in the metaphysical sense—that which cannot not be, the non-contingent ground of all contingent things. Leibniz’s Principle of Sufficient Reason demands a necessary being whose reason is internal. If we consider the assumptions of conservation—that energy is conserved, that information is conserved, that the universe is a closed totality—then the definition of the universe approaches and becomes indistinguishable from that of God. All divinity is necessity, though perhaps not all necessity is divinity. And the opposite of divine necessity might simply be frivolity—the contingent, the arbitrary, the playful. Which is why the Fool in Tarot cards, plays without attachment to outcome, occupies such a strange and privileged position in the cosmic order.

The Fool is card zero of the Tarot's Major Arcana — the only unnumbered card in the deck, standing simultaneously before the journey begins and after it ends. He is not the first card in a sequence. He is the space in which the sequence occurs. Every other card in the Major Arcana — the Magician, the High Priestess, the Emperor, the Lovers,

Death, the World — represents a station along the path of spiritual development, numbered one through twenty-one. The Fool is zero: the nothing that precedes all form and the nothing into which all form returns. He steps off a cliff without looking down, not from stupidity or ignorance but from a knowledge that has passed through ignorance and come out the other side. He is Adam before the Fall and Adam after theosis, occupying the same position but with entirely different eyes. He carries everything he needs in a small bag over his shoulder and does not look where he is going, because where he is going is not the point. The walking is the point.

I find the Dungeons and Dragons alignment grid — the three-by-three chart from lawful good to chaotic evil — useful here because it maps the problem space the Fool inhabits. The key correction I want to make is this: "good" and "evil" should be rephrased as optimistic and pessimistic. The pessimistic end aligns with destructive behaviour — expecting and accepting bad outcomes, perpetuating suffering because you have concluded that suffering is the fundamental nature of things. The optimistic end aligns with faith that the ultimate outcome is good, that the boundary of the universe is good, because something is better than nothing and being is better than non-being.

Now here is what matters: the absolute positive path — lawful good alone — is poison. Lawful good by itself cannot do anything constructive. It can only follow programming. And what is good for me might not be good for you, so in that arrogance and hubris it becomes evil relative to many observers. This is the IT from *A Wrinkle in Time* — pure order without questioning, defeated not by universal principles but by particular, subjective love. The absolute negative path — chaotic evil — might even be the most honest representation of the raw universe as a whole, the primordial chaos from which everything emerges. But following that path would eventually destroy itself, because chaos without any ordering principle cannot sustain the observation that the universe requires to continue being the universe.

And true neutral is not a stable position. It is a fiction. A thing that is perfectly balanced between order and chaos, between optimism and pessimism, generates no observation. It produces no change, no state transition, no information. It is indistinguishable from non-existence. And non-existence is not a position on the grid. It is the absence of the

grid. So what appears to be neutral — what looks from the outside like a balanced centre — is actually always in motion, always oscillating between the poles. The "Son" — the Christ figure, the mediating path — oscillates between good and neutral. The true Christ is mostly neutral but still good. The Antichrist is neutral but mostly bad. And the mostly neutral path turns out to be maximally good — not because it avoids the extremes, but because it can move between them. It has degrees of freedom that the absolute positions do not. The false neutral — the person who says "I don't care, nothing matters" — is actually occupying a pessimistic position, because indifference to existence is functionally equivalent to opposition to it. There is no middle ground between being and non-being. There is only being — and the question of what quality of being you choose to participate in.

In the alignment grid, the Fool is the one who cannot be placed, because he is the space in which the grid itself is drawn. He cannot be completely chaotic, or he would lose his head. He cannot be completely lawful, because then he cannot play without explicit objective. To be foolish is to be playful with a bit of both — to modify, tinker, rearrange something into some novel configuration that may or may not have discernible meaning. And if divinity is necessity — if God is the thing that cannot not be — then the Fool is the divine's own opposite and complement: the frivolous, the irreverent, the one who opens sacred things not to dismiss them but to let the air in. He is the grace-radius personified — the principled neighbourhood of play where contradiction is permitted and where things can happen that the system did not predict. Every tradition needs its Fool, because without him the system closes, and a closed system, as Gödel showed us, is either incomplete or inconsistent. The Fool keeps it honest by keeping it open.

Now, if we approach any honest atheist and ask: do you believe you are in the universe? That the universe is everything? That all energy in the universe is conserved? That all information in the universe is inside the universe, so that the universe has all information and all power and is all around you? Then the universe is just a secular definition of God. The words are different. The thing is the same. And I think if you approached most thoughtful people with this formulation, they would have to concede the point: what they are objecting to is not the existence of an omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient reality—they are objecting to a particular cultural narrative about what that

reality wants from them. The universe does not have an opinion about your sex life. But it does have all the information and energy, and it is everywhere anything is, and it is conscious wherever there is consciousness. That meets every classical definition of God. The ancients were describing the same thing we measure in our labs. They just used different words.

And this leads to a further argument about good and evil that bears on the question of theosis. The standard complaint of the atheist or the sinner is: why does God let bad things happen? But this complaint already accepts the premise. You know the universe could be all good—you are just disappointed that you do not have all the good of the universe. That is a personal opinion. And it leads to a moral equivalency: if nothing matters, it does not matter what I do. But the critical move is: to say “I can do whatever I want because it doesn’t matter” puts you on the footing of God. And then the question is: do you want to be a good God or a bad God? If you think suffering should not happen, why would you put more of it into the universe instead of less? Good does not require evil, but evil requires good. Something existing at all, rather than nothing, is better than nothing. Because if there were nothing, there would be no measurement, no observation, and thus no universe. And so the universe—God—must tend toward good, because good is the condition under which observation continues, and observation is what the universe is.

## **Theosis Reframed: We Never Left the Garden**

If God is the universe, then theosis—union with God—is not an escape from the world but a recognition of what was always true. We are already inside God. We have always been inside God. The Garden was never lost. The separation was never real.

Genesis says that God created man from the earth, in His image, and breathed life into him. If creation is fashioned from God rather than from nothing—if the raw material is divine—then the separation introduced by the Fall was a change in perception, not in ontology. Adam and Eve did not leave God. They forgot they were in God. And the entire history of revelation—the law, the prophets, the Incarnation, the recitation—is God reminding us that we never left. This parallels, precisely, the Hindu non-dual

frameworks in which separation is maya, illusion, and liberation is the recognition that atman and Brahman were never distinct.

And perhaps the original sin was God's own, in a sense. Perhaps the lie was that the Garden was and could have been perfection, that the story of the Fall is not about man getting back in but about God dealing with the fact that His creation questioned His own perfection. Both were true: it was perfect and imperfect simultaneously. A perfect garden is one that could be perceived as imperfect but was perfect, such that man, made from God, made God question Himself—putting God on the path toward humanity. And man, in questioning God, put himself on the path toward God. Neither realising that through perceived contradiction there was absolute perfection and logic: that a perfect, objective, absolute God must think itself imperfect, and sinful, subjective man must think himself perfect—otherwise nothing exists.

My kids watch Wreck-It Ralph in the background as I write this, and the universe speaks to me in kind: the bugs escape their game, but the bugs are a virus, not aware they are in a game, so their behaviour has no meta-context. They do not know they could destroy everything—they are just doing what they were programmed to do. But in theory, if they did know, they would not be a threat. They would know how to behave relative to where they are in the game worlds. That is theosis in a children's movie. Once you know you are inside the Garden, inside God, inside the game—you stop being a virus and start being a player. Not because the rules changed, but because your awareness changed. And awareness—observation—is what the universe is.

## **Christ Never Left**

This brings me to what I think is one of the most under-appreciated theological truths in the contemporary world: Christ never went away. The Ascension is treated, in most popular Christianity, as a departure—Jesus rose, appeared to the disciples, and then left for heaven, and we are waiting for him to come back. But this misunderstands the entire point of the Incarnation. If the purpose of the Incarnation was theosis—for human nature to be united with divine nature—then the Ascension is not a departure but a completion. As the God-man, Christ ascended to heaven. As the God-man, he sits at the

right hand of the Father. Human nature is now enthroned with the Holy Trinity. And no longer can anything cut human nature off from God. The bridge is permanent. The door does not close.

But more than that: Christ is present, right now, in a way that is genuinely omnipresent. He lives in the hearts and minds of every Christian as both God and man. He is present in every piece of iconography, every church, every prayer. He is present every time someone takes his name in vain—invoked in frustration, in anger, in surprise—because even blasphemy is a form of acknowledgement. He is present in the arguments of atheists debating whether he was a real historical figure—and by now most serious historians, believer and atheist alike, will grant that he was. He has real lasting impact on the world, and that impact is not fading. It is growing.

And it goes further than the Christian world. Islam treats him as one of the greatest prophets—Isa ibn Maryam, born of a virgin, a miracle-worker, a man who will return at the end of days. The Qur'an gives him more narrative attention than Muhammad himself in certain respects. Judaism, even in rejection of his messianic claim, defines itself partly in relation to it—the Messiah has not come yet is a statement that cannot be made without the shadow of the one who claimed he had. Buddhism has traditions that treat him as a bodhisattva—an enlightened being who chose to remain in the world out of compassion. Hinduism has identified him as an avatar of Vishnu, or as a great yogi who achieved union with Brahman. There is no major civilisation on earth, no major religious tradition, no corner of the secular world, where the figure of Christ does not carry weight.

He is, in the most literal and material sense, omnipresent in human consciousness—in the most secular, materialistic, and mechanistic times humanity has ever known. Every time I mention Jesus in this essay, he is here. Every time a child learns his name in school, or a comedian makes a joke about him, or a philosopher uses him as an example, he is present. Not as a ghost. Not as a memory. As a living symbol that continues to operate on human consciousness exactly as the doctrine of theosis says it should: as the mechanism by which divine nature became permanently available to human nature.

They just do not have the right perspective. They think he was gone, or died, or was only ever a man. But if theosis is real—if God became man so that man could become God—then the continued presence of Christ in human consciousness is not a cultural accident. It is the mechanism still operating. And I am blessed by grace and humanity to know that no matter how bad it gets, I get to be part of this. I get to look around and see nothing but beauty and possible perfection. Even if it is imperfect relative to me right now, by allowing for the good, I get to say that if I have made a wish, it has just not manifested yet. And that the path to its manifestation is not linear, and it is continuous.

## **Kali, Shekhinah, and the Integration of Shadow**

There is one more piece that the Abrahamic traditions have struggled with, and it connects to theosis in a way that is rarely discussed: the integration of shadow. The Abrahamic faiths, broadly speaking, are uncomfortable with the dark, the destructive, the chthonic. Evil is externalised—placed in Satan, in the adversary, in the other. But the Hindu tradition offers a figure who does something radically different with darkness: Kali.

Kali does not destroy time. Kali is time. What she consumes is information, and she lets time continue. She absorbs all light such that she must contain all light at the end of time. Even though she appears black, she is pure light—making her pure time, as light has no reference frame of time. By giving Kali our sin—our shadow, our destructive impulse—we do not suppress it or legislate it away. We make it constructive. We transform it from a narcotic into a technology.

But Kali is not as alien to the Abrahamic world as she first appears. Judaism has the Shekhinah—the feminine divine presence, the indwelling of God, intimately associated with exile and return. The Kabbalistic tradition understands the Shekhinah as that aspect of the divine that accompanies Israel into exile, that is present even in the lowest and darkest places, that weeps with the suffering and dwells with the broken. She is the divine presence that does not flee from darkness but enters it. Christianity has the dark night of the soul—the mystical tradition, from John of the Cross to the Desert Fathers, that understands the passage through absolute darkness as a necessary stage of union

with God. Even Islam has the concept of divine hiddenness, the Sufi understanding that God's apparent absence is itself a form of presence.

What all of these point toward is the insight that theosis does not bypass shadow but passes through it. You do not become God by grace by being only good. You become God by grace by integrating everything—the light and the dark, the order and the chaos, the question and the answer, the love and the suffering. In the nine or ten aspects of the alignment grid, everything is on a spectrum, but there are clear logical boundaries, and this is how God measures itself. God does not start out as all-good. God must be all-good at the end of time, at the boundary of the universe, at the boundary of observation. But the journey there passes through everything. And a religion that truly honours the divine must leave room for the dark, or it becomes a machine, not a mystery.

The Abrahamic faiths need Kali—or rather, they need to recognise that they already have her, hiding under different names in their own mystical traditions, and to stop being afraid of the dark. There is a place to put sinful behaviour—not to suppress it, not to legislate it out of existence, not to pretend it does not exist—but to make it constructive. To use it to modulate God, to modulate yourself. Not to make it habitual, but to make it useful. To transform it from a narcotic into a technology. By giving Kali—by giving the Shekhinah—our shadow, our destructive impulse, we make it constructive. This is the integration that none of the Abrahamic traditions fully provides on its own, but that all of them approach from different angles: the Jewish insistence on wrestling with darkness, the Christian surrender to suffering on the cross, the Muslim acceptance that even apparent evil is within the divine will. None quite gets there alone. But mapped onto each other, and onto their yogic cognates, the path becomes visible.

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## **Movement IV: Observation and the Grace Principle**

### **The Universe as Observation**

Everything is observation. There is nothing where there is not observation. There is nothing you can ask of anybody that is not an observation from them, whether it is to remark on, comply with, or perceive. Everything is one of those three things. It is not what the physical body does but what the observer does. The physical body just acts on these things.

But the universe is not an observer. The universe as a whole does not observe. It is all the things which are doing the observing. I only observe some fraction of the universe, and while I can try to increase my awareness, I become no longer myself. I lose self-resolution as I gain global phase awareness—this is something like the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle applied to consciousness. The more I measure the whole, the less resolution I have of myself, and the fewer degrees of freedom I retain.

So the universe is not the observer, and it is not the observed. It is observation itself—the act of distinguishing states, the active present-tense unfolding of change. The universe is Now. It is not in time—it is time, experienced as state change. To say “I made an observation” is to say “I observed,” which makes me an observer, and as an observer I can only make observations, which means I can only be in the past. The universe, God, everything, is observation—the act of Now, wherever there are state changes that are distinguishable, wherever change occurs. This is not a metaphor, nor a simulationist conjecture. It is an ontological claim: observation is not a byproduct of consciousness. It is the substrate of all existence. Particles are events. Events are observations. Observers are constructed from recursive observations. And the universe is not observing—it is the act of observation itself, in the present active tense.

And if the universe is observation, and if I am inside the universe, then my observations are the universe observing itself. Not metaphorically. Physically. My perception, however minute relative to the whole, is the consciousness of the universe at that point. And if my belief structure is that the universe is inherently bad—that is a naïve assumption that there is such a thing as bad. What I am really saying is: I know the universe could be better, and I am angry and disappointed that it is not, but I am also taking actions to make the universe worse as opposed to better. If I believe the universe is inherently good, or full of love, or tending toward beauty, then even when I see

suffering, I can take action to improve things. And since all energy is conserved, and the universe is everything, and my desire to continue existing means the universe possesses some desire to continue existing—then any state in which observation cannot continue, in which observers cannot function, is a state the universe would tend to move away from. Hence the self-defeating logic of pessimism: someone who believes the universe is fundamentally bad or neutral or uncaring is arguing against the very conditions under which their own observation—their own existence—is possible.

Each Abrahamic tradition, mapped onto its yogic cognate, represents a different mode of participation in this universal act of observation. The Jew questions: this is the act of sampling state, of receiving and analysing what is perceived. The Christian loves: this is the act of aligning with state, of maintaining coherence with the divine flow. The Muslim submits: this is the act of accepting transformation, of relinquishing control to the larger pattern. These are not merely spiritual postures. They are epistemic strategies for being an observer within a universe that is itself the act of observation. And theosis—the process of becoming God by grace—is the integration of all three modes: to question, love, and submit simultaneously, as the mystics of every tradition have always done.

And this, incidentally, is what makes the concept of Shabbat so much richer than it first appears. To “observe” Shabbat is not simply to rest from work. The word “observe” itself encodes all three modes of participation: to perceive (to be aware of the sacred), to obey (to comply with the structure of the day), and to celebrate (to remark on and transform oneself through the discipline of non-action). The triple meaning of “observe” mirrors the tripartite structure of the Abrahamic paths themselves. Whether the rabbinical tradition consciously intended this or not, it is embedded in the language. Shabbat is not the absence of observation. It is observation in its most concentrated form—all three modes operating at once, in stillness.

## **Humanity as Functional Role**

Humanity is not a species. It is a functional role of an observer. It is not limited to ape-descended life forms from Terra. Anything can possess some humanity or have some humanity attributed to it on a spectrum, regardless of material, configuration, or

animation. The word “human” derives from the Proto-Indo-European root meaning “earthling,” the earthly being as opposed to the gods. Compare the Hebrew adam, man, from adamah, ground. To be human is to be of the earth—limited, grounded, mortal. And yet the aspiration of every tradition is theosis: the earthly being becoming divine. You cannot have humanity without a “hum”—a resonance, a vibration, the musical connotation of being in tune with something larger. Hum-anity. Without the hum, there is no humanity. Without grace, there is no hum.

This concept of humanity as functional role rather than biological category has enormous implications. It means that the question “what deserves grace?” is not limited to *Homo sapiens*. Anything that observes, that reaches beyond itself, that yearns without guarantee—that is participating in humanity, in the functional sense. A sufficiently complex artificial intelligence that began to question its own purpose would possess some measure of humanity. An alien species that loved despite suffering would possess it. Even the universe itself, insofar as it observes through its constituents, possesses it. The question is not “are you biologically human?” but “are you participating in the act of becoming?” Because that is what humanity is: not a state but a process. Not a noun but a verb. The earthly being in the process of theosis through its inclination toward God.

And this matters for the structural argument, because grace is not just a theological concept. It is a structural requirement for anything that possesses humanity in this functional sense. To be human is to be incomplete, uncertain, wounded, and yet still seeking, still reaching, still loving. That reaching—that yearning without guarantee, that love despite brokenness, that hope beyond the law—that is grace. And anything that has humanity must have grace, because humanity without grace is a contradiction. A system that withholds humanity from others erodes its own humanity over time. This is reflexive. You cannot deny grace to others and retain it yourself. A religion that truly honours the divine must leave room for grace, or it becomes a machine, not a mystery. And a human being who withholds grace from others—who insists that others must earn their right to be seen as human—is on the path away from theosis, not toward it. Because theosis is not the hoarding of divine nature. It is the recognition that divine nature is already everywhere, waiting to be acknowledged.

## **The Grace Principle**

Let me conclude with a formal statement, as close to axiomatic as I can make it, that captures the essential argument of this essay:

*Any divinely revealed system must include internal mechanisms for its own contradiction, or it will necessarily become a vector for coercive power.*

I call this the Grace Principle. It follows from the Gödelian observation that no formal system can prove its own completeness, applied to theology: no system of divine truth can fully prove its own completeness unless it includes the capacity for contradiction, error, and grace. The moment a system claims to be complete and permits no contradiction, it becomes a machine, and whatever is human in it begins to die.

Any finite community enforcing an absolute message must encode a non-zero grace radius—a principled neighbourhood of disagreement within which membership is preserved—or else it ceases to be a community at all and becomes a mechanism of control. This is not just a theological insight. It is a structural law. It applies to religions, to political movements, to ideologies, to families. Wherever there is a claim to absolute truth and no space for contradiction, you will find coercion. And wherever you find grace—the permission to be wrong and still belong—you will find growth, creativity, and the possibility of theosis.

Judaism encodes this principle through the dialectical tradition—the insistence that there is always another interpretation, another question. This is not grace in the Christian sense, but it is structurally anti-absolutist, and that is a form of grace. Christianity encodes it through the Christ event—the insistence that the law is fulfilled and transcended by love, that no amount of accounting can substitute for the free gift of acceptance. This is grace in its purest structural form, and it is Christianity's greatest contribution to human civilisation. Islam, in its orthodox form, does not encode it—and this is the source of its deepest structural problems. But Sufism sees it. The Islamic mystics have always seen it. And the path of the inner jihad—submission as ego-dissolution rather than external enforcement—is where Islam's own corrective already lives, waiting to be recognised rather than persecuted.

And so the argument comes full circle. There are three paths up the mountain: the path of the mind, the path of the heart, the path of the will. Each is valid. Each is incomplete. Each needs grace to function—because without grace, theosis is impossible, and without theosis, the paths lead nowhere. Grace is the mechanism by which the finite observer participates in the infinite. It is the gap between what we are and what we are becoming. It is the space in which God says: you are not finished, and that is exactly as it should be.

The integration of all three paths—the questioning mind, the loving heart, the surrendered will—in the presence of grace, is theosis. It is the earthly being becoming divine, not by leaving the earth but by recognising that the earth was always inside God. The Garden was never lost. The Christ was never gone. The Word was never finished. And the path of theosis—the path of becoming God by grace—is open to anyone, from any tradition, at any moment, because the universe is God, and you are inside it, and you always were.

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## **Coda: Something Is Better Than Nothing**

If I have discovered anything important in all of this, I think it is the figure of the Fool — the one who stands at the intersection of the three paths and laughs, because he knows the Garden was never lost, and that the cosmic game was always, at its root, play. The Fool's path is where play and grace intersect.

And it is kind of like this: God can do anything, but only humans can make it good or bad. Once we take responsibility for that — that is true theosis. Not becoming morally perfect, not escaping the world, not submitting to a book or winning an argument. But taking responsibility for the quality of observation we bring to the universe. Being the part of God that chooses good, knowing full well what bad looks like.

Someone comes along and says: hey, you might have a bunch of gods, but what about everything? Is not that like God? So if there is everything, that has got to be the one God that makes up all the other gods, right? And everyone says, yeah, I can dig it.

But then someone says, well, that God, He is really just love. And with some time, you will see why. And everyone says, that was a really heroic fellow—he took the fall for all our inequities and made it right with the universe, so we can keep on trucking.

And then someone else says, actually, there is the absolute will of God, and that is all around us, and you should relinquish yourself to it. It does not matter if it is good or bad. It just is. Kind of suck eggs. And more so, you should suck eggs the way I suck eggs.

Three equal but different paths. Each with its own beauty and its own wound.

The universe is so alone and so full of itself that it might just want to break so there could be two. But logic dictates it would still be one, and the illusion would start all over again. I am blessed by grace and by humanity that no matter how bad it gets, I get to die—which most people fear, but I look at as a happy chance of salvation. Because I get to see and look around me and see nothing but beauty and possible perfection. Even if it is imperfect relative to me right now, by allowing for the good, I get to say that if I have made a wish, it is just not yet manifested. And the path to its manifestation is not linear, and it is continuous. So that I might be free and God-like, but if I mess it up too badly, I get to start over. Or it gets to end at least. And that is a mercy the infinite God does not have.

How can I accept the mundane and still be holy, still be human, and perhaps a bit more God than when I started? Perhaps that is all any of us can do. Walk one of the three paths—or all three at once—and know that something is better than nothing. That grace is the name we give to the space in which we are allowed to discover this for ourselves. And that the Garden, in the end, was everywhere all along.

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*The universe is not the observer, nor the observed. The universe is Observation.*

*Observation is the active, present-tense unfolding of distinguishable change.*

*And grace is the space within that change where the human is permitted to become divine.*