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## Unsayng Law The Voice of Longing

### **Abstract**

The humble one prays for Justice. The cynic calls to him and says: "I see you pray everyday, but have you ever received a reply?". He halts his prayer and falls away, confused. In a troubled sleep a voice comes through a dream and asks "Why have you stopped praying?" -- "I have never received an answer". The dream voice says: "But your longing is the response you wait for. It is the longing that draws you into union with your beloved".

## Law & The Sacred: Unsayng Law The Voice of Longing

Richard Edwards

My heart could receive you  
if only it chose  
to turn toward the light  
as does the rose  
- Angelus Silesius

The humble one prays for Justice. The cynic calls to him and says: "I see you pray everyday, but have you ever received a reply?". He halts his prayer and falls away, confused. In a troubled sleep a voice comes through a dream and asks "Why have you stopped praying?" -- "I have never received an answer". The dream voice says: "But your longing is the response you wait for. It is the longing that draws you into union with your beloved".

The Christian of Cusa's *De Deo Abscondito* says of this ignorance of God, "It is because I do not know that I worship" (Nicholas of Cusa 1977). Such ignorance is not lack of any knowledge but is to be *in* God by the very hiddenness of the divine form. The revelation of this hiddenness, which constitutes for us the divine manifestation of justice, is the longing for that on which we wait. Justice must remain hidden to be worthy of our love and wonder. It is that which resides in us; called a "brilliant darkness of a hidden silence" by Pseudo-Dionysis (Wolters 1978:212). If we seek justice, if we have a purpose, we are not seeking justice at all. Our journey in life is to possess "the identical being and identical substance and nature" that is God (Meister Eckhart 1994: 139). As Paul said "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2: 20). We are perfected in the identical being of God but this is not the perfection of a subject:

If every medium were removed between myself and a wall, then I would be at the wall but not in it. But this is not the case with spiritual things, for with them one thing is always in another. That which receives is the same as that which is received, for it receives nothing other than itself. This is difficult. Whoever understands it has been preached to enough (Meister Eckhart 1977: 192).

### The Breath of Longing

If the soul could love God in its own special way, as a son loves a father, then the soul loves itself and not God. The son loves itself as a son, and the father as a father. This would be love with a personal nature and not the love that is in all things, the love of God. This love of which we speak is the love that comes before we are, for this love brings us into creation before creation, before the word. We might hear this as the echo; we are thrown into a world that is already speaking, we ourselves are the voice. Our substance is in the word even before the word. When I was before I was, I was with God. If we see this, then we see that within what we are is the very word that God seeks in herself. As Paul said: "God is my soul's new form wherein she is formless". This seeing is the "spark", the light of the soul that leads us to justice.

To speak and be spoken in a voice by which 'I am' requires breath, a breath that is the possibility to be, and yet does not determine what that being is. The breath always seeks to return from whence it came, yet it always comes of itself. This gift is given in compassion, it is received as life, and returned in a saying. It is never truly our own. Nor does it exist without us. As we each long for breath, that forgotten but always present longing, so too the breath longs to be spoken, to return from where it comes. This comes as neither the breath of immanence nor the breath of transcendence. It is a point of coincidence. It is the breath of the poet that establishes the site that lets beings be. Holderlin writes in *Remembrance* (1967: 478) "What endures, though, the poet ordains". The breath of the poet is a pure releasement, a moment of infinity given without the asking of it. For the Sufi, this breath is a constantly renewed creation:

But the people of unveiling  
See that allah manifests himself in every breath  
And that the manifestation never repeats itself

And they see as witnesses that every manifestation  
presents a new creation and removes the old  
And its removal is nothing other than passing away  
which is implicit in the manifestation  
And the remaining is what is presented  
by the new manifestation-so understand  
(Sells 1994: 106)

The breath returns again and again. I am. That I am. I am... a witness. Each word calls upon it. The mystery. I speak and my words set out a world. Whose world? I speak again and another ripple in the pond appears. Wave upon wave, I speak with necessity in the contingency of this breath. I feel the one ripple rise and subside, and I also am washed over, bewildered by a surge that comes over me. Another saying. The overwhelming surge of creation that I must forget if I am not to be struck dumb in ecstasy. It is necessary. This is no accident. And yet the accident is the miracle upon which I wait.

To sing in truth is a different breath  
A breath around nothing. A stirring in God. The wind  
(Blanchot 1982: 144)

This breath "forces God to its being". God must give himself over to himself. Man needs nothing. And nothing needs man. Each breath washes away what was the previous, and returns anew. It is towards the nothing that there is the greatest receptivity. It asks for nothing and so it is free from prayer. As the Desert Fathers implore, we become a prayer for nothing, a prayer that forgets it is prayer. A breath around nothing. When we let go of the breath that is our own, we have shattered the mirror.

Were it said that we are the mirror and God is the face, then we should look again for he is the mirror also. For Eckhart, Justice is God, and God is Justice. When we reflect on justice we annihilate the self-grounded subject. Anything I wish to say is an attribute, a quality, and any attribute reduces God to a mere creature. How then are we to think upon the sacred? Have we not already overreached in the very posing this question? For Nicholas of Cusa, such thinking is utterly incomprehensible, indeed, it is precisely this incomprehensibility, this impossibility of thought that draws us in and opens us up to the mystery. And yet we are asked to think upon the unthinkable. Not only must we make this reach in thought, it is the very necessity for Justice. Our thought has been preordained as a sacred pilgrimage from the saying of Antigone. Our starting point is that Justice is the divine breath; a breath that is both in and beyond the law.

My thought must be ecstatic, it must reach to nowhere. Nicholas of Cusa thought to the beginning and end as the place of infinity. It is there that all opposites become coincidental. The maximum circle is a straight line. This inflection can be thought of as the point where justice and injustice coincide. This fact of existence, this point of coincidence, leads to a notion that finitude constitutes an actualised possibility of everything that is possible. This actualised possibility is a showing of the face, an event of language. The mystical recognition of a God here and now is as absolute simplicity. To become God is to become this contradictory all, to become coincidence of contradictories beyond contradiction. To dissolve opposites within simplicity, such that we come closest to this infinity. This simplicity, this actualised possibility is the *tajalli*, the self-manifestation of the real unveiled in the breath. For Ibn Al'Arabi this breath constitutes a mystical condition:

This means that a condition [*hal*] can prevail on a person so that only through it is he known [or does he know]: he is related to it and determined by it

But the relation of stations to a Muhammadan is like the relation of names to Allah  
He is not determined in any station to which he may be related (Sells 1994: 111; see also Al'Arabi  
1980: 147ff).

Rather, in every breath, in every time, in every condition he is the image of what that breath, time  
or condition requires (Blanchot 1982: 144)

My guide to seeing what is to see, as Ibn Al'Arabi has said, is the "heart that is receptive of every form" (Sells 1994: 106). It is the heart of the mystic who learns the unknown unknowingly. The heart receives, shapes, and becomes the form in which the real appears. Each moment the heart receives and is

reconstituted into the real. This moment is however not a sequence of temporal events. The moment is the duration of a given mystical condition (*hal*) that plays against the instant (*an*). This moment arises as a *breath*, a breath that is the divine breath of compassion. The power of Adam is in this breathing that is both God and the servant. In this breath is Being and its withdrawal. Most powerfully this mystical moment of disintegration and reintegration is a movement that I might become myself.

### Longing and the Last Breath

Where it the case that a fly had reason and could rationally seek out the eternal abyss of divine being, from which it came forth, we say that God, insofar as he is God, could not fulfil or satisfy the fly. Therefore pray God that we be free of God.

--Meister Eckhart

We are like Joseph waiting for what can never come. Joseph puts his faith into a man to bring word for his release to the Pharaoh. He has forgotten who it is that will release him. He is aware of time as much as he is aware of the four walls within which he lives. Time imposes itself on this man in his prison as a series of instants. His cell appears to have no doors and no windows either. Each apprehension of his situation leads him to be tied to a 'before' and an 'after', to be in duration, to be historical. He realises that time is passing, and not that his revelation is drawing near. He knows how he is but he does not know how he is not.

The man in his cell is in a state of confusion because he does not know his confusion. He sees what is the possible meaning of his circumstances as the truth of his possibilities. The breakthrough for Nicholas of Cusa to such confusion came when he was visited with the thought that there is no proportionality between things finite and the infinite. A temporal event cuts itself off from the one it loves, from infinity.

What our concern is, our care, is that we are Just. Heidegger recognized in 'Was ist Metaphysik?' that Dasein cannot wrest the truth of Being from Being itself: *Es Gibt*. It is given. We cannot create a world through law: "Being is no product of thinking. On the contrary, indeed, essential thinking is an event (*Ereignis*) of Being" (Heidegger 1982: 127). To let this truth be manifest is to let the world, the one that presents the problem itself, to present its resolution. Let being be. In *Was Heisst Denken*, Heidegger takes Parmenides Fragment 5 traditionally translated as: "For it is the same thing to think and to be" into "For the same: taking-to-heart is also presence of what is present" (1968: 241). What is this same, this belonging together? For Heidegger it is the call to thinking that brings forward what is present as present. The call is the longing of this other. This other is always non-other than the non-other. We surmise in this thought that the real is always to be grounded in this sacred apprehension, that reality arises only insofar as it is divine. To let being be, it is necessary that man release himself into Being, into a nothingness, as Cusa says, a learned ignorance. The proposition that *Nihil est sine ratione* becomes overturned to a grounding in "Without a why".

Eckhart called God a nothingness beyond being. For the thinking and being that is the same, it is God alone that does not exist. To speak of God is mere chatter and confusion. One should not seek to understand God because God is beyond all understanding. If I understand God I do not know God. I am in ignorance. Dionysius says "There is no speaking of it nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth - it is none of these" (Wolters 1978: 217). In our reach we cannot think her face but only long for her. But whatever she grants, she can never satisfy us because when we come upon her, we are always bewildered-out of thought. We enter into the dark night, the removal of our every sense, that we might enter such a place beyond the longing to a place of no longing, as is the place of the unborn. Justice cannot be found in this world but it is this world.

This longing is the response that Dasein itself evokes in response to its ownmost possibility. It is the voice that comes of itself, as when Christ asks "Why have you forsaken me", separating Christ into the trinity. Language finds the voice that is itself not language, this voice is conscience, a voice without sound, the voice of Being that calls mortals to think Being (Agamben 1991: 63). We must be silent on him from the "wisdom of our inner riches". This voice adopts only a saying that the entity is: *qui est misit me ad vos* (Exodus 3: 13).

I hear the last breath of a man and in this I hear what is said: "All that you know is nothing. See how I, who was most real, vanish as if I never was". I see a mere drop in a vast, blue ocean, a raindrop in the sky. It is perhaps that this death, the one the animal does not carry with him, is the only moment when we glimpse into the sway of infinity, the transcendental threshold between meaning and its utter dissolution, the possibility of a glimpse into the incomprehensible. Out of this nothing is the possibility of seeing what I see, of the appearance in the clearing that a thing may be. When I think I know the law, I have lost sight of the clearing, the possibility that Justice may be. This justice, this nothing, is what lets a thing be what it is.

This silent voice, which is also a name of God speaking itself beyond mortal finitude, calls mortals to conscience and to the sacrifice. Silence is the pure comprehension of the abyss, and hence bewilderment is the highest form of conscious apprehension. St John of the Cross evokes this essential solitude (1998: Canto III). It is the sacrifice of language to total ignorance, to a complete unguided pathway, a journey without light or guide but only a pure response to the call that is the call of conscience. It is to dissolve all signification and signs into the pure burning light that, as an always happening of creation, reinvigorates and reforms into the incomprehensible.

Plotinus asks why the need for the soul to take on human form (1986: 62). The answer comes as the silence of the cross. Jesus, in his physical form cries out into the silence, and in this moment man is redeemed. This redemption is offered as the death of death. This essential moment that speaks only in the complete absence of the word. This essential moment. God came into existence only when he was not, only in a death was he born. Agamben points to Dasein's negative foundation, that the voice rests on *being-there*, a there that must be spoken first and therefore not Dasein's own -- a there uttered in a voice that has itself become silent (Agamben 1991:63). That terrible silence. Blanchot speaks of a new Death, a death without the dying. He says no to the resurrection of Lazarus, resurrected without his death. Agamben calls this the death of the voice, the truly groundless foundation (1991: 45). To bear death and maintain it is the possibility of true speech.

The fall of language, as Walter Benjamin puts it, is an irresistible corruptibility (1968: 62). The word corrupted by the image of the thing, by knowledge. This image is what Eckhart thinks as 'creaturedness', as the profane insistence that a thing has a substance outside of God. Within this corruptibility is the distancing of my life and my longing. This I share with Satan. The one who longs the deepest is the one whose love is most unrequited. Satan said:

I am the one remembered by him, to whom he said, 'My curse be upon you!' Do not the 'you' and the 'I' coincide in that curse? I am pledged to loving and yearning. I am in heaven and in hell... O Moses, do you know why God has caused me to be separated? So that I would not mix with the sincere ones and worship him out of passion or fear or hope or craving (Fadiman and Frager 1997: 237).

For the Muslim, Satan alone loves God without hope, without reward or a returned love. God turned his eyes away from him. The blasphemy was his self-will, his refusal to bow before Adam, and his adamancy of this to be an act of God's will, not his own. He refused to see that the self is not itself a creation of God but is God's gift of the distance between being and non-being; a voice. Man, given the authority of names, becomes the divine bearer of this distance, and accords him his high stature; for it is God alone that he is proclaiming. Satan would not see the mystery of creation, that we are and are not, born in the word and revealed in the name. In this light, Satan is not a symbol of evil but of utter wretchedness. He burns. Wretchedness is when we are not in the gaze of God, when we are not face to face but have turned our eyes away from God's. To turn away from God is to turn away from the creative possibilities that God is, and revealed through the Voice that man bears.

To lose one's language. Christ's silent response. This death of death, this death that only man has. On the cross, Jesus shares with Satan this mystical moment of absolute non-otherness. The negativity of negativity. In unrequited love, Christ is open to absolute receptivity, where every fibre of the soul reaches for what is totally absent. Unlike Satan, Christ accepts the sacrifice of his self absolutely thereby becoming God himself. Ibn al'Arabi captures this transformation and releasement: "Love deprived these [unrequited lovers] of their wits. It made them pass away from themselves at the sight of their imagination of the beloved". No love is more real than no love. It is love for the sake of love, the apophatic love of the non-other than the non-other. A love without a lover, without hope, a god-less

love. It reaches out to a pure nothingness and thereby comes nearest to the beloved. It is perhaps here that the Heidegger of *Identity and Difference* speaks of god-less thinking that is more open to the divine. The mystic must lose his language. Indeed to be mystical is to be without language. There is no guide. When there is no guide, there is only the way one travels, the road one takes. Its destiny is always to arrive at the same place—a celestial city.

From incomprehensibility we reach to wonder. As Porete says, we see the truth in exemplars, in shadows or images, and these imperfections show ignorance as the limit of our social world, a world always given to the possibility of justice in which the saint shines out of its darkness (1993: 149). Is it possible in law to preserve the enigma that is the disclosure of the presence of the divine? In achieving the identity that Eckhart speaks, the soul is consumed by identity and union with God. It is as a river that flows into the sea. It is a life without regard to the concerns and comforts of a created life. Marguerite Porete, a mystic who consigned herself to the flame in both body and soul, speaks of the perfected soul that:

neither desires nor despises poverty nor tribulation, neither mass nor sermon, neither fast nor prayer, and gives to Nature all that is necessary, without remorse or conscience. But such a nature is well ordered through the transformation by unity of Love, to whom the will of this Soul is conjoined, that nature demands nothing which is prohibited (1993: 86).

This soul is so dispossessed of this world that it neither desires nor refuses it. It has taken leave of the virtues, for the way of the soul is the way of nature. Nature can make no demands, for the Soul in abandoning its will has already superseded whatever may be asked of it. Whereas those possessed of the images of this life, and therein corrupted to the illusions of knowledge, must do contrary to their will, those who are detached and in union with God do the opposite:

For insofar as it is necessary that in the life of the spirit they do the contrary of their own will if they wish not to lose peace, so likewise in an opposite way, the unencumbered ones do everything that pleases them if they wish not to lose peace, since they have arrived in the stage of freeness, that is, since they have fallen from the Virtues into Love, and from Love into Nothingness (Porete 1993: 186).

Rumi has said that we do not know a man's true name until they breathe their last. Our reach for Justice is a reach for death. Yet incomprehensibly with the dead God, the one whose name is now open to us to possibly know, we might hear in the terrible silence the divine breath that we carry in us. The real death. In the utter incomprehensibility and humility of the last breath, the completed, still, breath, my heart turns once more and creation is perfected to begin anew. We hear in that breath that *is* the last breath the memory of the sacred that is always possible in the abyss that lies between *what was* and *that is*. Justice is not for man or of man. Justice is. It is in all things and all things are in it. When Christ hears the terrible silence Justice breathes the word. And from this Justice a whole world is born.

## Notes

For my father whose true name I now know.

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