

THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED
of the Most Beautiful Deity

small in contents, yet great in power

*Granum sinapis de divinitate pulcherrima in vulgari,
parvum in substantia, magnum in virtute*

attributed to Meister Eckhart von Hochheim



The Matheson Trust
For the Study of Comparative Religion

[Translation by Bernard McGinn]

When all began
 (beyond mind's span)
 the Word aye *is*
 Oh what bliss
 When source at first gave birth to
source!

Oh Father's heart
 from which did start
 that same Word:
 yet 'tis averred,
 the Word's still kept in womb
perforce.

From both doth flow
 a loving glow:
 in double troth known to both
 comes forth from them the Holy
Ghost,

of equal state
 inseparate
 The three are one:
 who grasps it? None!
 Itself it knows itself the most.

The threefold clasp
 we cannot grasp,
 the circle's span
 no mind can scan:
 for here's a mystery fathomless.
 Check and mate,
 time, form, estate!
 The wondrous ring
 holds everything,
 its central point stands motionless.

The peak sublime deedless climb
 if thou art wise!
 Thy way then lies
 through desert very strange to see,
 so deep, so wide,
 no bound's descried.
 This desert's bare
 of *Then* or *There*
 in modeless singularity.

This desert place
 no foot did pace,
 no creature mind
 ingress can find.
 It *is*, yet truly none knows what.
 'Tis there, 'tis here,
 'tis far, 'tis near,
 'tis high, 'tis low,
 yet all we know
 is: *This* it's not and *That* it's not.

It's clear, it's bright,
 it's dark as night;
 no name or sign
 can it define,
 beginningless, of ceasing free.
 Immobile, bare,
 'tis flowing there.
 Where it may dwell,
 whoso can tell,
 should teach us what its form may be.

As a child become,
 both blind and dumb.
 Thy own self's aught
 must turn to naught.
 Both aught and naught thou must
reject,

without a trace
 of image, time, or space.
 Go quite astray
 the pathless way,
 the desert thou mayst then detect.

My soul within,
 come out, God in!
 Sink all my aught
 in God's own naught,
 sink down in bottomless abyss.
 Should I flee thee,
 thou wilt come to me;
 when self is done,
 then Thou art won,
 thou transcendental highest bliss!

[Modern German version adapted from Beierwaltes]

In dem Anfang
hoch über dem Begriff
ist stets das Wort.
Reicher Hort, in dem
stets Anfang Anfang gebar!
Brust des Vaters,
aus der mit Lust
das Wort stets floß!
Doch hat der Schoß
das Wort behalten, das ist wahr.

Von Zweien eine Flut,
der Liebe Glut,
der Zweien Band,
den Zweien erkannt,
fließt der gar süße Geist
ganz gleich,
untrennbar.
Die Drei sind Eins.
Weißt du ihr Wesen? Nein.
Es weißt sich selbst am besten.

Die Verbindung der Drei
bringt tiefes Erschrecken,
diesen Kreis
hat Verstand nie begriffen:
hier ist eine Tiefe ohne Grund.
Schach und Matt
der Zeit, den Formen, dem Ort!
Der Wunder Ring
ist Ursprung,
ganz unbewegt steht sein Punkt.

Des Punktes Berg
besteige ohne Werk,
Vernünftigkeit!
Der Weg trägt dich
in eine wunderbare Wüste,
die breit, die weit,
ohne Maß da liegt.
Die Wüste hat
weder Zeit noch Ort,
ihre Weise, die ist wunderbar.

Der Wüste Gut,
durchschritt nie ein Fuß,
geschaffener Verstand
kam nie dahin:
Es ist, und doch weiß niemand, was.
Es ist hier, es ist da,
es ist fern, es ist nah,
es ist tief, es ist hoch, es ist so,
daß es weder dies noch das ist.

Es ist licht, es ist hell,
es ist ganz dunkel,
es ist ohne Namen,
es ist unerkannt,
von Anfang und auch Ende frei,
es steht still,
ist bloß, ohne Kleid.
Wer kennt sein Haus?
Der komme heraus
und sage uns, welches seine
Gestalt sei.

Werde wie ein Kind,
werde taub, werde blind!
Dein eigenes Sein
muß Nichts werden,
alles Etwas, alles Nichts treibe
hinweg!

Laß Ort und Zeit,
meide auch das Bild!
Gehe ohne Weg
den schmalen Steg,
so findest du der Wüste Spur.

Meine Seele,
geh aus, Gott ein!
All mein Etwas sind
in Gottes Nichts,
sinke in die grundlose Flut!
Fliehe ich von dir,
Du kommst [dann] zu mir.
Verliere ich mich,
so finde ich dich,
o überseiendes Gut!

[Translation by Karen Campbell]

In the beginning
high above comprehension
is the word, eternally.
O rich treasure,
where the beginning eternally bore
the beginning!

O paternal bosom,
out of which, in bliss,
the word flowed forth eternally.
Yet the womb still
held fast to the word, truly.

Of the two, one flowing forth,
ember of love,
binding both,
known to both,
so flows the sweetest spirit
in complete symmetry,
inseparable.
The three are one:
do you know, what? No,
it alone knows itself completely.

The enmeshment of the three
harbors deep terror.
No reason has ever
comprehended this circle:
here is a depth without bottom.
Check and mate
to time, to shapes, to space!
The circle of mysteries
is a source of everything;
its point of origin rests, completely
immutable, in itself.

Leave your doings
and climb, insight,
the mountain of this point!
The way leads you
into a wondrous desert
which extends wide
and immeasurably far.
The desert knows
neither time nor space.
Its nature is unique.

Never has a foot
crossed the domain of the desert,
created reason
has never attained it.
It is, and yet no one knows what.
It is here, there,
far, near,
deep, high,
so that
it is neither the one nor the other.

Light, clear,
completely dark,
nameless,
unknown,
without beginning and also without
end,

it rests in itself,
unveiled, without disguise.
Who knows what its dwelling is?
Let him come forth
and tell us of what shape it is.

Become as a child,
become deaf, become blind!
Your own substance
must become nothingness;
drive all substance, all nothingness far
from you!

Leave space, leave time,
eschew also all physical
representation.

Go without a way
the narrow foot-path,
then you will succeed in finding the
desert.

O my soul,
go out, let God in!
Sink, my entire being,
into God's nothingness,
sink into the bottomless flood!
If I flee from you,
you come to me,
if I lose myself,
I find you:
O goodness extending over all being.

[Translation by Fr John Gray]

ERE aught began,
 Beyond the span
 Of sense, the Word
 (O priceless hoard!)
 Was, which God fashioned in his
 youth.

O Fatherbreast,
 Wherefrom, with zest,
 The Word did bloom!
 Yet did the womb
 Retain the Word in very truth.

Of twain a fount,
 Love paramount,
 The double troth,
 Known unto both,
 The ever gentle Spirit flows.

Equal, and none
 Can make but one ;
 One are the three
 Yet what it be
 That triple spirit only knows.

The triple crown
 Hath deep renown ;
 Ring without clasp
 No sense can grasp,
 It is a depth without a floor.

Is is rest, grace,
 Shape, form and space;
 The source, the ring
 Of everything ;
 A point which never moveth more.

To its abode
 There is no road ;
 Curiously
 It beareth thee
 Into a desert strangely strange.

Is wide, is broad,
 Unmeasured road;
 The desert has
 Nor time nor space,
 Its way is wonderfully strange.

That desert plot
 No foot hath trod;
 Created wit
 Ne'er came to it;
 It is, and no man knoweth what.

Is there, is here,
 Is far, is near,
 Is deep, high,
 And none reply
 Whether this thing be this or that.

Is light, is pure,
 Is most obscure,
 Nameless, alone,
 It is unknown,
 Free both of end and origin.

It standeth dark,
 Is bare and stark;
 Reveal his face
 Who knows its place,
 And say what fashion it is in.

Become a child,
 Deaf, blind and mild;
 Be eye and thought
 Reduced to naught,
 Self and negation driven back.

Space, time resign,
 And every sign,
 No leader hath
 The narrow path,
 So com'st thou to the desert track.

O soul, abroad,
 Go into God ;
 Sink as a yes
 In nothingness,
 Sink in unfathomable flood.

I fly from thee,
 Thou greetest me;
 Self left behind,
 If I but find
 Thee, O thou good of every good !