

The Book of Urizen

William Blake

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PRELUDIUM TO THE [FIRST] BOOK OF URIZEN

Of the primeval Priests assum'd power,
 When Eternals spurn'd back his religion;
And gave him a place in the north,
 Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary.
Eternals I hear your call gladly,
 Dictate swift winged words, & fear
 not
To unfold your dark visions of torment.

I

1. Lo, a shadow of horror is risen
In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific!
Self-closed, all-repelling: what Demon
Hath form'd this abominable void
This soul-shudd'ring vacuum? — Some
said
"It is Urizen", But unknown, abstracted

Brooding secret, the dark power hid.

2. Times on times he divided, & measur'd
Space by space in his ninefold darkness
Unseen, unknown! changes appear'd
In his desolate mountains rifted furious
By the black winds of perturbation

3. For he strove in battles dire
In unseen confictions with shapes
Bred from his forsaken wilderness,
Of beast, bird, fish, serpent & element
Combustion, blast, vapour and cloud.

4. Dark revolving in silent activity:
Unseen in tormenting passions;

An activity unknown and horrible;
A self-contemplating shadow,
In enormous labours occupied

5. But Eternals beheld his vast forests
Age on ages he lay, clos'd, unknown
Brooding shut in the deep; all avoid
The petrific abominable chaos

6. His cold horrors silent, dark Urizen
Prepar'd: his ten thousands of thunders
Rang'd in gloom'd array stretch out across

The dread world, & the rolling of wheels

As of swelling seas, sound in his clouds
In his hills of stor'd snows, in his mountains
Of hail & ice; voices of terror,
Are heard, like thunders of autumn,
When the cloud blazes over the harvests

II

1. Earth was not: nor globes of attraction

The will of the Immortal expanded
Or contracted his all flexible senses.
Death was not, but eternal life sprung

2. The sound of a trumpet the heavens
Awoke & vast clouds of blood roll'd
Round the dim rocks of Urizen, so nam'd
That solitary one in Immensity

3. Shrill the trumpet: & myriads of Eter-
nity,
Muster around the bleak desarts
Now fill'd with clouds, darkness & waters
That roll'd perplex'd labring & ut-
ter'd
Words articulate, bursting in thunders
That roll'd on the tops of his moun-
tains

4: From the depths of dark solitude. From

The eternal abode in my holiness,
Hidden set apart in my stern counsels
Reserv'd for the days of futurity,
I have sought for a joy without pain,

For a solid without fluctuation
Why will you die O Eternals?

Why live in unquenchable burnings?

5 First I fought with the fire; consum'd
Inwards, into a deep world within:
A void immense, wild dark & deep,
Where nothing was: Natures wide womb

And self balanc'd stretch'd o'er the void
I alone, even I! the winds merciless
Bound; but condensing, in torrents
They fall & fall; strong I repell'd
The vast waves, & arose on the waters
A wide world of solid obstruction

6. Here alone I in books form'd of metals
Have written the secrets of wisdom
The secrets of dark contemplation
By fightings and conflicts dire,
With terrible monsters Sin-bred:
Which the bosoms of all inhabit;
Seven deadly Sins of the soul.

7. Lo! I unfold my darkness: and on
This rock, place with strong hand the
Book
Of eternal brass, written in my soli-
tude.

8. Laws of peace, of love, of unity:
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness.
Let each chuse one habitation:
His ancient infinite mansion:
One command, one joy one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law.

III

1. The voice ended, they saw his pale
visage
Emerge from the darkness; his hand
On the rock of eternity unclasping
The Book of brass. Rage siez'd the
strong
2. Rage, fury, intense indignation
In cataracts of fire blood & gall
In whirlwinds of sulphurous smoke:
And enormous forms of energy;
All the seven deadly sins of the soul
In living creations appear'd
In the flames of eternal fury.
3. Sund'ring, dark'ning, thund'ring!
Rent away with a terrible crash

Eternity roll'd wide apart

Wide asunder rolling

Mountainous all around

Departing; departing; departing:

Leaving ruinous fragments of life

Hanging frowning cliffs & all between

An ocean of voidness unfathomable.

4. The roaring fires ran o'er the heav'ns

In whirlwinds & cataracts of blood

And o'er the dark desarts of Urizen

Fires pour thro' the void on all sides

On Urizens self-begotten armies.

5. But no light from the fires. all was
darkness

In the flames of Eternal fury

6. In fierce anguish & quenchless flames

To the desarts and rocks He ran raging

To hide, but He could not: combining

He dug mountains & hills in vast strength,

He piled them in incessant labour,

In howlings & pangs & fierce madness

Long periods in burning fires labour-
ing

Till hoary, and age-broke, and aged,
In despair and the shadows of death.

7. And a roof, vast petrific around,
On all sides He fram'd: like a womb;
Where thousands of rivers in veins
Of blood pour down the mountains
to cool
The eternal fires beating without
From Eternals; & like a black globe
View'd by sons of Eternity, standing
On the shore of the infinite ocean
Like a human heart struggling & beating
The vast world of Urizen appear'd.

8. And Los round the dark globe of Ur-
izen,
Kept watch for Eternals to confine,
The obscure separation alone;
For Eternity stood wide apart,
As the stars are apart from the earth

9. Los wept howling around the dark
Demon:
And cursing his lot; for in anguish,

Urizen was rent from his side;
And a fathomless void for his feet;

And intense fires for his dwelling.

10. But Urizen laid in a stony sleep
Unorganiz'd, rent from Eternity

11. The Eternals said: What is this?
Death
Urizen is a clod of clay.

12: Los howld in a dismal stupor,
Groaning! gnashing! groaning!
Till the wrenching apart was healed
13: But the wrenching of Urizen heal'd
not

Cold, featureless, flesh or clay,
Rifted with direful changes
He lay in a dreamless night

14: Till Los rouz'd his fires, affrighted
At the formless unmeasurable death.

IV[a]

1: Los smitten with astonishment
Frightend at the hurtling bones

2: And at the surging sulphureous

Perturbed Immortal mad raging

- 3: In whirlwinds & pitch & nitre
Round the furious limbs of Los
 - 4: And Los formed nets & gins
And threw the nets round about
 - 5: He watch'd in shuddring fear
The dark changes & bound every change
- With rivets of iron & brass;
6. And these were the changes of Urizen.

IV[b]

1. Ages on ages roll'd over him!
In stony sleep ages roll'd over him!
Like a dark waste stretching chang'able
By earthquakes riv'n, belching sullen
fires
On ages roll'd ages in ghastly
- Sick torment; around him in whirlwinds
Of darkness the eternal Prophet howl'd
Beating still on his rivets of iron

Pouring savor of iron; dividing
The horrible night into watches.

2. And Urizen (so his eternal name)
His prolific delight obscurd more &
more

In dark secrecy hiding in surging
Sulphureous fluid his phantasies.
The Eternal Prophet heavd the dark bel-
lows,
And turn'd restless the tongs; and the
hammer
Incessant beat; forging chains new & new
Numb'ring with links. hours, days &
years

3. The eternal mind bounded began to
roll
Eddies of wrath ceaseless round & round,

And the sulphureous foam surging thick
Settled, a lake, bright, & shining clear:

White as the snow on the mountains cold.

4. Forgetfulness, dumbness, necessity!

In chains of the mind locked up,
Like fetters of ice shrinking together
Disorganiz'd, rent from Eternity,
Los beat on his fetters of iron;
And heated his furnaces & pour'd
Iron sodor and sodor of brass

5. Restless turnd the immortal inchain'd
Heaving dolorous! anguish'd! unbear-
able
Till a roof shaggy wild inclos'd
In an orb, his fountain of thought.

6. In a horrible dreamful slumber;
Like the linked infernal chain;
A vast Spine writh'd in torment
Upon the winds; shooting pain'd
Ribs, like a bending cavern
And bones of solidness, froze
Over all his nerves of joy.
And a first Age passed over,
And a state of dismal woe.

7. From the caverns of his jointed Spine,
Down sunk with fright a red
Round globe hot burning deep
Deep down into the Abyss:

Panting: Conglobing, Trembling
Shooting out ten thousand branches
 Around his solid bones.
And a second Age passed over,
 And a state of dismal woe.

8. In harrowing fear rolling round;
 His nervous brain shot branches
Round the branches of his heart.
 On high into two little orbs
And fixed in two little caves
 Hiding carefully from the wind,
His Eyes beheld the deep,
 And a third Age passed over:
And a state of dismal woe.

9. The pangs of hope began,
In heavy pain striving, struggling.
 Two Ears in close volutions.
From beneath his orbs of vision
 Shot spiring out and petrified
As they grew. And a fourth Age passed
 And a state of dismal woe.

10. In ghastly torment sick;
 Hanging upon the wind;

Two Nostrils bent down to the deep.

And a fifth Age passed over;
And a state of dismal woe.

11. In ghastly torment sick;
Within his ribs bloated round,
A craving Hungry Cavern;
Thence arose his channelled Throat,
And like a red flame a Tongue
Of thirst & of hunger appeared.

And a sixth Age passed over:
And a state of dismal woe.

12. Enraged & stifled with torment
He threw his right Arm to the north
His left Arm to the south
Shooting out in anguish deep,
And his Feet stampd the nether Abyss

In trembling & howling & dismay.

And a seventh Age passed over:
And a state of dismal woe.

V

1. In terrors Los shrunk from his task:
His great hammer fell from his hand:
His fires beheld, and sickening,

Hid their strong limbs in smoke.
For with noises ruinous loud;
With hurtlings & clashings & groans
The Immortal endur'd his chains,
Tho' bound in a deadly sleep.

2. All the myriads of Eternity:
All the wisdom & joy of life:
Roll like a sea around him,
Except what his little orbs
Of sight by degrees unfold.

3. And now his eternal life
Like a dream was obliterated

4. Shudd'ring, the Eternal Prophet smote

With a stroke, from his north to south
region

The bellows & hammer are silent now
A nerveless silence, his prophetic voice
Siez'd; a cold solitude & dark void
The Eternal Prophet & Urizen clos'd

5. Ages on ages roll'd over them
Cut off from life & light frozen
Into horrible forms of deformity
Los suffer'd his fires to decay

Then he look'd back with anxious de-
sire
But the space undivided by existence
Struck horror into his soul.

6. Los wept obscur'd with mourning:
His bosom earthquak'd with sighs;
He saw Urizen deadly black,
In his chains bound, & Pity began,

7. In anguish dividing & dividing
For pity divides the soul
In pangs eternity on eternity
Life in cataracts pour'd down his cliffs
The void shrunk the lymph into Nerves
Wand'ring wide on the bosom of night

And left a round globe of blood
Trembling upon the Void
Thus the Eternal Prophet was divided
Before the death-image of Urizen
For in changeable clouds and darkness
In a winterly night beneath,
The Abyss of Los stretch'd immense:
And now seen, now obscur'd, to the
eyes
Of Eternals, the visions remote

Of the dark seperation appear'd.
As glasses discover Worlds
In the endless Abyss of space,
So the expanding eyes of Immortals
Beheld the dark visions of Los,
And the globe of life blood trembling.

8. The globe of life blood trembled
Branching out into roots;
Fib'rous, writhing upon the winds;
Fibres of blood, milk and tears;
In pangs, eternity on eternity.
At length in tears & cries imbodied
A female form trembling and pale
Waves before his deathly face

9. All Eternity shudderd at sight
Of the first female now separate
Pale as a cloud of snow
Waving before the face of Los

10. Wonder, awe, fear, astonishment,
Petrify the eternal myriads;
At the first female form now separate

They call'd her Pity, and fled

11. "Spread a Tent, with strong curtains

around them
"Let cords & stakes bind in the Void
That Eternals may no more behold
them"

12. They began to weave curtains of
darkness
They erected large pillars round the
Void
With golden hooks fastend in the pillars
With infinite labour the Eternals
A woof wove, and called it Science

VI

1. But Los saw the Female & pitied
He embrac'd her, she wept, she re-
fus'd
In perverse and cruel delight
She fled from his arms, yet he followd
2. Eternity shudder'd when they saw,
Man begetting his likeness,
On his own divided image.
3. A time passed over, the Eternals
Began to erect the tent;

When Enitharmon sick,
Felt a Worm within her womb.

4. Yet helpless it lay like a Worm
In the trembling womb
To be moulded into existence

5. All day the worm lay on her bosom
All night within her womb
The worm lay till it grew to a serpent
With dolorous hissings & poisons
Round Enitharmons loins folding,

6. Coild within Enitharmons womb
The serpent grew casting its scales,
With sharp pangs the hissings began
To change to a grating cry,
Many sorrows and dismal throes,
Many forms of fish, bird & beast,
Brought forth an Infant form
Where was a worm before.

7. The Eternals their tent finished
Alarm'd with these gloomy visions
When Enitharmon groaning
Produc'd a man Child to the light.

8. A shriek ran thro' Eternity:

And a paralytic stroke;
At the birth of the Human shadow.

9. Delving earth in his resistless way;
Howling, the Child with fierce flames
Issu'd from Enitharmon.

10. The Eternals, closed the tent
They beat down the stakes the cords

Stretch'd for a work of eternity;
No more Los beheld Eternity.

11. In his hands he siez'd the infant
He bathed him in springs of sorrow
He gave him to Enitharmon.

VII

1. They named the child Orc, he grew
Fed with milk of Enitharmon

2. Los awoke her; O sorrow & pain!
A tight'ning girdle grew,
Around his bosom. In sobbings
He burst the girdle in twain,
But still another girdle

Opressd his bosom, In sobbings
Again he burst it. Again
Another girdle succeeds
The girdle was form'd by day;
By night was burst in twain.

3. These falling down on the rock
Into an iron Chain
In each other link by link lock'd

4. They took Orc to the top of a mountain.

O how Enitharmon wept!
They chain'd his young limbs to the
rock

With the Chain of Jealousy
Beneath Urizens deathful shadow

5. The dead heard the voice of the child
And began to awake from sleep
All things. heard the voice of the child
And began to awake to life.

6. And Urizen craving with hunger
Stung with the odours of Nature
Explor'd his dens around

7. He form'd a line & a plummet

To divide the Abyss beneath.

He form'd a dividing rule:

8. He formed scales to weigh;

He formed massy weights;

He formed a brazen quadrant;

He formed golden compasses

And began to explore the Abyss

And he planted a garden of fruits

9. But Los encircled Enitharmon

With fires of Prophecy

From the sight of Urizen & Orc.

10. And she bore an enormous race

VIII

1. Urizen explor'd his dens

Mountain, moor, & wilderness,

With a globe of fire lighting his journey

A fearful journey, annoy'd

By cruel enormities: forms

Of life on his forsaken mountains

2. And his world teem'd vast enormities

Frightning; faithless; fawning
Portions of life; similitudes
Of a foot, or a hand, or a head
Or a heart, or an eye, they swam mis-
chevous
Dread terrors! delighting in blood

3. Most Urizen sicken'd to see
His eternal creations appear
Sons & daughters of sorrow on moun-
tains
Weeping! wailing! first Thiriël ap-
pear'd
Astonish'd at his own existence
Like a man from a cloud born, & Utha

From the waters emerging, laments!
Grodna rent the deep earth howling
Amaz'd! his heavens immense cracks
Like the ground parch'd with heat;
then Fuzon
Flam'd out! first begotten, last born.
All his eternal sons in like manner
His daughters from green herbs & cattle
From monsters, & worms of the pit.

4. He in darkness clos'd, view'd all his

race,
And his soul sicken'd! he curs'd
Both sons & daughters; for he saw
That no flesh nor spirit could keep
His iron laws one moment.

5. For he saw that life liv'd upon death

The Ox in the slaughter house moans
The Dog at the wintry door
And he wept, & he called it Pity
And his tears flowed down on the winds

6. Cold he wander'd on high, over their
cities

In weeping & pain & woe!
And where-ever he wanderd in sorrows
Upon the aged heavens
A cold shadow follow'd behind him
Like a spiders web, moist, cold, &
dim

Drawing out from his sorrowing soul
The dungeon-like heaven dividing.
Where ever the footsteps of Urizen
Walk'd over the cities in sorrow.

7. Till a Web dark & cold, throughout

all
The tormented element stretch'd
From the sorrows of Urizens soul
And the Web is a Female in embrio
None could break the Web, no wings of
fire.

8. So twisted the cords, & so knotted
The meshes: twisted like to the human
brain

9. And all call'd it, The Net of Religion

IX

1. Then the Inhabitants of those Cities:
Felt their Nerves change into Marrow
And hardening Bones began
In swift diseases and torments,
In throbbings & shootings & grindings
Thro' all the coasts; till weaken'd
The Senses inward rush'd shrinking,
Beneath the dark net of infection.

2. Till the shrunken eyes clouded over
Discern'd not the woven hypocrisy
But the streaky slime in their heavens

Brought together by narrowing perceptions
Appeared transparent air; for their eyes
Grew small like the eyes of a man
And in reptile forms shrinking together
Of seven feet stature they remaind

3. Six days they shrunk up from existence

And on the seventh day they rested
And they bless'd the seventh day, in sick
hope:

And forgot their eternal life

4. And their thirty cities divided

In form of a human heart

No more could they rise at will

In the infinite void, but bound down

To earth by their narrowing perceptions

They lived a period of years

Then left a noisom body

To the jaws of devouring darkness

5. And their children wept, & built

Tombs in the desolate places,

And form'd laws of prudence, and call'd
them

The eternal laws of God

6. And the thirty cities remaind
 Surrounded by salt floods, now call'd
Africa: its name was then Egypt.

7. The remaining sons of Urizen
Beheld their brethren shrink together
 Beneath the Net of Urizen;
Perswasion was in vain;
 For the ears of the inhabitants,
Were wither'd, & deafen'd, & cold:
 And their eyes could not discern,
Their brethren of other cities.

8. So Fuzon call'd all together
The remaining children of Urizen:
 And they left the pendulous earth:
They called it Egypt, & left it.

9. And the salt ocean rolled englob'd

The End of the [first] book of Urizen

William Blake (1794)