

# THE UNIVERSE AND SELF

by  
\* Nenad Downing  
Sept 1972

Nenad Cure 9/4/2024

## CONTENTS

- CH.1. Brahman
- CH.2. Atman
- CH.3. Maya
- CH.4. Practical Vedanta
- CH.5. On the Necessity of Religion ✓
- CH.6. On the Principle of Renunciation
- CH.7. Realization through action( Karma-Yoga\*)
- CH.8. Reincarnation and Karma
- CH.9. The personal meaning of Karma and Reincarnation
- CH.10. The Mirror of the Soul.
- CH. 11. Suppl<sup>e</sup>mentary reflections.

Before creation came into existence,  
Brahman existed as the Unmanifest.  
From the Unmanifest he created the  
manifest. From himself he brought  
forth himself. Hence he is known  
as the Self-Existent.  
Taittiriya Upanishads.

He who gives man spiritual knowledge is the  
greatest benefactor of mankind, and we  
always find that they are the most  
powerful who help man in his spiritual needs,  
because spirituality is the true inspiration  
of all our activities.

Swami Vivekananda.

# BRAHMAN

A 1

When we speak of Brahman as being the Absolute we necessarily come to the question, "How did the Absolute become finite?" Brahman is free from time, space, and causation; yet when describing the universe we say its cause is Brahman who, when manifesting through Maya (time, space, and causation) creates the world we know. But if Brahman is the cause, and the universe and all that we perceive is the effect, then Brahman too must have a cause. This conclusion would contradict our statement that Brahman is the Self-existence; meaning, that which has no primary cause is Brahman. Still the question, "What created Brahman, and what is the primary cause," continues to trouble our sense of reasoning. Our life experiences teach us that nothing is ever generated out of nothing. The consequence of this observation is to impress on our minds the idea that if Brahman is the Absolute he must have no other cause excepting that He himself is the primary cause; therefore he is the Self-existence. A2

However, this argument is still a tangled web of logic and we have not really answered our initial question. Truly, Man has always been seeking to



answer this one question, "Who created God?"

The explanation that Brahman created Brahman is far from being a satisfying answer. The Advaita system of philosophy, which is a part of the general Vedantic system of thought, presents us with the statement that the question "What caused the Absolute?" is really an invalid and unanswerable question.<sup>1</sup>

Why is this so? Consider first the position from where you stand when you ask this question. You are in this universe and subject to its Maya.<sup>2</sup> The universe is an infinite and yet bounded system.<sup>3</sup>

To ask "What is the Absolute" the human mind is forced to put limits between the Absolute. Try and conceive of totally empty space of infinite dimensions. You cannot do it. The mind forces us to think between two reference points. Yet Brahman has no reference point. He is the infinite and unbounded. Brahman is much more than Spinoza's totality of the universe. Even to contemplate Brahman is to bring Him within the scope of our minds, down to the level of the

1. For a comprehensive analysis of this question see Vivekananda's Jnana Yoga.

2. The usage of the term, Maya will appear at first to have many different definitions. When we delve into the meaning of Maya the ambiguity may be cleared up.

3. This apparent contradiction may be cleared up by reading Albert Einstein and the Cosmic Universe by Cornelius Lanczos.

universe.

The thinking mind is subject to Maya. It cannot go beyond its own limits. To try to answer "Who created God" is impossible <sup>to do</sup>. Even if we knew the answer we could not describe it because the tool of language is itself finite. <sup>A3</sup> Everything we perceive in this world is an extension of our self. The interpretations we make are limited by the capacities of our mind to understand. The thinking mind is subject to Maya. One cannot interpret beyond the abilities of his own mind. Therefore the question "How can Brahman be know?" is a mute question insomuch as the question pertains to an infinite concept and demands an explanation from a mind that is finite in its capacities to understand. The very nature of the finitness of mind prohibits its knowing the Absolute. <sup>1 A4</sup>

Brahman is neither Maya nor the Universe. It is above all these. It is totally free from influences of any sort. The universe is subject to relativity.

1. In this discussion the mind is to be understood as the thinking and comprehending agent of the body. It is not to be construed as being the Atman of which we will speak later.

Brahman is above relativity. The conclusion the Advaita philosopher reaches is that Brahman cannot be known by mind. The Absolute is beyond knowing. If the mind knew the Absolute then we would no longer be speaking of the Absolute. Intellectual attempts will never lead us to describe Brahman. No man has ever described the Highest, and no man ever will. Only that which is free of Maya will know the Absolute. But without the universe a man no longer exists so Brahman is beyond the knowing.

Or, it may  
not be  
"mind"  
knowing

An illustrative example of one who, through very sound logic, though not so sound if contrasted with Sankara's arguments of God, reasoned the existence of a Supreme Being, is ~~that delux jesuit~~, Descartes. He reasons that though all else may be questioned, doubt itself cannot be doubted. He rightly concluded that his thinking, his doubting, presupposes his existence. This is in agreement with Vedantic philosophy since the Vedantist does not say you ~~donnot exist~~. However, <sup>VEDANTA</sup> it clarifies the point and says that within the bounds of Maya your individual self exists and above this there is the Atman, your true Self, ~~exists~~. Now Descartes proceeds to argue that, since "I find in me the notion of God, which I cannot have formed by my own power, since it involves a higher degree of

reality than belongs to me; it ~~must~~ have for its author God himself, who stamped it upon my mind, just as the architect impresses his stamp on his work." The Vedantist would urge Descartes to consider the possibility that he himself is the author, the God; that ~~the~~ concept of God is in Man because within Man there is the Atman and the Atman is identical with Brahman.. Descartes concludes that " God's ~~existence~~ follows also from the very idea of God, since the essence of God involves existence, eternal and necessary ~~existence~~. Among the attributes of God belongs truthfulness. God cannot wish to deceive me; therefore, all that which I know clearly and distinctly must be true."

From the previous arguments we have set forth concerning the nature of the Absolute, we ~~can only~~ conclude that the God Descartes describes is not the ~~One~~ eternal existence who is above all ~~want~~ and worry. Descartes is describing the infinite and unbounded ~~and having~~ finite and limited capabilities. To say, " God cannot wish to deceive me " is to give God human qualities. As stated previously, the Absolute cannot be described by finite methods; for when we do this we bring God into the realm of the non-Absolute.

Descartes' God describes more appropriately ~~one~~ of the many thousands of Hindu Gods; you can choose as you wish which one of these Gods ~~most~~ fits Descartes' God.

Now we would implore you to take note that if we juggle Descartes' words around very slightly we could, by force of his own arguments, describe the Atman-Brahman equality. No doubt, <sup>Descartes</sup> ~~the fine Jesuit~~ would not appreciate this approach in the least. If we personalize God ( Brahman ) and try to describe him with human qualities we will quickly find MANY FLAWS THAT ARE INCONSISTANT WITH REASON. ~~Bertrand Russel pounding on our heads demanding we be more logical. One may be certain though, that if this gentleman, who was forever in wont to preach and practice the fine puritan ethic so loved and adored by those pious apostles of the good Christian faith, were alive today he would relish the idea of dissecting Sankara, ie; the Vedanta-Sutras, and scrutinize every little morsel found there-in. So we implore your forgiveness if we have been too harsh with Gentleman Descartes.~~

Let us conclude this very short treatment of Brahman with a summary which will include a mild attempt to personalize the Absolute for the purpose of making your exploration into this subject more appealing.

If there seems to be some overlap of previously mentioned ideas its purpose is to help clarify and throw more light on the subject. After all, our object in sharing with you Vedanta philosophy is not to present you with just facts and arguments, but to try and convey the real essence of Vedanta in such a manner that they will have personal meaning for you. We will quote a few sources to help us on our journey. Up to this point we have presented our arguments ~~for~~ the case of Brahman without really saying much about Him or referring to scriptural passages. This was intentional<sup>on</sup> and its purpose was to arouse your curiosity. So let us very quickly describe what the Upanishads and the Vedanta-Sutras have to say regarding Brahman.

Before creation came into existence, Brahman existed as the Unmanifest. From the Unmanifest he created the manifest. From himself he brought forth himself. Hence he is known as the Self-Existence.

Taittiriya Upanishads.

In the Vedanta-Sutras the great sage Sankara teaches that whatever is, is in reality one. We have been taught that the first principle is unity, and this oneness is called God. ( Brahman ) We find no real exceptions in other religions that deny this idea. Mostly the exceptions arise when we try to describe God in the personal sense. Whether we call God Allah, or Brahman, he is still defined with a

8

description which is universal in its meaning. God is the all powerful, omnipotent, all prevailing being. In the opening of the glorious Koran, Allah is described as the " Lord of worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful, the owner of the day of judgement." The Old Testament describes God in similar ways. Both holy scriptures, the Koran and the Bible give God human like qualities. The Bible describes him as a ~~revengeful~~ God who will smite the enemies of his people; yet he is also described as a loving God. So we see God described with human qualities and this is quite understandable. Man is forced to describe his surroundings in terms of what his physical senses perceive. Thus in describing God he falls back on what his senses have taught him is real. But do we do justice to God by giving him these human attributes? If we say God is subject to emotions then he is subject to indecision. If he regrets that he has flooded his world in anger then he cannot make up his mind as to what is right and wrong. When he favors one tribe over another then he is a God predisposed to prejudices. If through his Son, Christ, he brings a new law to the world, then this negates the old law and leaves one to wonder whether he will change his mind again. What a vacillating God this would be.

Now many argue that God gave Man a free will and because of this will Man is responsible for his acts. But an obvious question is why he bothered to create man in the first place. Did he say, "I'm lonely, I'll make me a Man?" There is really no valid argument to explain why God would bother to create in the first place. If God is a creating being then he too must have been created. If he has a purpose for us then he too must have a purpose. The idea of a physical God who manifests through Christ is an extreme extension of man's need to identify with the incomprehensible; to explain that which his senses cannot. From our previous arguments describing the Absolute we must reject the concept of a God who both possesses human qualities and Absolute qualities. If we wish to describe God in the personal sense - fine. But do not attribute absolute qualities to him if you wish your arguments to stand the test of logic.

ULTIMATELY

Brahman is that which is undefinable. How can we describe a state which is neither existence nor non-existence? To repeat: Man is limited by the tools he may use to describe his world. The real world is a finite world and we cannot expect to be able to describe the infinite with finite methods.



He truly knows Brahman who knows him as beyond knowledge; he who thinks that he knows, knows not. The ignorant think that Brahman is known, but the wise know him to be beyond knowledge..

Kena Upanishads..

What is the point in concerning oneself with Brahman if he is beyond knowledge? The reason we must never lose sight of God is because he is never beyond the true Self.. The fundamental idea of the Vedanta system of philosophy is " Tat Tvam asi," which means " That art thou." In other words, you

are Brahman. This means that Brahman, that is, the eternal principle of all beings, the power which creates all worlds, sustains them and again absorbs them, is identical with the Atman...."

Deussen.

That omniscient omnipotent cause from which proceeded the origination, subsistence, and dissolution of this world--which world is differentiated by names and forms, contains many agents and enjoyers, is the abode of the fruits of actions, these fruits having their definite places, times and causes, and the nature of whose arrangements cannot even be conceived by mind,-- that cause we say is Brahman.

Sankara.

Throughout this discourse we have attempted to gently weave into you the concept that the God you worship is really the true Self that is within you. This true Self is the Atman and it is identically equal to Brahman. This is not an easy idea to accept and often

11

when one is first introduced to it he rejects it with distasteful feelings. In fact, there is usually invoked the whole gamut of human emotions possible. Some just lay the book aside and ignore any more inquiry into the subject. This type of person is the real fool of this world. He is the one who worships ignorance above all else. Then there is that type of person who says "I'll just see what this idiot is trying to say." This type of person usually succeeds in his life's pursuits because he is willing to give a new idea consideration. The really remarkable person is the one who is compelled to explore a new idea to its fullest. He seeks to study every facet of the subject before rendering criticism. He knows nothing can be mastered in a single day; so he doesn't voice an opinion until all avenues of argument have been explored. If he is steadfast in his own beliefs, after his study, it is because he is able logically to support his disagreements with

Now that we have some feeling for this idea of Brahman we may proceed to explore the ~~Atman~~ and ~~try to grasp the full meaning of~~ the Brahman equals Atman equality statement.

## A T M A N

Identification of Brahman with Atman is fundamental to Vedanta philosophy. Up to now, we have described the " You " as being identified with God. However, because there is no exact english word equivalent to the sanskrit word Atman, we have tried to find close substitutes which would convey the meaning of Atman. Strictly speaking though, the Atman and You cannot be thought of as having the same meaning. Let us now delve into this problem of separating what is normally thought of as Atman and what the Atman truly is.

Ordinarily one thinks of the term self in the sense of the ego. This idea stems from the relationship of one's being subject to his environment.

The ego in us is the actor, thinker and perceiver. That which performs all functions of the body and mind, is generally known as " I " or ego.

Swami Abhedananda.

The ego is that which is acted upon and that which acts upon its surroundings. It is that entity which by its very nature is constrained to be a function of the physical world. Without the physical world the ego does not exist. The ego's identity is the integral

part of all those experiences, both physical and mental, which have acted upon it in some finite period of time. The ego is developed through every experience in life; due to its being a part of nature, the ego suffers death.

Now it is commonly thought that the ego lives on after death in the form of a soul. Some say this soul goes to a Hell ( Depending on one's actions in this life ) while others maintain that the soul goes to a Heaven. Yet in both of these cases it is argued that the soul will have a life everlasting. But what is immortality? That which continues to live forever? But that which has a beginning must have an end. The rationality of the mind cannot conceive of something being created out of nothing. If the soul exists in the personalised state then it must be of substance. By the very laws of nature, substance cannot exist in a single phase for an infinite period of time. In addition, if we say that a soul has infinite existence, and then ~~claim~~ that another soul too may have infinite existence, we start adding infinites to infinites and this is contradictory to the concept of infinity. Infinite existence is that which belongs to Brahman alone. When we say that souls have infinite existence then in effect we are

saying that these souls become other Brahman. (Gods)  
Accepting this approach, we must reject the idea  
of a one all prevailing God. Thus do we contradict  
ourselves when we say there is but one God and  
that souls may have infinite existence or immortality.  
Immortality and infinity are synonymous terms only  
in-so-much as they relate directly to Brahman. (God)  
One cannot have two infinite states. One state must  
be bounded by the other. If there does exist a soul  
then it must be finite in its existence. Remember  
this: Infinity and immortality are descriptions of  
Brahman. When we describe souls as having immortality  
then we equate them with Brahman. But in doing this  
we say that all souls are the same because they are  
all one with Brahman.

Let us argue that the soul becomes infinite  
by being absorbed into the Godhead. But again we  
are adding to that which is defined to be of  
infinite dimensions. One cannot become absorbed into  
the infinite God for by the concept of an unbounded  
God the finite must already be contained within this  
infinite being. This last point is very important  
to Vedanta philosophy. for it helps us to understand  
the relationship of the Atman to God. When the  
individual soul realises his true relationship to God

then we may speak of his soul as having become absorbed into Brahman. The soul is not literally absorbed into this Being in the manner we might think of water being absorbed into the ground; but we may use this analogy to cast some light on this point. The soul is like the mist in the air. When it condenses it falls to the ground and is absorbed by the earth. Yet this mist had its origins on the earth so it is really returning to that which it was a part of from the beginning. Now when we attain Self-knowledge then we realise this truth and our minds are not clouded with erroneous ideas about God.

✓  
"absorb" is  
figurative  
as so used  
not literal

The true Self ( Atman ) is beyond space, time, and causation. The Atman is the center of the universe and is one with Brahman. If the true Self is within us, and it is also Brahman, then are we able to know the existence of Brahman? The best place to turn for such answers is the Vedanta-Sutras.

Moreover the existence of Brahman is known on the ground of its being the Self of ~~everyone~~. For every one is conscious of the existence of ( his ) Self, and never thinks 'I am not.' If the existence of the Self were not known, every one would think 'I am not.' And this Self ( of whose existence all are conscious ) is Brahman.  
Sankara.

Now since the true Self in us is God then it is nonsense to believe that one can attain to Brahman. You are already God! Cast away silly notions that you can become a God. God is in you already-He is you- and what is very important is that we realise this fact.

So it is a matter of "waking up"

The aim of Vedanta is not to discover God, as one would discover a treasure, but to realise that you are this magnificent treasure. The Atman is first to be heard, then thought about, and then meditated upon. You do not find the Atman-you realise it! Repeatedly the Upanishads equate the Self with God. We will try to show later that the words of Christ were not contradictory <sup>to</sup> this Atman=God relationship.

If you ask, "Why does the Atman exist?" it is the same as asking why God exists. The real question should be, "Why, if we are all God are there such great distinctions and differences between us?"

This is a very fair question and we shall try to resolve it when we discuss the concept of Maya.

But for the moment keep in mind that the Atman is the true Self which "resides" in the soul of Man, and the soul resides in the body of Man. The ego dies when the body dies; the soul continues for a very long