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BRAHMAN: the Highest God

Brahman is the central theme of almost all the Upanishads. Brahman is the indescribable, inexhaustible, omniscient, omnipresent, original, first, eternal and absolute principle who is without a beginning, without an end, who is hidden in all and who is the cause, source, material and effect of all creation known, unknown and yet to happen in the entire universe.

He is the incomprehensible, unapproachable radiant being whom the ordinary senses and ordinary intellect cannot fathom grasp or able to describe even with partial success. He is the mysterious Being totally out of the reach of all sensory activity, rationale effort and mere intellectual, decorative and pompous endeavor.

The Upanishads describe Him as the One and indivisible, eternal universal self, who is present in all and in whom all are present. Generally unknown and mysterious to the ordinary masses, Brahman of the Upanishads remained mostly confined to the meditative minds of the ancient seers who considered Him to be too sacred and esoteric to be brought out and dissected amidst public glare.

Though impassioned and above the ordinary feelings of the mind, the masters of the Upanishads some times could not suppress the glory, the emotion, the passion and the poetry that accompanied the vast and utterly delightful, inner experience of His vast vision. In the Mundaka Upanishad the mind explodes to reverberate with this verse, "Imperishable is the Lord of love, as from a blazing fire thousands of sparks leap forth, so millions of beings arise from Him and return to Him." Again in the Katha Upanishad we come across a very poetic and emphatic expression, "In His robe are woven heaven and earth, mind and body...He is the bridge from death to deathless life."

The Brahman of the Upanishads is not meant for the ordinary or the ignorant souls, who are accustomed to seek spiritual solace through ritualistic practices and rationalization of knowledge. Discipline, determination, guidance form a self-realized soul, purity of mind, mastery of the senses, self-control and desireless actions are some of the pre-requisites needed to achieve even a semblance of success on this path. Only the strong of the heart and pure of the mind can think of dislodging layer after layer of illusion and ignorance that surrounds him and see the golden light of Truth beckoning from beyond.

He is not like the other gods either. He is incomprehensible even to almost all the gods. And He chooses not to be worshipped in the temples and other places of worship but in one's heart and mind as the indweller of the material body and master of the senses, the charioteer. He is too remote and incomprehensible to be revered and approached with personal supplications although He is the deepest and the highest vision mankind could ever conceive of or attain.

The weak and the timid stand no chance to approach Him even

remotely, except through some circuitous route. For the materialistic and the otherworldly who excel in the art of converting everything and anything into a source of personal gain, He does not offer any attraction, solace or security as a personal God.

That is why we do not see any temples or forms of ritualistic worship existing for Brahman either at present or in the past. We only hear of fire sacrifice, later to be called Nachiketa fire, to attain Him, which was taught to the young Nachiketa by Lord of Death, but lost in the course of time to us. Perhaps the sacrifice was more a meditative or spiritual practice involving the sacrifice of soul consciousness than a ritual worship.

Whatever it is, the fact is that Brahman of the Upanishads is more appealing to the seekers of Truth and Knowledge than seekers of material gains. Even during the Islamic rule when the principles of monotheism challenged the very foundations of Hinduism, Brahman was never brought into the glare of public debate to challenge the invading and overwhelming ideas of the monotheistic foreign theology.

And even during the period of the Bhakti movement, when the path of devotion assumed unparalleled importance in the medieval Hindu society, Brahman was somehow not made the center of direct worship in the form of Brahman as such. He became the personal God with a name and form, but as Brahman remained out side the preview of the Bhakti movement.

Perhaps the exclusion was so evident and seemingly so intentional that even Lord Brahma, the first among the Trinity and the first among the created, was also simultaneously excluded from the ritualistic worship, probably for the similarity in names. Very few temples exist for this god even today in India, probably as He is seen more as a source of intelligence and creativity than of material wealth.

Some Upanishads do describe Brahman as the Lord of Love. It is a description born out of pure personal experience of a seeker of truth, not from a devotee's imaginative and self-induced emotional energy. The description and approach, therefore, is more philosophical and impressionably revelatory in its approach than feverishly emotional or reverently devotional. The reason was not difficult to understand.

Brahman was too remote, indifferent, disinterested, too vast a principle to be reduced into meaningful and intellectually satisfying forms and shapes and worshipped as such. Existing beyond all the surface activities of illusory life, he was like the remote star, heard but rarely seen, seen but vaguely remembered, remembered but rarely explicable, unlike the daily sun that traversed across the sky spreading its splendor in all directions and appealing to the common man with its intensity, visible luminosity and comforting him with its assuring and predictable routine.

Hidden, however, in the practice of Bhakti was the inherent and inviolable belief that the aim of all devotion was the attainment of the Supreme Self, though the path chosen for the purpose was circuitous and symbolic, rarely suggestive of any direct involvement of the eternal Brahman Himself in His original formless condition. Since the mind could only comprehend and derive inspiration in a language that it can understand and interpret, the Saguna Brahman, Iswara in the form of various manifestations became the object of devotion and personal

worship.

But the same was not true of the formless Nirguna Brahman, beyond duality and activity. Ignoring the citadels of human civilization, He, the Absolute, continued to remain in the hearts of His spiritual aspirants, away from the din of materialistic life. He remained confined even as of today, to a few illumined minds, guiding them in His mysterious and invisible ways through the minds of self-realized souls, who have been too spiritualistic and disinterested in worldly life to consider any thing other than self as a matter of spiritual interest.

The ancient seers described Brahman as the One eternal principle, the unity behind all, the connecting principle, the light shining through all. But at the same time they also referred to him variously as almost every thing. He was thus One and the many, the finite and the infinite, the center as well as the circumference, the enjoyer as well the enjoyed, the hidden as well as the manifest, in a nut shell, every thing and any thing that we can conceive of or imagine or perhaps much more than that. Incomprehensible even to the gods, as Kena Upanishad narrates, He stands above all, tall and mysterious, almost incommunicable except through personal experience and inner voyage.

As a formless Being He was the Nirguna Brahman, the unqualified principle totally beyond the reach of all levels of intelligence. Assuming myriad forms He becomes Saguna Brahman, the one with attributes and qualifications. In this capacity as the formless and the One with form, He becomes all the multiplicity in this vast universe. He becomes everything and also nothing. Thus He is the day and night, light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance, the river and the ocean, the sky and the earth, the sound and the silence, the smallest as well as biggest of all and also the abyss of the mysterious nothingness.

The attributes are many and repetitively suggestive of His universality and His unquestionable supremacy. This existence of the duality and the myriad contradictions inherent in the creation of life are the riddles which the minds of the disciples were expected to understand and assimilate till all the confusion and contradiction becomes reduced to one harmonious and meaningful mass of Truth.

In the Katha Upanishad we come across this explanation of Brahman being compared to the Aswaththa tree in reverse, whose roots are above and the branches spread down below. "Its pure root is Brahman from whom the world draws nourishment and whom none can surpass." Actually this is an analogy drawn from the Sun whose base is above and whose rays spread downwards in thousand directions.

Myriad are the ways in which Brahman is described in the Upanishads. The verses strenuously struggle to explain the novice students of spiritual practice the immensity of the object of their meditation. There is a feeling of respect and reverence mixed with fear and awe. Even the gods seem to be not very comfortable with this concept of an unknown, mysterious and unfathomable God. The Lord of death explains to the young Nachiketa, "In fear of Him the fire burns, the sun shines, the clouds rain and the winds blow. In fear of Him death stalks about to kill."

He is the creator, the life giver and also the reliever of the devoted and determined from bondage. The manifest universe is his creation. He created it through Self-projection, out of Ananda,

pure Delight. The process of creation is not very explicitly mentioned but one can draw some inferences from verses such as this, "The deathless Self meditated upon Himself and projected the universe as an evolutionary energy. From this energy developed life, the mind, the elements, and the world of karma."

This is not the God who can be supplicated with rituals and sacrifices. The Upanishadic seers did not show much respect to the outer aspects of religious practice. The rituals according to them constituted the lower knowledge. "Such rituals," declares Mundaka Upanishad, "are unsafe rafts for crossing the sea of worldly life, of birth and death. Doomed to shipwreck are they who try to cross the sea of worldly life on these poor rafts." The argument does not end here. It goes on, "Ignorant of their ignorance, yet wise in their estimate, these deluded men proud of their learning go round and round like the blind, led by the blind. Living in darkness, immature unaware of any higher good or goal, they fall again and again into the sea."

Please read the concluding part of the essay on Brahman from the link provided below.

[Part II. Brahman in the Upanishads](#)

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Brahman in the Upanishads- Part II

Many are the ways in which Brahman is extolled in the Upanishads. The following are a few most commonly found descriptions, by meditating upon which one may develop some understanding of this vast Phenomenon.

1. Brahman is the Reality. He is the Absolute Truth. All else is unreal and mere illusion, a mere shadow that disappears when the Sun shines.
2. Brahman is constant and fixed. He is unchangeable, immutable, permanent, incorruptible and inexhaustible. All else is transient, fleeting and changing. Since He is the only fixed factor in an every changing impermanent world, the seers advise us to make Him the center of our lives and activities
3. Brahman is eternal and timeless. Since He is the Absolute, Time does not exist in Him. The Past present and future flow in Him simultaneously. The Master of Time and Knower of all events, past., present and future, He creates Time as a part of His play and subjects us all to the motions of Time.
4. Brahman is the Creator of all. The world is his projection. He descends into the material universe and subjects Himself to the laws of nature.
5. Brahman is the sacred OM.
6. Brahman is beyond the senses, but is the mover and enjoyer of senses.
7. Brahman is the first principle. He is the Ancient. No one truly knows Him for He is without a beginning and without an end.
8. Brahman is pure love. He is described as Lord of Love.
9. Brahman is immortal. He in fact is the creator of death and the wheel of life.
10. Brahman is the law giver and law maker. He maintain Dharma and Rita (harmony). But He Himself is not subject to any laws.
11. Brahman exists in all and all exists in Him. Yet He is beyond all and different from all.
12. Brahman is Supreme Bliss. Pure Delight, which is the delight of pure love.
13. Brahman is the eternal soul, the Atman, the indweller of mortal bodies, the silent witness, the enjoyer of life and the power behind all the movements of life breath.
14. Brahman is above all Gods. None could ever approach Him closely except Indra.
15. Brahman is duality personified from the rationale point of view. But strangely in Him all conflicts and contradictions resolve

themselves into perfect harmony.

16. Brahman is unified awareness, the eternal indivisible One where there is no enjoyer and the enjoyed, the knower and the known.

17. Brahman is radiance, effulgence and brilliance of thousands of suns. He is the wielder of pure energy and possessor of pure consciousness.

18. Brahman is desireless, without attachment, without vibration, complete, fulfilled, self-satisfied and self- absorbed.

19. Brahman is without sleep, dispeller of darkness, the very intelligence in man, One who is awake when we are asleep.

20. Brahman is knowledge. He is the knower of all that is, that was and that is yet to come.

21. Brahman is man Himself, the ultimate truth which every human being realizes at the end of his spiritual journey. (Isa Upanishad)

To understand the splendor, greatness and dimensions of Brahman, please also read the tenth chapter the Gita, called [Vibhuti yoga](#).



[To Know more about Brahman please click here.](#)



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