

The Upanishad reads:

As is the atom, so is the universe;

As is the human body, so is the cosmic body;

As is the human mind, so is the cosmic mind;

As is the microcosm, so is the macrocosm.

After reading that, David Joseph Bohm, a quantum physicist wrote:

Indeed, to some extent it has always been necessary and proper for [a person], in [their] thinking, to divide things up. If we tried to deal with the whole of reality at once, we would be swamped. However when this mode of thought is applied more broadly to [a person's] notion of [them self] and the whole world in which [they] live, (i.e. in [their] world-view) then the [person] ceases to regard the resultant divisions as merely useful or convenient and begins to see and experience [them self] and this world as actually consti-tuted of separately existing fragments. What is needed is a relativistic theory, to give up altogether the notion that the world is constituted of basic objects or building blocks. Rather one has to view the world in terms of [a single] universal flux of events and proc-esses.

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Brahman

I am the Self that dwells in the heart of every mortal creature:

I am the beginning, the life span, and the end of all.

__I am the radiant sun among the light-givers:

__I am the mind:

__I am consciousness in the living.

I am death that snatches all;

I, also, am the source of all that shall be born.

__I am time without end:

__I am the sustainer: my face is everywhere.

I am the beginning, the middle, and the end in creation:

I am the knowledge of things spiritual.

__I am glory, prosperity, beautiful speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness, and forgiveness.

I am the divine seed of all lives.

In this world nothing animate or inanimate exists without me.

__I am the strength of the strong;

__I am the purity of the good.

I am the knowledge of the knower.

There is no limit to my divine manifestations.

__Whatever in this world is powerful, beautiful, or glorious, that you may know to have come forth from a fraction of my power and glory.

Bhagavad-Gita

Corners of Truth: Hinduism

You might remember that I started a series called Corners of Truth in which I focus on one specific piece of each world religion that I find particularly valuable in our common quest. I will be doing two of these services a year and today we're focusing on Hinduism.

Hinduism is an enormous religion. In fact, it's many different religions that were given one name when the British first arrived in India. Not recognizing the different devotions, the British declared that everyone on this sub-continent were of one faith. Over time and as a result of mobility of both people and ideas, Hinduism has a more unified grounding today, but even now a careful look at different areas of the country will reveal a great diversity of expressions of faith.

This Corners of Truth series isn't meant to summarize an entire religion in twenty minutes, but to hold up one particular revelation that faith offers the world. Hinduism is vast and deep and wide and offers many insights into the human condition and the way of the universe. Today, I'm looking at what is often called Philosophical Hinduism because it is what undergirds that system that I find most enriching.

Brahman, in Philosophical Hinduism, is Ultimate Reality, capital U, capital R. Brahman energizes the universe. Brahman pervades everything, is everything. Brahman is impossible to describe. It's like trying to contain infinity. Language is too small for that which Is All. Brahman is ever growing, transcending human thought, transcending the universe. Hindus might say Brahman is Light and Love, Bliss and Consciousness; Brahman is Existence Itself. As the universe expands, Brahman expands. When we breathe, we breathe Brahman. Brahman is that which makes us alive, the spark of life in all things, the animator, the Ground of our Being.

Brahma is the infinite spirit, source, fabric, core and destiny of all existence, both manifested and unmanifested and the formless infinite substratum from whom the universe has grown. Brahman is the ultimate, both transcendent and immanent, the absolute infinite existence, the sum total of all that ever is, was, or shall be.

Brahman, unlike many other gods, isn't the creator or the preserver or the destroyer. Brahman is above or beyond intentional acts. Brahman isn't individuated, Brahman simply Is. Brahman is Life, the basis for everything, the supreme value. Brahman comes from words meaning Great Breath. It is within Brahman that all things are held together. Brahman is the great container.

Brahman is a difficult concept to understand. Brahman is not a personal god. In the western world we think about god as a conscious and constant companion, but in this case, god is not the one swimming beside you; god is the ocean and god is the shore. Brahman surrounds and supports and allows you to be alive and Brahman is the goal, the direction of all things. Brahman is World Soul or Cosmic Soul. The essence of all the Universe.

In Philosophical Hinduism there's another concept, that of Atman. Atman is the Self, the soul, the mind. Atman is the interiority of the human person, that which makes us who we are. Atman is the immortal, perfect spirit, the essence of Self. Atman is the ego, the animator, the core of our being.

So, here's the concept, here's the Corner of Truth, here's the piece of Hinduism that, for me, is a real window into something profound and real.

Brahman is the Ground of Being, Ultimate Reality. Atman is the Soul. The truth? Atman IS Brahman.

Atman is Brahman. One beautiful way Hindus explain this concept is by using the image of the ocean. There is one ocean. When a wave crashes on a rock, drops separate and for that instant, they believe they are distinct. But they are still of one ocean. They will fall back in and become part of the whole soon. The disconnection they experience is an illusion. We are drops of a vast ocean. One source. One substance. We live in an illusion of separation, but we are all of the Ocean.

We experience our lives, our Selves, our Atman. We have an experience of being individuals when in fact, we are all One. Atman is Brahman.

The esteemed guru Anan-da-mayi Ma wrote: "One day I distinctly got the command: 'From today you are not to bow down to anybody.' I asked my invisible monitor, 'Who are you?' The reply came 'Your Power.' I thought that there was a distant Power residing in me and guiding me by issuing commands from time to time...After some time I again heard the voice within myself which told me: 'To Whom are you obedient? You are everything.' At once I realized that the universe was all my own manifestation. Partial knowledge then gave way to the integral, and I found myself face to face with the One that appears as many."

You are Everything. You are the Universe. You are cosmic. The human soul is vast and deep and open

and connected. Atman is Brahman. Atman, the Self, my Consciousness is Brahman, is Ultimate Reality, is Ultimate Truth. Atman is Brahman. Consciousness is Ultimate Truth. We have the potential to be everything, to know everything. We are limited by our inability to see past our immediate experience, but with disciplined meditation, we are able to use our minds as windows into all that is True.

What we experience is the primary source of knowledge. There are great implications here for the Humanist. There is nothing outside of what we can know, nothing outside of our own soul in the largest sense of the word. Another way to say this is that there is no god who knows everything, who acts outside of us. We are each part of that great Being. Our deepest Self connects with the universe, empties and is replenished by Infinity. We are the ocean. Nothing exists outside of us. We are complete.

But we are not each, individually, Brahman. It's not that I am God, but that WE are God. We, together, are the source and the goal, the beginning and the end. This concept is the end of dualism. There is no us and them, there is no way to hide or cover or dismiss. All is One. The temporary illusion of separation will end in death if not in living enlightenment gained through meditation and right practice. It is a flash, like the spray from a crashing wave; we experience it momentarily but will return to Brahman and to our True Selves not impeded by illusion.

The human challenge is to eliminate maya, the perception of duality, the illusion of separation, to stop experiencing ourselves as divided and to know ourselves as One Being. That is the spiritual work. To live out of the knowledge that we are each of the same substance and we will return to the same source.

This is the end of isolation. We are all radically attached, all of the same substance. Atman is like an hour glass. It begins wide and open as the cosmos and empties into one being and then pours out back into the cosmos. We are all connected, all part of Infinity, of Ultimate Reality. All we have is surface diversity; at our core, we are all Brahman.

When Atman is Brahman, there is no hierarchy, there is no dualism, no good and bad. All is All. There is a singularity and our illusion of separation.

What we are talking about has a wide variety of theological and spiritual applications that range from the individual to the planet, for creating wholeness. Currently, many of us have numerous things going on at once. I've said it before- we live fragmented lives. So many things we're each involved with, so many people and projects and causes. We are scattered, multitasking various experiences each on the surface and with tiny bits of time sprinkled amidst other things, nothing providing depth of meaning. The concept that Atman is Brahman is a challenge- all is One. If we are to live into the implications of that concept, we might gather up all the little pieces of our lives and create a centered, faithful whole. We might assemble all those fragmented parts and sculpt a single life, focused and clear. Reality is One.

There are great implications for justice work in this Hindu vision. The result of the end of this illusion is ahimsa, non-violence or non-injury. In other words, when we have accepted our common source, the only way of being is non-violent. Ahimsa is the natural way once we know that all is one, all are god, all are connected. This is not just about killing another person, but about non-injury to all living beings. The daffodils and the cherry trees and the house flies and the goldfish and the cows and the ladybugs and bacteria and the mosquito- they all have atman, all are part of the Source of Being and are all protected from intentional harm. When we are enlightened, we live gently.

What we are talking about could encourage an end to oppression. We can move from separation to communion, from many individuals, to one body working toward our shared goal of non-violence. It could become a mandate for compassion and even for profound empathy, once we see ourselves in each other's eyes.

If I knew that the man on the corner with his feet in plastic bags rather than shoes, smelling of the consequences of life lived on the street, whose hair is matted and mind and speech are foggy- if I knew that he and I were of the same substance, that he, too is Brahman, how might I treat him? How might our culture embrace the sick or the lonely or the poor or the imprisoned? If Thou Art That, how might we alter our behavior to sweep up the fragmented pieces of our society and mold them back together to create a unified whole?

I'm sure you've heard the greeting Namaste. It literally means the divine in me recognizes the divine in you. The two hands clasped together represent the two gods.

Can I ignore the immigrant searching for a safe place to raise her children when I remember that she, too, is Brahman. Can I forget the two million men in prison when I know they are each Brahman, they are each Infinity. Will the restaurant worker making two dollars an hour remain invisible to me when I know that she, too breaths

the Great Breath? Can I overlook the paranoid schizophrenic who has no mental health care if I remember that we are of the same substance?

What would change if this concept was the driving force in your life? What would change if each time you looked in the mirror, you saw the face of god? If each time you looked at another person, you knew them to be of the divine spirit, to be Cosmic Soul?

I can hear some of you tell me that Hindus don't live this perfectly. It's true. What I'm describing today is theology and like all good theology, it tells us what life is beneath what we can see and pushes us to live out of a deeper, grander reality. There are implications for behavior, but rarely are those implications made manifest flawlessly. I have never seen anyone live their faith perfectly. Not the Hindus or the Buddhists or the Christians or the Jews or the UUs. I have yet to see the perfect UU. I have seen our faith lived beautifully, but never perfectly.

How do we move closer to knowing the truth of our existence? How do we end the illusion and know Atman to be Brahman? The Hindus would say we can do this through meditation. They also grant the human person many lives during which we can move forward into this insight. But maybe the path most of us can take is that of living your dharma, your duty, living into what is right, what is your path. Knowing your True Self comes from following your True Path.

I'm not suggesting this is easy. What I'm suggesting is that it is rich in potential for living meaningfully. I'm suggesting that we live in a way, in a culture, in a society that affirms and maybe even exaggerates our individuality, our separate existences. In this current reality, we experience the world often as a fragmented or lonely place. Home is difficult to determine. Community is hard to find and harder to keep. People are sick and suffering, each in their own constructs, few within our circles of concern.

I'm suggesting that there's another way to experience the world, another way to understand how we live on this planet, how we live in this particular moment in history. It is to know that Atman is Brahm- to know that the cosmos pours itself into me and I empty again into infinity. It is to know that I am part of a vast whole, a Great Breath and that there is no separation between me and you and us and all that is. Atman is Brahm. I am God. We are God. We are the whole and the parts, the beginning and the end. We are Light and Love, Bliss and Consciousness; We are Existence Itself. As the universe expands, We expands. It's time we sweep up the fragmented pieces of ourselves, look in the mirror and know there is One and we are it. Atman is Brahman.

And so, to you I say, Namaste.