

Mândukya Upanishad: *Some Notes on the* *Philosophy of the Totality* *of Existence¹*

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Table of Contents

1. Reality and Relations.....	2
Introduction.....	2
Causality: A Presupposition.....	2
Name and Form.....	5
2. The Three States & the Fourth.....	7
The Three States.....	7
The Fourth.....	9
The Three States viewed from the Fourth.....	11
The Mantra 'OM'.....	12
3. Seeing Brahman with Open Eyes.....	14
Introduction.....	14
Life as the Confrontation of Contradictions.....	14
The Mahavakya.....	18

1 These three articles on the *Mândukya Upanishad* are based on notes made by Mr Gilbert Vaillant during lectures delivered by Swami Siddheswarananda at Centre Védantique Ramaknchna, Gretz, France, in the 1950s. Translation and edit by André van den Brink of the Netherlands.

1. Reality and Relations

Introduction

The *Māndukya Upanishad* is a philosophy of the Totality of existence, which is not the same as the sum total of a number of separate entities or data added together. It seeks the knowledge of that Totality, which endeavours to solve the greatest problem of philosophy: *the contradiction between life and death*.

In non-duality there are no relations: there is only the one reality. That is why the *Māndukya Upanishad* speaks of *Asparsha Yoga*, the yoga of 'no-contact', of 'no-relation'. This is in contrast to everyday-life, which consists of relations and rapports *only*. The problems in the life of an individual are always relational problems. It is only through relations and rapports that we can have knowledge, normally speaking. This we ought to keep as a keystone for the study of the *Māndukya Upanishad*: “*all is rapports*”.

Causality: A Presupposition

Perhaps the most important mental artifice for establishing rapports is causality. Causality is a principle which is established by our intelligence in order to find an explanation via relations and rapports. It is also a given fact of our education, of our culture. From early childhood each human being has been conditioned by the principle of causality, and thus it has become a universal principle. Nevertheless, it is only through the intelligence of our imagination that we have created such a universal principle in order to be able to interpret and manage our every-day world. The notion of a 'primary cause' is only an idea born from the need to understand. The numerous gods of Hinduism represent only that

one idea: the search for the cause—God (in religious terms). It is very difficult to eradicate the notion of a cause.

In religion, once we have been caught by the principle of causality, there are the ideas of immanence and transcendence. We then believe that there is the one reality and that that is a transcendental state. In that state, a 'fall' takes place, and then, in that fall, the manifestation takes place, and so on. From an early age we have been nourished by that theological dualism, and we don't even ask ourselves whether such an idea is really correct!

The *Mândukya Upanishad*, on the other hand, is a metaphysics leading to wisdom, to knowledge. In it there is *no* redemption, *no* God, *no* sanctity, *no* transcendence, *no* mysticism, *no* esoterics. There one does not run to the forests in order to attain the final *samâdhi*. This metaphysics is reserved for very few people and therefore in India this teaching was given behind closed doors so as not to confuse other people.

The problem of cause and effect is well presented in the example of the clay and its forms, which is found in the *Chhândogya Upanishad: Brahman*, the one reality, is the clay. No one is able to perceive clay as such: we always see only *forms* of clay—where there is form, there is clay, and where there is clay, there is form. Thus, as an 'observer', we can never go and stand *outside* the one reality; being a *form* of clay, we are inescapably *part* of the Whole and, as such, we will never be able to 'grasp' the Whole. As an individual we are indissolubly connected with the one reality; we cannot objectify the reality nor abstract ourselves from it as a subject. As no form of clay can exist apart from clay, so also no material or mental form can stand outside the reality. In this sense the idea of a separate, independent personality—how-

ever much unique in itself—is an illusion.

In terms of cause and effect we can never experience the cause, *Brahman*, as an object. What we see are always the effects only, even when the effects (*the forms of clay*) cannot be distinguished from their cause (*the clay*), as in the case of a substance that is constantly changing, but which remains unknown in itself. Our error is that we are trying to find a cause apart from the forms. *Brahman*, the one reality, is being known *through* the forms by means of the metaphysical insight, just as the clay is known *through* its forms, for the clay and its forms are inseparably one.

The evolution idea, the idea of 'progress', tells us that form A precedes and, therefore, is the cause of form B which we are seeing now, and so on. This is an error: the so-called cause is always the one and the same reality (*clay*). The same applies to the practice of spirituality: 'realisation' or 'liberation' is not the 'product' (*effect*) of a foregoing, personal effort (*cause*), however much it may take its legitimate place.

Also one should always try to get rid of the notion of a substratum, of a separate, more or less concrete base serving as a 'ground' cause. Shankara's theory of super-imposition (*adhyâsa*) of the reality as presented in the classic example of the piece of rope which is being mistaken for a snake, is a concession to the presupposition of causality. Nobody ever experiences ignorance or unreality *directly*. It is always only *afterwards*, through memory, that we speak of unreality or of error—so always in relation to an experience *in the past*. The notion of reality persists through *all* of our perceptions and experiences: *the clay remains clay under all of its forms*. The *Māndukya Upanishad* places a time-bomb under the presupposition of causality.

Name and Form

However, in order to record and communicate the experience of our perceptions, we attribute certain sound-symbols to them—their names. The names are like labels which enable us to indicate objects and ideas. Through the emotional value of a name we maintain a certain rapport, a certain relationship with an object or idea.

First we have the idea that an object is presenting itself as an independent, separate reality. Nevertheless each object is but a form, the essence of which remains unnameable—just as in the example of the clay. Next, we attach, through tradition or convention, a name to the form of the object, which we are able to communicate via a common language. The name (*nama*) is the 'naming' (and therefore defining) element, and the form (*rupa*) is the element 'named' (the defined). It is said that it was only *after* the fall, when Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (the knowledge of *relativity* brought about by polarisation through opposites—*mâyâ*), that they started to give names (definitions) to the things.

In the perception of a table, for example, there is only the perception of its total instantaneousness. Just as in the perception of a dream). We first have a *direct* perception of the table, then the idea 'table' comes to our mind. Next we try to analyse the experience of that perception: We put the idea 'table' (*the name*) on one side, and the object (*the form*) on the other side. Through the power of abstraction we make a separation between the table and the name of the table, that is to say, with our imagination we mentally attribute an independent existence to the name of an object. That way all names are recorded and stored in the mind, to be processed into a more or less complex structure which we exper-

ience as an 'inner' world of our own. With this complex we identify ourselves *indirectly* and *retrospectively* through the memory, so as to derive a sense and meaning from it as a person.

With one single effort, push aside the illusion that name and form may be seen separately. Name and form are indissolubly linked to each other as the mental and physical aspect of one and the same reality. From the Totality of Time the names are as much a manifestation within *time-duration* as are their forms: the name has no superiority over the form, or the form over the name. He who knows through realisation that, *in reality*, there is no difference between name and form, is liberated.

The notion of unreality, of illusion or of ignorance, consisting of name and form, is felt only in relation to a foregoing experience. With the realisation of the metaphysical insight all rapports collapse into the non-dual *one*.



2. The Three States & the Fourth

The Three States

The unique contribution of the *Mândukya Upanishad* lies in an investigation into the nature of the three states of consciousness (*avasthâtraya*) of waking (*jagrat*), dreaming (*swapna*), and deep, dreamless sleep (*sushupti*). With a very rigorous logic it can be established that, from the standpoint of consciousness, it is impossible to arrive at dualism. The individual which imagines itself to be passing through the three states of consciousness every day, is *in reality* nothing but the indivisible, pure and non-dual consciousness. The dialectics of this analysis is explained by K.A.Krishnaswami Iyer in his book: '*Vedanta or the Science of Reality*'.

One never becomes conscious of consciousness as of an object. Consciousness is not an 'object' to be known as such, nor is it an entity of which the individual as a 'subject' could have the experience. On the other hand, for consciousness itself everything is equally an object, including the individual in its role as subject. In the Samkhya philosophy also everything is *prakriti*, matter, the whole of the mental world included. In Indian thought there is no dualism between matter and mind. That is the big issue which separates European thinking from Indian thinking – *there* lies the whole difference: *From the standpoint of consciousness no real distinction can be made between mind and matter*. For that reason Cartesian thinking ('*Cogito ergo sum*') actually represents a big fall in western philosophy, spiritually speaking.

Pure consciousness is like the number 1: indivisible (*advaita*). The notion of individuality, the sense of 'self', is really the notion of consciousness, essentially undivided, persisting *through* the three states of consciousness of waking, dream-

ing and deep sleep. The universal man—he who *knows* through realisation that he is pure consciousness—bears the whole universe within himself.

In the waking and dream states there is the experience of the reality in its manifested aspect, characterized by the opposition between the 'I' and the 'non-I'. In the state of deep sleep the reality is in its non-manifested aspect, which is the negation of the manifested aspect. Well then, no one can imagine a state in which there is a subject and an object, without there being another state, in which there is no subject and no object. Everything which is experienced here in the manifested is known, because of its being opposed to its antipode, the non-manifested: all relative knowledge arises from an opposite. According to Prof.V.Subramanyam Iyer: 'This is one of the greatest achievements of Indian thought.'

The positive can become a form of knowledge, only if the negative also exists. We can acquire an integral knowledge of the relative, only if we have an experience of another order in which all relative knowledge is absent. Well then, every person is daily in the state of deep sleep, the state of the non-manifested. An understanding of the position which deep sleep takes up within the whole of the three states of consciousness, gives a clear insight in which the error collapses. The non-manifested is a negative affirmation.

Is empirical knowledge possible without its opposite? All knowledge arises through opposition: black-white, cold-warm, pain-pleasure, etc. Empirical knowledge cannot arise, unless there is non-empirical knowledge as well. If the whole of empirical knowledge is only a play between the positive and the negative, then empirical knowledge as a whole can arise only if its opposite *as a whole* is also a factor of our experience. Now then, without the state of deep sleep it would

be impossible for us to come to an experience of the waking and the dream state. This is made clear in the last line of verse 5 of the *Mândukya Upanishad*: 'Deep sleep... who is the doorway to the experience (of the dream and waking states).' This knowledge regarding the state of deep sleep is only received through oral transmission.

The Fourth

The *Mândukya Upanishad* first gives us a definition of the waking state, the dream state, and the state of deep sleep. Subsequently the Upanishad speaks of '*turiya*' as being a fourth state of consciousness, using the word '*pâda*' which may mean both 'foot' and 'quarter'. In his commentary Shankara explains that *turiya* is not, for example, like the fourth foot of the four feet of a cow, in other words, as part of an arithmetical series. *Turiya* is *Brahman*, looked at from the non-causal standpoint, and is not part of any enumeration or classification. The Upanishad, according to the opposition raised by Shankara, actually identifies *turiya* with the fourth quarter of a coin that is divided into four parts as it were. The three states of consciousness of waking, dreaming and deep sleep make up the first three quarters of the coin. The first quarter merges into the second, the second quarter merges into the third, etc. *Turiya*, being' the fourth and last quarter into which the first three merge themselves, completes the coin by making it into one whole and, in that sense, it contains the first three quarters. It could then be argued accordingly, that each of the first three quarters represents a state of consciousness, and that *Turiya* is a fourth state of consciousness into which the first three are merged successively. *Turiya* would thus complete and 'perfect' the other three states by making them into one whole, thereby raising itself to a state of 'transcendence' as compared to the

other three states. But it is not at all like that: *Turiya* is not a *state* which one enters, stays in for a while, and then leaves again.

Turiya is the non-causal reality which persists *throughout* the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. It is the awareness of the reality, the sense of the real, which accompanies all of an individual's perceptions and experiences. The realisation of *Turiya* is a metaphysical insight. The one reality is an indivisible Totality and forms no part of the scheme of numbers. The example of the coin is used only to arrive at the notion of prime number: the philosophy of Shankara is non-dualistic (*advaita*), therefore undivided and indivisible. For that reason, *Turiya*, the one, non-causal reality, is considered as the number 1. Whether one multiplies, adds or divides, the number 1 is always implied. Whatever the process that is being applied, the number 1 is always implicitly present, we can never eliminate it. The divisions which we make are but our own mental divisions, the abstractions of our intellect. The notion of '1' is a metaphysical insight: *Turiya* is the 1.

Turiya is the Intemporal, the eternal *Now*, always staying outside the framework of the personal vision. Here it is not a matter of a 'fourth' state of 'transcendence': *Turiya* is the eternal 'here-and-now', present under all circumstances and in all states of consciousness. This given fact is, normally speaking, being disregarded by the individual, because of the power of ignorance (*avidyâ*), resulting in the denial and negation of its very indivisibility. The realisation of *Turiya* is the removal of that denial, which does not mean the removal of the world: it is only the ignorance which is removed. If the ignorance (*avidyâ*) results in the negation of the one reality, then the realisation of *Turiya* is the removing of that nega-

tion, leading to an affirmation, namely that *everything* is this one reality: *everything is Brahman*. At the same time this realisation gives us the knowledge that cause and effect are *one* in the moment of the eternal *Now*.

The Three States viewed from the Fourth

The idea that the three states of consciousness would succeed one another in time follows from a wrong interpretation by the intellect, made afterwards through abstraction in the waking state with the aid of memory. The 'I' of the waking state unjustly 'appropriates' the other two states of consciousness. This applies to the state of deep sleep in particular. In the expression, 'Last night I slept soundly for eight hours; I didn't know anything', the paradox of the state of deep sleep comes to light. The three aspects of this statement, 'I' (causal), 'for eight hours' (temporal), and 'didn't know anything' (cognitive), are but elements of an illegitimate claim made *afterwards* by the ego of the waking state. To that same ego the state of deep sleep remains puzzling, because in it [in deep sleep] the perception of the world as a time-space complex disappears all at once, including the perception of an 'I' as a subject. At the same time the state of deep sleep is a miniature example of the reality as a non-causal, non-relational and non-temporal actuality.

The dream state also may be an important guru to us. Looking at them from the eternal *Now*—time—the waking and the dream states, as manifestations, are equivalents. The dream state may give us an insight into the waking state: in the dream state, one and the same consciousness is spontaneously split into subject and object, thereby giving us a miniature example of how the world as a time-space complex may be presented all at once just as pure idea [imagery], in the Totality of the *Now*. The dream state makes it clear how

everything may be pure idea, including the idea of an 'I' as a subject. It is the unique contribution of the *Māndukya Upanishad* that it removes the distinction between the illusory reality of the dream state and the empirical reality of the waking state by viewing them as being on the same level.

The Mantra 'OM'

The mantra 'OM' forges the connecting link between the above metaphysical analysis and spiritual practice. The *Māndukya Upanishad* gives a unique place to the symbol 'OM'. OM is not a symbol in the usual sense of the term. Let us take an example: It can be said that the flag of a country is the symbol of that country, because the flag represents that country. OM, however, is more than a symbol representing the one reality. OM is a sign which possesses a concrete counter-value. A banknote, for example, is a sign, that is to say, the note may be exchanged for its fixed counter-value. Similarly, OM is a sign which not only represents the one reality, but presents it at the same time. The *Chhândogya Upanishad* states that the syllable OM contains all the sounds that may be uttered by man. Swami Vivekananda also explains in his 'Raja Yoga' that the syllable OM is the womb of all the vowels and consonants which the human voice is capable of: Starting with the 'A' sound with a fully opened mouth, one concludes, via the 'U' sound, with the 'M' sound, where the mouth is completely closed. Thus OM comprises all sounds and therefore, all names and their meanings.

The *Māndukya Upanishad* identifies the letter 'A' of the symbol OM with the waking state, the letter 'U' with the dream state, and the letter 'M' with the state of deep sleep. The letter 'A' merges in the letter 'U', and the letter 'U' in the letter 'M'. The silence which follows the uttering of the last letter 'M', and which constitutes the interstitial void between

any two words or thoughts, is identified with *Turiya*. The interstitial void may be made bigger by slowing down the 'internal dialogue' through the practice of the objectless attention.

Since name and form are indissolubly connected with one another, the same applies to OM: OM is the name of the reality. Meditation on the mantra OM is essential for those who are not able as yet to remove the ignorance directly with the aid of metaphysical insight.

Life is a dream.

Dream that you are the immortal Atman

and you become Atman.



3. Seeing Brahman with Open Eyes

Introduction

The *Mândukya Upanishad* is the only upanishad which is purely metaphysical. It teaches *ajata vada*, the way of the unborn, of non-causality. In the metaphysics of Vedanta a distinction is made between (1) reality (*tattva*)—that which does not change and which persists through all our experiences, and (2) truth (*mata*), of which, according to the Vedanta, there may be any number. Swami Vivekananda explains this with the example of the sun: somebody is travelling towards the sun and at each stage he takes a picture. The images are all different, but no one can deny that they all show the same sun. The reality always stays the same, whereas the truths, although all true at their own particular level, are relative. As such, everyone else is entitled to a place for his standpoint which is as important as the place occupied by our own standpoint.

The reality is the Totality of existence, which has two aspects: (a) the manifested aspect, and (b) the non-manifested aspect. The purport of the *Mândukya Upanishad* is to prove that, irrespective of the level of existence at which one may find oneself, there is only one Reality which *is*.

Life as the Confrontation of Contradictions

Mâyâ is that which is constantly changing, thereby giving rise to the numerous contradictions in life. That is why Swami Vivekananda explains that *mâyâ* is not just a theory of illusion, but a fact of our experience: it is the confrontation of the contradictions in life, the play of interaction between the positive and negative poles, where-from the ordinary, relative knowledge springs. The only way by which we may

know life, is *by* means of opposites, *by opposition*. And true knowledge (*jñāna*) arises from the confrontation of the silence with the tumult. Only very few can have *that jñāna*.

This confrontation is to be met on a basis which connects all the data of our perceptions and experiences, and which is not a denial. (Compare the concept of *dharma*, which literally means 'that which holds things together'.) When you faint, you deny pathologically; but in *samādhi*, you deny supernaturally in a trans-psychological state. But the reality is the Totality, the whole of everything (*sarvam*). A summing up of three or four states of consciousness would mean that the one reality is a compound, which is *im*-possible. And it is a great error of spiritual and philosophical life to think that all that is matter in life is to be rejected: by trying to make psychological supports and abstractions for oneself, by practising yoga, by leaving the world, retreating into caves and thus to deny the world completely. Surely, there are ways to leave the world, to practise meditation, *samādhi*, etc. for oneself, but that is not the ultimate state. It is not a matter of denying, of escaping or destroying the world, but of destroying *avidyā* that we are ignorant of the one reality as one undivided Totality.

One seeks solitariness, because one is too much occupied by the outer world. We practise detachment and renunciation in order to break our attachment to the material world; we enter the monastery in order to discipline ourselves, but we can never deny the Totality. Why not try to get rid of those contradictions of life *here and now*, in the little place that we occupy in life? Why practise all these gymnastics, which only serves to postpone the true knowledge?

Therefore, it is not the *yoga-samādhi* as such, as the ultimate form of meditation, against which a charge is being

made by the *Māndukya Upanishad*, but the wrong use of it as a means to arrive at the knowledge of reality. It is a warning against the practice of meditation as an end in itself. The world is not going to be explained by concentrating oneself exclusively on a condition of peace or by making oneself immune to the world. And this explanation of the world, of life's contradictions, is what is needed. The word *samādhi* means 'sameness of vision'. That sameness of vision comes with the enlightenment of the *buddhi*, the faculty of metaphysical discrimination, as a metaphysical insight. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna taught this *buddhi yoga* to Arjuna on the battlefield. He did not advise Arjuna to go and meditate in the caves, but to fulfil his duty as a warrior on the battlefield, established in the metaphysical insight. Sri Ramakrishna also admonished Naren (later Swami Vivekananda) to see Brahman *with open eyes*. Thus we can make a distinction between *yoga-samādhi* and the *jñāna-samādhi*: the former is a condition, in time, between a 'before' and an 'after', whereas the latter is a metaphysical insight into our true, intemporal being, which is not time-related.

So the *Māndukya Upanishad* breaks the wrong notion that the philosophy of Vedanta or the spirituality of Hinduism would advocate an escape from the world. The solution of problems and contradictions of life is the vision of the Intemporal *here* and *now*. Why not seek that knowledge right from the beginning? 'The unreal never exists; the real never ceases to exist.' Even in the midst of confusion and error, the awareness of the reality of the *Eternal Now* never fails.

We make a distinction between Time itself as the Totality of the *Eternal Now* (*turiya*), and 'time-duration' which is an interpretation *afterwards* of that which is constantly changing. The eternal *Now* is an ungraspable certainty, it is the

eternal Subject which never becomes an object of knowledge. When there is the notion of *particular* attention, there arises the notion of time-duration, of Time apparently being divided into *durations*. Then there is duality and multiplicity, and we enter into the scheme of numbers. Through *particular* attention we are living in time-duration, as it were; in other words: in relativity. This particular attention is innate in all beings and is the negation of Totality as the indivisible One. That is the ignorance, *avidyâ*, of the Vedanta, and the western 'fall' and 'original sin'. It keeps 'the third eye' of wisdom closed.

At present we have not the vision of the Totality, but the experience of relativity—*mâyâ*. The literal meaning of the word *mâyâ* is: 'That which measures (the Unmeasurable).' The ignorance (*avidyâ*) makes itself felt as a want, a gap, and as an individual, we are constantly looking for possibilities to fill that gap: trying to fill our lives sensibly so as to come to fulfilment. In our attempts to find compensation we are caught by the desire to embrace the particular in the manifestation. In the process of wanting to grasp the reality through the particular, we enter the field of time-space to be confronted there with the contradictions inherent in all experience—*mâyâ*. These contradictions *are* life—through this polarisation we *know* life. But, at the same time, there is the possibility to detach ourselves from it. The same relativity (*mâyâ*) may be solved through the very fact of its being inescapably related to the Totality in the eternal moment of here and now—just as forms of clay are always indissolubly connected with clay.

Through the practice of objectless attention we open ourselves to the possibility of being the pure and non-dual consciousness. Through the detachment of objectless atten-

tion, that very attention may be realized as the unrelated and unborn *Now* of Time. We don't have that attention; we *are* that attention as pure Intelligence, apart from all physical and mental activities. That realisation is the realisation of the metaphysical insight.

The Mahavakya

In the second verse of the *Mândukya Upanishad* is the *mahavakya* '*Ayam Atma Brahma*': This Atman is Brahman. The realisation of this *mahavakya* is not an experience, but a metaphysical insight falling outside the realm of duality. With this realisation disappears the ignorance regarding the non-dual nature of the one reality and, along with it, all the reports and relationships which were built between the 'I' and the 'non-I'. At the same time, the illusion that there had ever been the question of *two* selves, a higher Self and a lower Self, the latter being in search of the former, disappears.

As long as there is a seeking, there is the sense of separation. As long as there is a seeker, there is the faith in the words of the holy scriptures and in the example of those who realized their true nature. Faith is a knowledge 'by anticipation': without faith one cannot progress, whereas a *belief* may be refuted at any level.

Realisation is not the outcome of a certain discipline or planned action, but a metaphysical insight which makes one recognize that the reality is one integral whole. The metaphysical insight cannot be 'practised' as one would practise yoga. When all our personal efforts have collapsed through the bankruptcy of all our seeking, only then, on that basis, can the reality come and seek us with its grace. Realisation is a gift of the Omnipresent to stay in the Intemporal, where past and future dissolve in the moment of the eternal *Now*.

Realisation is the perception of the reality, a unique happening, indivisible, and therefore, ungraspable by the mind and its categories. The metaphysical insight is not a form of mental cognition (*vr̥tti*), *it does not remain stuck in an intellectual conviction, but implicates the person as a whole.*

The *Mândukya Upanishad* teaches us 'to see Brahman with open eyes'. In the words of Meister Eckhart: 'To see God is to see through the eyes of God.' It is a great outburst against the fixed idea that realisation is an exclusive state of security, in which there is no longer any danger, created by religion and yoga. Nor is it a matter of transcending the world: the world stays as it is.

There is only the overcoming of the ignorance regarding the truth of the one reality. Indian thought does not avoid the world of matter at all, but gives it its true value. There is no question of mystique or of transcendentalism: the whole of reality may be seen in a single grain of sand. Why seek a transcendence?

There is but one reality and three ways of seeing it. The three states of consciousness are three different visions of one and the same reality, they are like zones of attention through which the awareness of the reality persists. Let us take a stone, for example: in its grosser aspect it is perceived as a form of gross matter; under a microscope it is perceived as a specific molecular structure in movement; and with an even subtler perception the stone appears as a speck of light. All three are but the different presentations of one and the same substance.

What one sees in realisation is the reality and always only the reality. Mind and matter are equally Brahman. On the one hand, there is only Atman-Brahman who, as the eternal

Subject, is the Self of all our experiences; on the other hand, the experience of the world is but 'one unbroken perception of Brahman' as an Object. Therefore one can no longer say, 'Brahman is real and the universe is unreal.' *'All that exists is Brahman.'*



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