

“That which cannot be expressed in words but by which the tongue speaks—know that to be Brahman. Brahman is not the being who is worshipped of men.

“That which is not comprehended by the mind but by which the mind comprehends—know that to be Brahman. Brahman is not the being who is worshipped of men.

“That which is not seen by the eye but by which the eye sees—know that to be Brahman. Brahman is not the being who is worshipped of men.

“That which is not heard by the ear but by which the ear hears—know that to be Brahman. Brahman is not the being who is worshipped of men.

“That which is not drawn by the breath but by which the breath is drawn—know that to be Brahman. Brahman is not the being who is worshipped of men.”¹

And again, in a passage preserved only in Śaṅkara’s commentary:

““Sir,” said a pupil to his master, “teach me the nature of Brahman.” The master did not reply. When a second and a third time he was importuned, he answered: “I teach you indeed, but you do not follow. His name is silence.””

This last paradoxical view of Brahman seems the more worth noting because of the possibility that it too, like the others we have defined, had an important place in later Hindu philosophy—perhaps indeed a more important place than either of the other two. For who can say whether the apparent agnosticism of Buddha, often miscalled atheism, his refusal to make any affirmation whatever regarding Brahman, or God, may not have come from his attention to such passages as we have just quoted? For nobody doubts that Buddha made the most thorough study of the ancient scriptures.

Three views of Brahman, then, to sum up, all have a basis in the text of the Upaniṣads, the first two of which, primarily associated respectively with Rāmānuja and Śaṅkara, have for centuries divided the allegiance of orthodox saints and scholars. Must they continue to do so? Is there no means by which they can be reconciled?

None, it is clear, if reconciliation is to depend upon a discovery of identity between passages which on a natural interpretation are plainly dissimilar in meaning. That the relation of Brahman to the universe is variously represented in the Upaniṣads there can be no manner of doubt; and if a student is forced to make a choice between one formulation and another, then he will naturally lean to that one

¹ Kena, I. 5-9.