

Brahman and Maya

An Article by Swami Dayananda Saraswati | Version 1.01

Brahman has “become” the world through *māyā*

Brahman is *satyam*, absolutely real and formless. But then, there must be something with that Brahman to be able to ‘become’ this world of forms. This power is called *Māyā*. *Māyā* is there because this is how Brahman is. We don’t ask, “Why is there *māyā*?” because we don’t say that there is *māyā*. We say that there is only Brahman. Brahman ‘plus something’ doesn’t exist at all. Brahman is *satyam*, and any ‘plus’ is dependent upon Brahman for its existence and is therefore *mithyā*.

The world is Brahman. If Brahman is limitless consciousness, without any particular form, then how could it become this world of forms? It did not. Consciousness continues to be, without any change.

The gold has not become a chain. Only if it becomes a chain do I have to answer the question, “How did it become a chain?” Gold continues to be gold. Once you understand that clearly, then we can say Brahman has “become” the world through *māyā*.

There are rules here in the world; there are forces, causes and effects. Gold can be melted; it is a malleable metal; it can be drawn into a wire; the wire can be made into links; they can be connected and you can form a chain. Gold is given those capacities, those characteristics. Similarly, someone is given the skill, a physical body, and knowledge to make the chain. Everything is given. And all that is given is *Īśvara*. The chain on your neck is *Īśvara*. The gold is *Īśvara*, and the chain also is *Īśvara*. Really speaking, *Īśvara* made the chain. The given person who made the chain, Devadatta, is not separate from *Īśvara*. When we look at it from one standpoint, Devadatta made the chain. From another standpoint, *Īśvara* made the chain. There is nothing wrong with saying that. The only thing is, the man who says it should mean it, he should understand the whole of it.

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Brahman with *māyā* is *Īśvara*

When we talk of *Īśvara*, we understand that there must be something in Brahman which has this great power to create. That is *māyā* and it is also *mithyā* in terms of its reality. With that power alone Brahman is *Īśvara* and is the maker and material cause. If you look at *Īśvara* from the standpoint of knowledge and power, he is the maker, the intelligent cause. If you look at *Īśvara* from the standpoint of what makes him all-knowing, etc., then he becomes the material cause that undergoes a modification.

It is like the spider who, with reference to the product, the web, becomes the intelligent cause, from its own standpoint. From the standpoint of the web, he becomes the material cause. The spider, the conscious being who lives in his eight-legged body, who has knowledge and skill, is the maker of the web. He chooses the right place, never very near the floor, because he knows the lady of the house will come with a vacuum cleaner and his creation will be gone. Therefore, he puts it up in a corner near the ceiling, where the cleaning is done only once a year. By that time his life will be over. The choice of place implies knowledge. Where it should go, what it is for, is all well planned.

In the body of the spider there is a conscious being who is the maker and has the knowledge and skill to make the web. He is also the material cause to create the web. From the standpoint of its own body, because of which it is called a spider, it becomes the material cause.

Similarly Brahman with *māyā* is *Īśvara*. With *māyā* Brahman is all-knowing, all-mighty, the maker. From the standpoint of *māyā*, he has undergone a change to become the world of space, time, etc. From that standpoint *Īśvara* becomes the material cause. But that *Īśvara* is nothing but Brahman, and that *māyā* is not separate from Brahman. Therefore, Brahman alone counts—Brahman plus *māyā* is Brahman; Brahman plus the world is Brahman. One is *satyam* and everything else is *mithyā*. And that *satyam* you are (*tvam asi*).

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“This self is all this,” *aitadātmyam idam sarvam*. This entire world, including your body-mind-sense complex, has its being in this Brahman, *sat-cit-ānanda*. You are the whole. Even from the standpoint of the body, *Īśvara*’s manifest form includes your body too.

Value Addition without addition

Then why is there this feeling that one is only as much as the body? Even an enlightened man who knows he is the whole doesn’t think that when he gets up the whole world should get up. No. This physical body has another body called the subtle body which identifies with only one body. Beyond that it doesn’t go. There is a discreet entity, the body that still doesn’t deny the fact that you are the whole.

In fact, when you are whole without the body, mind, and senses, you are not going to become less whole by the addition of the body, mind, and senses. As simple consciousness I am the whole; with one body, mind and set of senses added to it, I do not become less whole. Then where is the problem? If I am the whole how did I become the body, mind, sense complex? Is it a loss? Some people say this is descending from the whole. Then you have to ascend! It seems the infinite has descended to become finite, and the finite has to ascend to the infinite. Nothing finite can ascend to the infinite. Nothing infinite can descend to the finite. What is infinite is that which cannot descend. What is finite is that which cannot ascend.

So where is the problem with having a body? I am the whole plus the body-mind-sense complex. Though I am the whole, having a body provides a slight difference. What is the difference? The whole cannot walk, I can walk. The whole cannot talk, I can talk. The whole cannot think, I can think. The whole cannot act, I can act. The whole cannot respond, I can respond. What an addition! All these are additions, and if you look upon them as additions, they are luxuries. This is the expression of a person who is liberated while still in this body (*jīvan-mukta*). He is happy with himself alone, not rejoicing or detesting (*ātmaiva ātmanā tuṣṭaḥ na nandati na dveṣṭi*). They are all value addition, without addition.

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Coimbatore in India is a textile town. How it became a textile town is very interesting. Originally they grew cotton there. It was ideal because there was not much rain in those parts. The cotton used to be sent to Bombay. Then one person came up with the idea of ginning the cotton (removing the seeds) himself instead of sending it to Bombay. So he started a ginning factory. This is called value addition. Nothing is added really. It is the same cotton. Another person started a spinning a factory to spin the cotton into yarn. The yarn was sold. Then someone started a weaving factory and the woven fabric was sold. A dyeing factory was started and the dyed fabric was sold. A garment factory was started. This is called value addition—an addition without any addition, really. They started with cotton and ended with cotton.

Īśvara is the greatest value adder. He goes on adding without really adding. Therefore, we have an addition to the whole without a real addition. One is *satyam* and the other *mithyā*. The gold plus a chain is not an addition, but still, the chain is useful. Thus, there are additions that are ornamental, and additions which are functional. All these are from the same Brahman alone, that is *sat-cit-ānanda*, limitless existence-consciousness.

Everything becomes ‘as though’

An individual, due to not knowing this fact, is under the veil of *māyā*. He is called the *jīva*. Until he calls the bluff, inquires into the reality, he continues to be a *jīva*. And once he understands the meaning of the sentence 'you are that' (tat tvam asi) very thoroughly, he is free and whole. He is no longer bound by action (*karma*) etc. The whole performs no action; all action is ‘as though’. Everything becomes ‘as though’. The whole remains the whole. When that person dies away he does not come back. This is called *mokśa*. Gaining the knowledge of this of the sentence 'you are that ' is called *mokśa*. And to make this knowledge happen alone is the purpose of the whole teaching.