

Unknowable and/but/vs. Unchangeable

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At the very beginning of my spiritual seeking, when I started to read miscellaneous esoteric literature, I found out that I didn't agree with the major routine definitions, and it was a problem, because I didn't know if I should move further having those disagreements. And when I turned with those problems to my teachers, I could never receive a satisfactory answer. They didn't know it.

Let me tell you what I mean exactly.

One of the first books on Hermetic philosophy that I read was "The Kybalion", written by the "Three Initiates". This little book describes the seven hermetical principles. At the beginning the authors define the Absolute, they called it "The ALL". So what is "The "All" as defined by the Three Initiates, who wrote the famous "Kybalion"?

"We accept and teach the view of the great Hermetic thinkers of all times, as well as of those illumined souls who have reached higher planes of being, both of whom assert that the inner nature of THE ALL is UNKNOWABLE. This must be so, for naught by THE ALL itself can comprehend its own nature and being.

The Hermetists believe and teach that THE ALL, "in itself," is and must ever be UNKNOWABLE.

- 1. THE ALL must be ALL that REALLY IS. There can be nothing existing outside of THE ALL, else THE ALL would not be THE ALL.*
- 2. THE ALL must be INFINITE, for there is nothing else to define, confine, bound, limit or restrict THE ALL. It must be Infinite in Time, or ETERNAL, — it must have always continuously existed, for there is nothing else to have ever created it, and something can never evolve from nothing, and if it had ever "not been," even for a moment, it would not "be" now, — it must continuously exist forever, for there is nothing to destroy it, and it can never "not-be," even for a moment, because something can never become nothing. It must be Infinite in Space — it must be Everywhere, for there is no place outside of THE ALL — it cannot be otherwise than continuous in Space, without break, cessation, separation, or interruption, for there is nothing to break, separate, or interrupt its continuity, and nothing with which to "fill in the gaps." It must be Infinite in Power, or Absolute, for there is nothing to limit, restrict, restrain, confine, disturb or condition it — it is subject to no other Power, for there is no other Power.*
- 3. THE ALL must be IMMUTABLE, or not subject to change in its real nature, for there is nothing to work changes upon it; nothing into which it could change, nor from which it could have changed. It cannot be added to nor subtracted from; increased nor diminished; nor become greater or lesser in any respect whatsoever. It must have always been, and must always remain, just what it is now — THE ALL — there has never been, is not now, and never will be, anything else into which it can change.*

This description struck me as illogical. If it is ALL, how can anything finite, changeable, fleeting and conditioned be excluded? Then it is not ALL! All that is around has these

properties. If THE ALL does not have them, then it is that which is not revealed or even that which does not exist. And if it is written, that THE ALL has no name and term, how can we limit it with this term and name as being not anything changeable? How do we know that it is unchangeable, if it is unknowable? How can we say that it is unknowable, if it is consciousness itself, unlimited in its potency?

I wondered where they had those ideas from. They made no sense to me. This definition contradicted the Laws described by the book, namely the Law of Correspondence and the Law of Vibration. They explain that THE ALL is above all Laws, thus trying to escape the contradiction. On the other hand they mention that THE ALL is THE LAW itself. Why should we be changing all the time, developing and undergoing transformations, if it doesn't affect THE ALL at all? What's the purpose of incarnation, if it is so? If we change, that means that THE ALL changes, because we are THE ALL. How on Earth can there be any purpose in life, if nothing changes as a result?

And concerning the unknowability of THE ALL, it is a very pessimistic and limiting approach. It is unknowable to the mind that is developed to our knowledge at present. If THE ALL is unlimited, then consciousness is unlimited, because they are identical. So if we are ALL, that means that we are unlimited. And that brings the possibility to know the ALL, if not necessarily with the mind. And the purpose of spiritual work is getting to that knowledge of the ALL. And when we know, the purpose is fulfilled, and the life ceases to exist, which brings about Pralaya. What is the nature of the highest enlightenment if not the knowledge of THE ALL?

At least those two features cannot be proved, so they should not be mentioned, like all the other innumerable features of THE ALL ("which are not") are not to be mentioned.

Those were my considerations when I was reading the Kybalion and looking at those definitions of THE ALL. I turned to my teacher with these questions, and he was surprised. He said, "You must have been dealing with these things for a couple of incarnations before, if they arouse such an emotional reaction in you. People usually just write out the seven principles, pin them to the wall and try to live according to them. And nobody thinks, why THE ALL is not knowable and not changeable".

That was not an answer to me. So I didn't know how to treat the whole Kybalion, if I should trust it, or not. I ended up rewriting the Kybalion for myself, changing all the misconceptions I found in the book and adding what was missing. That was my first acquaintance with the Hermetic tradition.

Later life brought me to Sivananda ashrams to study yoga philosophy. The first thing that I was taught during the lectures on Vedanta was the definition of Brahman, which was very similar to the definition of THE ALL. It seemed it had been designed by one and the same person.

Brahman is the Infinite, Uncaused, Eternal, Supreme Reality of vedanta philosophy. It is said to be beyond all qualities or attributes; beyond subject and object; to be the source of Being, Intelligence and Bliss.

And again, Brahman is unchangeable and unknowable.

And again, I asked my teacher, why unchangeable and unknowable. And again he could not answer.

And I was again perplexed, because those were two very different and very serious spiritual traditions, and they agreed in what I could not accept.

So I had to move further, without knowing really what was THE ALL or Brahman, which would be the basic thing to understand. I mean I understood and I knew, what it was, but my inner knowledge did not match the traditions which I chose to trust...

Sometime later, when I was trying to grasp the Secret Doctrine by H.P. Blavatsky, I suddenly came across a line in the book that read: "Exoteric schools teach that The Being/Non-Being (which was her term for THE ALL or Brahman) was unchangeable, but an esoteric knows that it's not true." Imagine what I felt. It was nectar pouring onto my soul. I was so thankful to Blavatsky that she didn't forget about me and put that little line in that huge and sophisticated book...

After that I started to trust in myself, and not in what's in the books. However, I was wondering, why these authoritative traditions taught wrong things.

First of all I realized that Vedanta could have been the source of that definition, taken over later by Hermetic followers. In Vedanta itself the definition stems from Adi Shankaracharya – a great Hindu philosopher of the 9th century, who is considered to be the main advocate of Advaita (vedantic philosophy of non-dualism) in the history. Some sources even suggest that Shankaracharya was an incarnation of Buddha, who wanted to explain what he had taught in terms of philosophy. His famous allusion in "Viveka Codamani" says: "*Just as when a pot is broken the pot-space becomes the limitless space, so too, when the conditionings are destroyed, **the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman Itself.***" Here from we can clearly see that according to Shankara Brahman is knowable. So it wasn't him who attributed the unknowability to Brahman. But those were his followers who spread around his attribution of the Unchangeability.

I was asking myself, why? Why did he say that, which was wrong? And the answer came, which was as simple as this:

Shankaracharya wanted to explain what Maya was – the illusion around us that we take as the objective reality of the physical world.

In order to explain Maya, he compared it with Brahman. Shankara drew the following picture: Maya changes in every aspect, having necessarily the processes of birth, growth and death. Brahman doesn't have birth, growth or death, it's eternal. So Brahman is real, and Maya – unreal. That was his major statement. So when Shankaracharya wanted to define Maya, he necessarily had to give to Brahman those comparative attributes of unchangeability. He probably didn't think that people would cut the part of Brahman out of this statement and use it separately, thus defining Brahman as unchangeable. The Authority of the Teacher was so great that people didn't even think that there could be anything incorrect in his statements. And there was nothing incorrect in them, except that it was not a definition of Brahman, but a comparative explanation of Maya, and his followers didn't think about that.

Evidently, when we attempt to look at Brahman dualistically, i.e. as at an object (which Shankara did to compare it with Maya), we won't see any changes, like if we would look at an ocean. Compared with our lives, the ocean has always been and will always be the same. But Brahman is not finite, and we cannot look at it dualistically. It is us and around us – all

what we project. If we look at the ocean from inside, we cannot but see very much life and change within it – within Us.

The wrong definition has been forwarded for centuries, got rooted in the group mind and has disturbed considerably the vision of many.

In a meditation it comes clear, what a world of difference the correction of this misconception brings about.

This article does not claim any absolute Truth. It calls for creative approach on the part of spiritual seekers to any definitions that seem “unchangeable” and/or “unknowable”.

“Do not believe in what you have heard; do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations; do not believe anything because it is rumoured and spoken of by many; do not believe merely because the written statements of some old sage are produced; do not believe in conjectures; do not believe in that as a truth to which you have become attached by habit; do not believe merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. After observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.”

Gautama Buddha

