

# Parabrahm

## Definitional Essay

### Theosophy Trust

*Parabrahm*, also called *Parabrahman*, names the unconditioned One Reality beyond every distinction of subject and object, cause and effect, spirit and matter. The emphasis is the Absolute itself, rather than a particular mode of contemplating it. *Nirguna Brahman* stresses its freedom from attributes; *Saguna Brahman* concerns the approach through divine attributes within manifestation. These distinctions do not establish separate ultimate realities. They keep the mind from confusing the attributeless ground with any intelligible expression arising within it.

H.P. Blavatsky distinguishes *Parabrahm* from a personal creator who wills an event and brings it about in time. Such a creator would stand in relation to a creation, whereas the Absolute cannot depend upon a relation. Her expression Secondless Reality therefore does more than assign first place to a supreme being. It denies that an independent second principle could set a boundary to the Real. The inquiry begins by recognizing the limits of the categories through which ordinary explanation proceeds.

Professor Iyer preserves this rigor by teaching that absolute unity is beyond infinity as spatial or temporal extension. It transcends infinite and finite, unbounded and bounded, perception and conception, images and ideas, and even the Creative Logos. The mind often imagines the Absolute by enlarging something familiar: infinite space, endless duration, supreme intelligence, perfect love, or cosmic light. These may serve as sacred thresholds, but *Parabrahm* is not reached by magnification. It is not the largest possible thing. It is beyond thinghood.

This is why the term requires negation. Not body, not mind, not soul as an object, not Logos, not *Mahat*, not *Mulaprakriti* as an object, and not even Being as the mind ordinarily understands being. Professor Iyer states that *Parabrahm* is neither Being nor Non-Being; IT IS BE-NESS. Being and non-being are paired categories, each defined by contrast. *Parabrahm* is prior to the contrast. It cannot be confined by affirmation or abolished by denial.

Yet this is not nihilism. *Parabrahm* is not an empty blank. The negations do not destroy Reality; they destroy the mind's false claims upon Reality. If one says *Parabrahm* is wise, conscious, creative, loving, or existent in the ordinary sense, one has introduced a predicate. The language of negation is used not because Reality is barren, but because Reality is inexhaustible.

The relation between *Parabrahm* and manifestation is expressed through *Mulaprakriti* and the Logos. From the objective standpoint of the Logos, *Parabrahm* appears as *Mulaprakriti*, the veil thrown over the unconditioned Absolute and the root of the object-side of manifestation. At the

commencement of a great *Manvantara*, *Parabrahm* manifests as *Mulaprakriti* and then as the Logos. The Logos is the basis of the subject-side of manifested Being and the source of individual consciousness. This is not creation by a personal deity. It is emergence from Parabrahmic latency, from BE-NESS into being.

This distinction is essential. If *Parabrahm* is confused with the Logos, the Absolute becomes an intelligible principle within manifestation. If confused with *Mulaprakriti*, it becomes root-substance. If confused with *Brahmā* or *Ishvara*, it becomes a supreme deity. The Wisdom Tradition preserves each level: *Parabrahm* is unconditioned Reality; *Mulaprakriti* is the veil and root-substance; Logos is the luminous subject-side of manifestation; *Mahat* is cosmic mind, reflected from the Absolute *Nirguna*.

Professor Iyer's image in "Anamnesis" places the Logos in latency during *pralaya*, the period of non-manifestation. The comparison with deep, dreamless sleep concerns the withdrawal of differentiated activity; it does not make *Parabrahm* a sleeper. He also explains the limitation of cognition through *Mulaprakriti*, the undifferentiated ground or veil through which the Absolute is approached. Even a vast contemplative conception remains distinct from possession of what it points toward.

A helpful image is a shoreless depth from which light, space, thought, worlds, and beings arise, though no ray, world, thought, or being can contain it. This hidden depth is not elsewhere. It is not behind the universe as one object behind another. It is the metaphysical ground before distinctions such as within and without, here and there, before and after. Every attempt to place *Parabrahm* somewhere is already a descent into spatial imagination.

The doctrine has ethical force. If *Parabrahm* is beyond every doctrine, symbol, deity, and concept, then no finite formulation can claim final possession of truth. This does not mean all formulations are equally accurate. Some are more transparent, universal, ethically fruitful, and spiritually liberating. But none is the Absolute. This recognition protects the student from spiritual pride, sectarian rigidity, and the subtle violence of imagining that one's own favored language has imprisoned the Real.

The same discipline gives Human Solidarity a metaphysical basis in Theosophy. Differences of history, belief, circumstance, and character have real consequences within manifested life. None confers an independent existence outside the Whole. Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception requires holding these two truths together: persons must be understood in their actual circumstances, while no circumstance exhausts their possibilities. Unity becomes useful when it enlarges the care with which differences are understood.

In ordinary life, *Parabrahm* teaches spaciousness. When one suffers, the lower mind says: this is all I am. The teaching quietly says: not this. When one succeeds, the lower mind says: this is my reality. Again the teaching says: not this. In speech it teaches restraint; in love it teaches reverence for the unseen depth in another; in work it teaches service without claim. It does not make life unreal in a dismissive sense. It makes life transparent to a deeper Reality.

This is also a doctrine of stewardship. Manifestation is not ultimate, but it is not disposable. *Mulaprakriti* may be the veil over *Parabrahm*, but a veil is not to be despised. Nature, bodies, relationships, thought, speech, and collective life are relative, yet they must be handled responsibly. The student does not worship the form as final, but neither violates it as meaningless. The field of life becomes a trust.

*Parabrahm* purifies knowledge and devotion. The mind may study *Parabrahm*, *Mulaprakriti*, Logos, *Mahat*, and manifestation, but even accurate metaphysics remains a pointing language. Definitions are necessary, but they are not the Real itself. Devotion too is purified: every beloved form is a doorway, not a prison. Love touched by *Parabrahm* becomes less possessive and more reverent.

Suppose two students disagree over the best wording of a spiritual teaching. Each may identify a real weakness in the other's formulation. The question then is whether either can retain that discernment while admitting the limits of their own language. They can compare the source, define the disputed term, and revise what is imprecise. None of these acts requires claiming final possession of truth. A teaching about *Parabrahm* bears fruit when it makes such correction possible without humiliation. The highest term in the discussion has become a reason to listen more carefully.

The image of shoreless depth should be held with the same restraint. A depth is ordinarily below something, and a shore is the edge of a place. Neither relation applies literally to the Absolute. The image is valuable only while it loosens an enclosure that the mind has made. When it becomes another imagined object, it too must be relinquished. This repeated correction is part of philosophical reverence: to use language fully while recognizing where its reach ends.

To contemplate *Parabrahm* is to stand before the shoreless depth without trying to drain it into words. Universes may arise, the Logos may shine, *Mahat* may think, beings may suffer and awaken, and the Great Breath may carry manifestation outward and inward. Yet the supreme Reality remains untouched, inexhaustible, and unpossessed. *Parabrahm* is the silence behind every sacred sound, the hidden depth behind every ray, the unconditioned Reality before which all true wisdom bows.

## Glossary

**Absolute** — Unconditioned reality, beyond the limitations and relations of manifested existence.

**Akasha** — The subtle universal ground or space of manifestation in Theosophical metaphysics; associated in the sources with spiritual continuity and potential.

**Anamnesis** — Recollection; in the Platonic and Theosophical context, the recovery of soul-knowledge.

**Anupadaka** — Parentless or without an origin; applied in the sources to a primordial reality rather than a being born from another.

**Attribute** — A quality assigned to something; in these essays, any predicate that would limit the Absolute if applied literally.

**Be-ness** — Blavatsky's term for unconditioned Reality beyond the contrast of being and non-being as ordinary categories.

**Bhagavad Gita** — The Song of the Lord; the dialogue of *Krishna* and *Arjuna*, central to the teachings of action, knowledge, and devotion.

**Brahma** — *Brahmā* is the creative deity, distinct from attributeless *Brahman*. The unaccented spelling *Brahma* in a quotation explicitly marked neuter refers to *Brahman* instead.

**Chaitanya** — Consciousness or intelligence; paired with *Chit* in the quotation on the unconditioned Root.

**Chit** — Consciousness or awareness; its metaphysical use is distinguished from a particular mental act or content.

**Cognition** — The act or power of knowing; a cognizer or cogniser is one who knows.

**Consubstantial** — Of the same underlying essence or substance; used in the quoted relation between the relative and the Absolute.

**Cosmogony** — An account of the origin or emergence of a cosmos; cosmogenesis names that emergence.

**Cosmology** — An account of the structure and principles of the universe.

**Demiurge** — From the Greek for craftsman; in the quoted cosmology, a designation for the formative or Second Logos.

**Differentiation** — The emergence of distinct forms, functions, or conditions within manifestation.

**Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception** — Widening the frame of understanding to include more relations, perspectives, and responsibilities.

**Ego** — A center of self-reference; personal appropriation is distinguished from the higher or spiritual Ego in the cited passages.

**Esse** — Latin for to be or being; used in the quotation for the level contrasted with differentiated existence.

**Fecundity** — Fruitfulness or capacity for abundant generation; used of the inexhaustible possibilities of the ideal cosmos.

**Gnana** — A spelling of *jnana*, knowledge or wisdom; the quotation also gives the Greek equivalent, *gnosis*.

**Gnosis** — Greek for knowledge; here spiritual wisdom, paired in the quotation with *Gnana*.

**Great Breath** — A symbol of eternal motion and the rhythms of manifestation and withdrawal in Theosophical cosmology.

**Hebdomadic** — Sevenfold or arranged in sevens; the quotation applies it to hierarchies of manifestation.

**Homogeneous** — Of a uniform or undifferentiated nature; contrasted with differentiated or heterogeneous expressions.

**Human Solidarity** — Shared human dignity and interdependence, expressed through considerate responsibility for others.

**Ideation** — The activity or formative power of thought; in the sources, also the spiritual patterns underlying manifestation.

**Intelligible** — Capable of being understood or approached by thought; distinguished from the unconditioned that thought cannot circumscribe.

**Ishvara** — The divine focus of spiritual aspiration; in Professor Iyer's exposition of Yoga, the special *purusha* untouched by affliction and the resplendent *Saguna Brahman*.

**Kosmos** — A spelling of cosmos used in the sources for the ordered universe, especially in its ideal or metaphysical aspect.

**Latency** — A condition in which a possibility or power is present without differentiated expression; latent is the related adjective.

**Logos** — The spiritual principle of divine ideation and manifestation; the sources distinguish its unmanifest and active aspects.

**Mahat** — Universal Mind or cosmic intelligence; distinguished in these sources from *Nirguna Brahman*, its unconditioned ground.

**Mandukya** — The *Mandukya Upanishad*, invoked in the quotation for the Reality beyond thought and expression.

**Manifestation** — The expression of reality through differentiated forms, relations, and conditions.

**Manvantara** — A period of manifested cosmic activity, contrasted with *pralaya*.

**Metaphysics** — Inquiry into the fundamental principles and relations of reality beyond immediate appearances.

**Mulaprakriti** — Pre-cosmic root-substance or root-nature; the veil through which the Absolute is approached and the ground of differentiated nature.

**Nirguna Brahman** — *Brahman* without attributes; *nirguna* emphasizes that the Absolute cannot be circumscribed by any quality or predicate.

**Pantheist** — A person who relates deity to the universal whole; the quotation uses the term for certain Western interpretations of Universal Mind.

**Parabrahm** — The unconditioned, Secondless Reality, also written *Parabrahman* or *Parabrahmam*; distinguished from every relational expression within manifestation.

**Paramarthika** — Pertaining to ultimate reality; the quotation applies the word to the one true Existence.

**Paravara** — Supreme and not supreme, or higher and lower; the quoted passage applies the contrast to cause and effect.

**Phantasm** — An appearance or reflected image; in the quoted metaphysical argument, something relatively real rather than independently absolute.

**Prakriti** — Nature or the field of material and mental transformations; distinguished from *purusha* in *Sankhya* and Yoga.

**Pralaya** — Dissolution or a period of non-manifestation.

**Predication** — The act of assigning a quality or characteristic; a predicate is the quality or statement assigned.

**Primordial** — Belonging to the earliest or underlying level of manifestation in the metaphysical account.

**Prototype** — An original or ideal pattern whose expression is unfolded; the cosmic lotus illustrates this relation by analogy.

**Relational** — Defined through a relation to something else; contrasted with the unconditioned in these essays.

**Rootless Root** — A symbolic name for the Absolute as the ground of all manifestation without a prior source of its own.

**Saguna Brahman** — *Brahman* approached with attributes; *saguna* concerns the divine qualities and relations through which spiritual aspiration gains a focus.

**Secondless Reality** — The Absolute considered without an independent second principle that could limit it.

**Subject and object** — The perceiver and what is perceived; a central distinction within conditioned consciousness.

**Substratum** — An underlying basis or ground; used in metaphysical accounts of consciousness, substance, and manifestation.

**Upanishad** — A text of philosophical and spiritual inquiry within the Vedic tradition; *Upanishads* is the plural.

**Vedanta** — A family of Indian philosophical traditions drawing upon the *Upanishads*; the essays identify Professor Iyer's particular Theosophical interpretation.

**Vesture** — A sheath or vehicle through which consciousness acts; often used of the temporary human instruments.

## Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Volume I, p. 6.

"Indeed, if the *Parabrahmam* of the Hindus may be taken as a representative of the hidden and nameless deities of other nations, this absolute Principle will be found to be the prototype from which all the others were copied. *Parabrahm* is not 'God,' because It is not a God. 'It is that which is supreme, and not supreme (*paravara*),' explains *Mandukya Upanishad* (2.28). It is 'Supreme' as cause, not supreme as effect. *Parabrahm* is simply, as a 'Secondless Reality,' the all-inclusive Kosmos — or, rather, the infinite Cosmic Space — in the highest spiritual sense, of course."

*Meditation thought:* Consider Secondless Reality without imagining a supreme being opposed to lesser beings. What habitual contrast does the expression ask you to release?

2. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Volume I, p. 6.

“*Brahma* (neuter) being the unchanging, pure, free, undecaying supreme Root, ‘the one true Existence, *Paramarthika*,’ and the absolute *Chit* and *Chaitanya* (intelligence, consciousness) cannot be a cogniser, ‘for that can have no subject of cognition.’ Can the flame be called the essence of Fire? This Essence is ‘the life and light of the Universe, the visible fire and flame are destruction, death, and evil.’”

*Meditation thought:* A knower ordinarily implies something known. Reflect on the difficulty of applying that relation to what is described as unconditioned.

3. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Volume I, p. 10.

“The author of the *Four Lectures on the Bhagavad Gita*, says, in speaking of *Mulaprakriti*: ‘From its (the Logos’) objective standpoint, *Parabrahmam* appears to it as *Mulaprakriti*. . . . Of course this *Mulaprakriti* is material to it, as any material object is material to us. . . . *Parabrahmam* is an unconditioned and absolute reality, and *Mulaprakriti* is a sort of veil thrown over it.’”

*Meditation thought:* A veil permits an approach while concealing what exceeds the approach. Can a useful conception be honored without being mistaken for the Absolute?

4. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Volume I, p. 11.

“The Occult Catechism contains the following questions and answers: ‘What is it that ever is?’ ‘Space, the eternal *Anupadaka*.’ ‘What is it that ever was?’ ‘The Germ in the Root.’ ‘What is it that is ever coming and going?’ ‘The Great Breath.’ ‘Then, there are three Eternals?’ ‘No, the three are one. That which ever is is one, that which ever was is one, that which is ever being and becoming is also one: and this is Space.’”

*Meditation thought:* The dialogue resists turning three symbolic expressions into three independent eternals. Let its final unity correct the tendency to separate the symbols.

5. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Volume I, p. 62.

“*Mahat*, with the Occultists, the first-born of *Gnâna* (or *gnosis*) knowledge, wisdom or the Logos — is a phantasm reflected from the Absolute *nirguna* (*Parabrahm*, the one reality, ‘devoid of attributes and qualities’; see *Upanishads*); while with some Vedantins *Mahat* is a manifestation of *Prakriti*, or Matter.”

*Meditation thought:* Distinguish the source of cosmic intelligence from cosmic intelligence itself. What confusion arises when even the loftiest manifestation is called the unconditioned?

6. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Volume II, p. 24.

“At the commencement of a great *Manvantara*, *Parabrahm* manifests as *Mulaprakriti* and then as the Logos. This Logos is equivalent to the ‘Unconscious Universal Mind,’ etc., of Western Pantheists. It constitutes the Basis of the subject-side of manifested Being, and is the source of all manifestations of individual consciousness. *Mulaprakriti* or Primordial Cosmic Substance, is the foundation of the object-side of things — the basis of all objective evolution and Cosmogogenesis.”

*Meditation thought:* Follow the distinction between the subjective and objective sides of manifestation. Let neither become an independent reality outside the Whole.

7. R.N. Iyer, “Deity in Action”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 27.

“First of all, absolute unity is beyond infinity as spatial or temporal extension, even if boundless and endless, for it transcends polarization into infinite and finite, unbounded and bounded, which are correlative terms. It is important to grasp this truth fully and clearly, and to assimilate it completely, so that anyone can readily acknowledge the Rootless Root beyond perception and conception, images and ideas, beyond the fleeting and fickle awareness of objects and subjects, and even beyond the Creative Logos, the One Source and Ground of all manifestation.”

*Meditation thought:* Watch the attempt to reach the Absolute by magnifying a familiar quality. Does an endless extension remove the limitation inherent in the starting conception?

8. R.N. Iyer, “Deity in Action”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 32.

“Similarly, seekers of enlightenment have to recognize and revere the all-potent sap of the Absolute, as well as the inexhaustible fecundity of the ideal Kosmos, potentially present in the Absolute. They must venerate the inconceivable richness and diversity of unique expressions of ideal forms, as well as the ever-expanding and ever-deepening awareness of all the myriad hosts of hierarchies, from the highest and most homogenous to the lowest and most heterogenous, from *manvantara* to *manvantara*. This is what Plato meant by the statement that time is the moving image of eternity. It is a celebration of endless continuity as well as infinite diversity amidst the seeming discontinuities in the realm of appearances.”

*Meditation thought:* Attend to both shared essence and distinctive expression. How might that double attention deepen respect for a life unlike your own?

9. R.N. Iyer, "Consciousness and Existence", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 43.

"Pure unalloyed consciousness is unmodified by all macrocosmic and microcosmic existence, is untouched by relationality at every level of manifestation and time. This affirmation of the pure eternity of Spirit is the central teaching given to all souls who seek to enter the silence of the Divine Dark and experience the reality of the unmanifest. If one senses the possibility of rising to and remaining in that consciousness, then one will begin to awaken the mystical sense of inner touch in relation to the impalpable *Akasha*, the ethereal substratum which interpenetrates all life in every atom and form."

*Meditation thought:* Let the image of pure consciousness challenge the identification of the Self with passing circumstances. Return from contemplation with greater care for those circumstances.

10. R.N. Iyer, "The Logos and Man", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 57.

"As this process is recapitulated at more manifest levels, the Second Logos or *Demiurge* and the Third Logos or Man arise, each the objective expression of that degree of the concealed Thought which it reflects or mirrors in itself. With each, the triadic *esse* gives way to the sevenfold existence, the combination ten or 10, numerically and geometrically representing the descent and differentiation of light into the series of hebdomadic hierarchies symbolized by  $\pi$ . Each universe, world or planet has its own Logos, Lord or Eye manifesting sevenfold light."

*Meditation thought:* Consider the passage as symbolic cosmology, with different degrees of manifestation. What is lost when all uses of Logos are compressed into one definition?

11. R.N. Iyer, "Anamnesis", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II, p. 255.

"The Logos sleeps in the bosom of *Parabrahm* — in the Abstract Absolute — during *pralaya* or non-manifestation, just as our individual Ego is in latency during deep, dreamless sleep. We cannot cognize *Parabrahm* except as *Mulaprakriti*, the mighty expanse of undifferentiated cosmic matter. This is not merely a vesture in cosmic creation through which radiate the energy and wisdom of *Parabrahm*. It is the Divine Ground."

*Meditation thought:* A metaphor of sleep concerns latency, not a literal sleeper in the Absolute. Keep the comparison useful by noticing the point where it ceases to apply.

12. R.N. Iyer, "Enlightenment", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 240.

"If *Mahat* is prior to *prakriti*, one might be tempted to ask whether *Mahat* is prior to *Mulaprakriti*. But *Mahat* is to *Nirguna Brahman* as *prakriti* is to *Mulaprakriti*, which is *Anupadaka*. The precedence of *Mahat* to *prakriti* is the key; ideation and consciousness are prior to everything else, save the veil over *Parabrahm*. If an individual human being ardently longs to attain to universal self-consciousness, he or she must be able to reduce everything to its homogeneous essence, to see through the relative reality and unreality of the world, yet acknowledge that in the world of unreal time there is that which is consubstantial with the Absolute."

*Meditation thought:* The relative need not be dismissed to honor the unconditioned. What responsibility becomes clearer when its provisional form is understood without being despised?