

# Brahman, Reductionism and the Fractal Character of Awakening

What we are exploring will never stop unfolding layer after layer after layer.

We can think we've found THE source of THE source, but whatever we have found, there will be something behind it and something behind that and something behind that. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's lecture on "10 Brahman" hints at this feature of Brahman, that it never stops expanding and it never stops deepening and unfolding, layer after layer after layer, endlessly.

The famous quote from Saint Teresa of Avila points to the same reality: "The feeling remains that God is on the journey, too."

Again note, the Sanskrit word, "Brahman" derives from the root, "brih," which means, "to swell." Maharishi used to say over and over again, "Ever-expanding universe, ever-expanding universe of Brahman."

I had an epiphany not long ago listening to two lectures by the Stanford Professor, Robert Sopalsky ("Chaos and Reductionism" and "Emergence and Complexity" on YouTube). He discusses the ways phenomena emerge and the impossibility of predicting what will emerge next based on whatever we know about the prior conditions, whatever we know about what was already there.

Here's the money quote from those lectures: [In a fractal system] "There is no absolute state where the closer you get the more it suddenly is going to seem clean and nonvariable." ~ Robert Sopalsky, PhD

For example, even after Brahman has been realized, *lesha avidya* (the "faint remains of ignorance") will continue to operate, generating a component of randomness that makes reductionist formulae inaccurate. A certain amount of randomness is an intrinsic feature of EVERY natural system. That randomness cannot be removed from the dataset by looking more closely or by using better measuring instruments, because the randomness is not a measurement error; it is an intrinsic, NECESSARY part of the natural system itself.

All the certain, clear and absolute descriptions, criteria and definitions of "enlightenment" are going to be wrong because they operate from reductionist assumptions that simply don't apply to an open, infinitely variable, generative system. Virtually ALL teachings about "enlightenment" are reductive oversimplifications that try to remove the inconvenient, inherent and UNREMOVABLE randomness from the dataset. Such teachings can NEVER accurately describe what enlightenment actually is, how enlightenment actually functions.

"The Buddha told Ananda, 'You still listen to the Dharma with the conditioned mind, and so the Dharma becomes conditioned as well, and you do not obtain the Dharma-nature. It is like when someone points his finger at the moon to show it to someone else. Guided by the finger, that person should see the moon. If he looks at the finger instead and mistakes it for the moon, he loses not only the moon but the finger also.'" ~ Shurangama Sutra of Mahayana Buddhism

Substitute "reductive" for "conditioned" in this quote. Whoever wrote the Shurangama Sutra understood the futility of reductionist thinking.

What I realized from a careful listening to Professor Sopalsky's lectures is, we are seeing our experiences through a set of ideas and expectations based on previous experiences, based on conditioning, based on reductive thinking.

When a new experience emerges, we evaluate it based on what we have already experienced and based on what we expect according to the various sources we've been working from – teachings, traditions, attitudes, desires and expectations, etc.

We look at it, in a sense as if we are facing away from it, facing back toward our conditioned expectations and beliefs. We superimpose those expectations and beliefs onto whatever is coming into view, and that keeps us from being able to see directly into it.

The truth is, we will always keep going beyond and beyond and beyond, if we remain open to the process. The details of previous levels and layers will become interwoven and integrated. Then we will go beyond again, and again, and again.

The epiphany that struck me from listening to Dr. Sopalsky's exposition on Chaos and Reductionism was, THIS NEVER-ENDING UNFOLDMENT IS A FRACTAL PROCESS. There is no end to the depth or the distance or the number of shifts and awakenings we can go. There is no end to Brahman.

Again from the Kena Upanishad:

"If you think, 'I have known Brahman well enough,' then you have known only the very little expression that It has in the human body and the little expression that It has among the gods. Therefore Brahman is still to be deliberated on by you ... ." and "It is known to him to whom It is unknown; he does not know to whom It is known. It is unknown to those who know well, and known to those who do not know."

When we look a hundred times closer, we will see a completely new level. But we can look a hundred times closer again and see another new level and then again and again and again, endlessly. A key feature of fractals is, they are INDEPENDENT OF SCALE. The closer you look, you will always encounter a NEW level of detail that has as much complexity as every other level. And this goes on forever.



***Brahman appearing as romanesco broccoli***

I stopped thinking I might be moving toward some sort of comprehensive, all-inclusive vision and shifted into the sense that I am on something like an intergalactic spaceship exploration voyage – going endlessly ever further, deeper, closer, subtler, bigger – without any endpoint or finality.

The universe looks different to me today than it did before that epiphany, before I saw that the ever-expanding character of Brahman functions according to a universal law of nature called “fractals.”

I hope that makes sense.

Draft version, for personal use only, not for publication without the author’s permission. Copyright © 2024, Jerry Freeman. All rights reserved. This essay will be included in the upcoming book, *The Enlightenment Puzzle: A Guide to Navigating the Truths and Fallacies About Awakening*