THE BASICS OF VEDĀNTA PHILOSOPHY

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THE VEDĀNTA

THE Vedānta system of philosophy is the heart of modern Hinduism which is properly known as *sanātana dharma* — the "Eternal Path".

This system of philosophy[1] commonly referred to as the *Vedānta* — composed of *Veda* = knowledge and *Anta* = end; literally refers to "the end of the Vedas or final conclusion of knowledge".

The corpus of the Vedas[2] consist of four major divisions[3] the last sections of each Veda are the texts known as the **Upanishads** and their central topic of investigation is the Ground of Being, or Ultimate Reality called **Brahman**[4].

The Vedānta is technically classified as *Uttara-Mimāmsa*. *Uttara* means "last"; *Mimāmsa* means "investigation, examination, discussion, or consideration"; therefore, the Ultimate Conclusion of the Vedas.

1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE VEDĀNTA[5]

Concept of God in the Vedas

The Rig Veda is the root text upon which the other Vedas depend. The Rig consist of hymns to different deities i.e. Agni, Mitra, Varuna, Indra and so on.

The hymns were used in Sacrifices (yajñas) in which oblations of clarified butter and other substances were offered into the sacrificial fire.

These devas were conceived of as the Principalities underlying and governing the different phenomenon of nature, such as fire, sun, wind, rain etc., on which life itself, agriculture, and prosperity depended.

Nature, though presided over by different devas, is subject to the cosmic law (called *Rta*), which regulates the whole world, the laws and processes of nature and all living beings.

In the hymns of the Veda (*sūktas*) each of these devas was praised and extolled with the same epithets and declared to be 'the Supreme'.

Although the Vedic religion appears to be polytheistic in its approach, there is a peculiarity in that each of the many gods is praised and extolled as the Supreme Being, the Creator of the universe and the Lord of all the Gods etc.

monotheism = belief in One God.
polytheism = belief in many gods.
atheism = belief in no God.
agnosticism = suspension of belief in a god.
henotheism = election of one among many gods as supreme.
pantheism = everything is God.

The portfolios of cosmic management were also not unique to one deva only as in Greek mythology, but were reallocated according to the devotion of the poet.

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[1] From the outset it is important to note that English terms do not do justice to the Sanskrit terms. "Philosophy" is a poor translation of *darshana* — which means a view of Reality and includes philosophy, theology and spiritual practice.
[2] The ancient collections of Hymns in Sanskrit dating back more than 5000 years
[3] Samhita, Brāhmaṇa, Araṇyaka and Upaṇiṣad.
[4] **Brahman** must not be confused with *Brahmin* which is the priestly caste.
[5] (Adapted from Introduction to the Upanishads by Dr. Radhakrishnan)

Max Muller who was one of the first western scholars to translate the Vedic hymns, coined the term *'Henotheism'* to differentiate the Vedic attitude from simple polytheism. Henotheism means that one god is elevated above all other gods to the post of Supreme Being.

In the Rig Veda we come across many passages where it is clearly stated that the different devas/gods are only manifestations of one Ultimate Reality called by various names such as Agni, Yama etc.

ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti. ....

The Truth is ONE but the wise describe it in various ways

Many scholars have postulated a clear development in Vedic thought.

- The idea of God gradually evolved from simple polytheism through henotheism, to reach its culmination in monotheism.
- This hypothesis may be true but henotheism is not merely a transitional phenomenon.
- Indian monotheism even in its most developed form, retains the belief that though the Godhead is one, it has limitless manifestations in the many devas, anyone of which may be worshipped as a form of the Supreme Godhead.

Even today in India, we have five divergent cults of the Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, Śāktaism, and the Gānapatya and Saurya cults. All flourishing side by side but all based on a philosophy of one Supreme Godhead of which all other forms are also manifestations.

Indian monotheism in its living forms, from the Vedic age till now, has always believed in unity of the gods in the Godhead.

In Rig Veda, the belief in this fundamental unity of all gods is only a part of a greater theology which can be more clearly learnt from the famous Puruṣa-sūkta.

The Puruṣa-sūkta (Rig Veda 10.90) reveals that all existence i.e. wealth, heavens, planets, gods, living and non-living objects are the parts of one great Being (*Puruṣa*), who pervades the perceptible world, but also stands beyond it. In Him all that is, has been and will be, are united.

The poetic insight of the hymn, not only indicates that the universe is one organic whole, but that the Supreme Being is both immanent and transcendent (God pervades the world, yet He is not exhausted, thereby, He remains also beyond it).

In Western Theology, this concept is called *panentheism* (*pan*–all, *en*–in, *theos*–God) not *pantheism* — that is, all is not equal to God, but all is in God, who is greater than all.

This one hymn, reveals a variety of ideals that inspired the Vedic mind; monism, panentheism and organic symbiosis of the world.

In another hymn of Nāsadīya Sūkta (Rig Veda 10.120), we come across the concept of the Impersonal Absolute. Here, the reality underlying all existence; the primal One, from which everything originates cannot be described it says, either as nonexistent or as existent (*na asat, no sat*). It is the concept of the Indeterminate Absolute, which is the reality underlying all things, but is in Itself indescribable.

When we try to establish the relationship between the idea of the Ultimate Reality as a Person and the concept of it as an Indeterminate Absolute, we find that even in the description of the Ultimate Reality as a Personal Being, there is mention of its transcendent aspect, which cannot be described in terms of the objects we perceive in the world.

Both Personal and Impersonal are conceived here as the two aspects of the same Reality.

HYMN OF CREATION

Rig Veda. Mandala 10 Hymn 129

There was not the Non-existent nor the Existent then;
there was not the air nor the sky which is beyond.
What did it contain?
Was there water, unfathomable and profound ?

There was not death nor immortality then.
There was not the beacon of the night nor of day.
That One Being breathed, airless by its own power.
Other than That, there was nothing whatsoever.

Darkness was in the beginning hidden by darkness;
indistinguishable, all this was surging.
That which, coming into being, was enveloped by the void,
that One arose through the power of combustion.

Desire in the beginning came upon That,
that [desire] was the primal seed born of mind.
Sages seeking in their hearts with wisdom,
discovered the connection of the existent in the non-existent.

They have extended their measuring cord across the void;
but was there 'above' or was there 'below'?
there were Seminal Powers, there were mighty forces,
there was energy below and there was impulse above.

Who truly knows? Who shall here declare,
whence it has been produced, whence this material universe?
The gods came after the emergence of the universe.
Who then knows whence it has arisen.

Whence this vast material universe has arisen,
and whether 'He' founded it or not;
He, who in the highest heaven is its Surveyor;
He alone knows, or perhaps He knows not.

Most of the important foundational principles of the Vedānta are found in Rig Veda but they have been presented through poetry.

The Sanskrit word for a poet — **Kavi** also means a *sage,* a *seer* or a *visionary.*

The method by which the sages arrived at these views, their reasoning and the arguments put forth in support of them, are not found in the Vedic texts themselves. Thus there is no systematic philosophical methodology to be found in the Samhita portion of the Vedas. All attempts at a systematic philosophical investigation are to be found in the latter sections of

the Vedas known as the Upaniṣads, where questions about ātman, Brahman and the cosmos are raised and discussed at length.

Some of the Upaniṣads are written in verse and they follow the pattern of the hymns of the Rig Veda, while others, though written in prose, also lack the support of cogent philosophical reasoning. Some of them are in the form of dialogues where propositions are presented and supported by arguments.

Existential Problems of the Upaniṣads

- What is Self (*ātman*)?
- What is the Supreme Reality (*Brahman*)?
- What is the Source from which all things originate, by which all live and into which all dissolve?
- What is that by knowing which everything can be known?
- What is that by knowing which the unknown becomes known?
- What is that by knowing which one can attain immortality?

These questions in themselves are indicative of the fundamental belief of the Indian scholars that there is an all-pervasive Reality underlying all things; from which they arise, in which they exist and into which they ultimately all return. And that there is some Reality by knowing which immortality or cessation of suffering can be attained.

2. SCRIPTURAL SOURCES OF VEDĀNTA

The Vedānta is based upon 3 scriptural sources known as *Prasthāna Trayam*:—

1. Upaṇiṣads
2. Bhagavad Gītā
3. Brahma-sūtras

The last sections of each Veda are the texts known as the Upaniṣads and their central topic of investigation is the Ground of Being, called *Brahman*. These are the sources for all the doctrines taught in Vedānta.

The Gītā is a portion of the epic Mahābhārata and is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna as reported by Sañjaya. It is considered to be a summary of all the Upaṇiṣads.

The principle text of Vedānta is the Brahma-sūtra. Tradition attributes this work to one Bādarāyāṇa[6] whose actual date is unknown. The dates given range from 500 B.C.E. to as late as 200 C.E.

[6] Some scholars contend that Bādarāyāṇa is an alias for Vyāsa, the celebrated mythical sage who is regarded as the one who originally compiled the Vedas, the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas, and other portions of Hindu sacred literature as well as the Vedānta-sūtras; but the title Vyāsa ("compiler") seems to have been given to any great compiler or author.

3. THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF VEDĀNTA-SŪTRAS

The many different Upaniṣads evolved from the various Vedic schools at different times and places. They often seem to contradict each other in the way they tackle various existential problems, and their conclusions were frequently ambiguous, if not diametrically opposed. Hence, there arose an urgent need to systematise the different teachings and bring out the harmony underlying them.

Bādarāyaṇa was the first to address this problem and in his work — the Brahma-sūtra he attempted to set forth the unanimous teachings of the Upaniṣads and defended them against the possible and actual objections raised.

He wrote in the *sūtra* style, which is terse and cryptic and thus created the need for the various commentaries which were written by various scholars. Each of the commentators tried to justify his position as the only one consistent with the revealed texts, (*śrutis*) and sūtras.

The author of each of these *bhāṣyas* (commentaries) thus became founder of a particular school of Vedānta and thus we have the schools of Saṅkara, Rāmānuja, Madhva, Nimbārka and many latter day variations such as the school of Aurobindo.

4. EPISTEMOLOGY (THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE)

There are 3 ways of acquiring knowledge which are:—

1. Direct perception and experience through the five senses. (*pratyakṣa*)
2. Rational thought, reasoning, (*anumāna*)
3. Trustworthy testimony from an objective witness. (*āpta-vākya* or *śabda*)

Think of crime investigators — when they arrive on the scene they take note of all the evidence at the scene, they photograph, measure and document everything.

They then return to the precinct and draw up a time-line, paste up pictures, and try to figure out a logical narrative of events and possible causes and culprits.

They then call in trustworthy witnesses and take their testimonies – comparing the various versions to the evidence and the logical time-line.

Now, in relation to our examination of the presented esoteric Truths of Vedānta, the above order has to be inverted.

1. The metaphysical propositions of Vedānta are trans-personal and are based entirely upon Scripture (*śruti* = "that which is heard" i.e. the Upaṇiṣads) and hence are considered 'trustworthy' testimony. We study the texts in order to gain knowledge about metaphysical Truths that is unobtainable by the usual means.
2. Rational thought can help us in our study by ensuring that we remain within the bounds of reason and indeed all the propositions of Vedānta are vigorously defended by the use of logic and debate.
3. By the assimilation and the application of the teachings, direct personal realization can be achieved. Once we have studied the teachings and subjected them to the test of logic we then need to apply them in practice. Direct experience is the ultimate test of the teachings of Vedānta.

5. THE DIDACTIC PROCESS

Thus the didactic or learning process consists of 3 phases:–

1. Śravana — attentive listening to the teachings (*śabda*).

There is very little "objective" listening to anything! Our listening is conditioned by 3 factors which should be taken into account by the teacher when instructing the students — all doctrines, rules and regulations are conditioned by:—

svabhāva — One's personality and disposition.

bhūmika — The level of intellectual, academic and spiritual attainment.

adhikāra — The capacity of each individual for comprehension and insight and the ability to actually put the teachings into practice

2. Manana — reflection upon what has been heard.

Reflection using reason and logic must be applied to all the teachings. Nothing should be accepted unexamined.

There are four criteria which are applied to test the validity of the teaching which can be applied to all schools of thought:—

Satyam — is the teaching logical, rational, reasonable and does it stand up to challenge and debate. Can it be effectively defended from opposing views?

Śivam — is the teaching universally beneficial? Does it benefit *me* personally — will I be improved through this teaching? Does it benefit the majority? Does it benefit all beings, sentient and insentient?

Sundaram — is the teaching aesthetical, does it contribute to culture and to the Arts? Does it create more beauty in the world? Does it enhance people's lives?

Śānti — Does the teaching contribute to universal peace and tranquility? Is harmony produced between people and with nature and the other sentient beings?

3. Nididhyāsana — contemplation upon the teachings and their assimilation.

This stage of the process has two aspects: —

- *śraddhā*[7] — development of conviction that the practice and application of the teaching will lead to the results in mind. This conviction should be grounded on logic and supported by reason. If one is not yet convinced one returns to the afore mentioned processes and to the teacher for further interrogation and clarification.
- *Prayojana* — the application of the teaching through meditation and practice. The only way to realise the goal is *abhyāsa* or regular and consistent application and practice.

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[7] śaṅkarācārya defines śraddhā as:— *śāstrasya guru-vākyasya satya-buddhyavadhāraṇam* | *sā śraddhā kathitā sadbhir-yayā vastūpalabhyate* || Śraddhā is an sound intellectual understanding of the words of the gurus and scriptures whereby tangible goals can be achieved.

6. METHODOLOGY OF VEDĀNTA

A fundamental concept of philosophy (which means the 'love of knowledge') is that we must develop and keep an open mind!

If we are sincere in our investigation of the Truth; we are intellectually obliged to examine the teachings of all those who lay claim to the "Universal Truth"; we, as objective lovers of the Truth should ascertain wherein they are all in accord, for this is likely to be the Ultimate Truth. Where they differ, we are privileged to have our own opinion.

Differences in theology/philosophy arise due to various personal perspectives conditioned by hereditary, demographic and socio-economic factors and differing stages of personal development and training.

The same Truth and Teaching therefore will vary according to three factors:—

svabhāva — One's personality and disposition

bhūmika — The level of intellectual and spiritual attainment

adhikāra — The capacity of each individual for insight.

All ideas and concepts are accepted as a step forward; no ideation is evaded or discarded. However, no dogma is accepted as conclusive, since the Truth is revealed afresh with each individual who attains enlightenment.

Vedānta is an on-going process of practice and realization. It is passed on through a succession of spiritual teachers (gurus) each of who has their own personal take on the teachings and presents it to the students in a fresh narrative.

The Vedānta is a system which investigates, analyses, and criticizes all theories alike, forcing every proposition to verify and substantiate itself according to the rules of logic.

Before studying Vedānta one was required to have a good grasp of **Mīmāṁsa** (Hermeneutics) — the rules of interpretation of texts, and **Nyāya** — logic and debate.

7. PERSONAL PRACTICE & DEVELOPMENT.

One of the principals of Indian philosophy is that there must be a practical application of knowledge[8].

Knowledge (*jñāna*) goes hand-in-hand with spiritual practice (*sādhana*).

The technicalities of Spiritual Practice are handled differently in each of the schools but to start off with we'll present the format of the biggest school which is Advaita.

The study of the Sacred Texts however profound, will at best, provide only a general knowledge which will help to refine the mind and incline one towards personal attainment of knowledge of the Ultimate Truth (*Brahma-vidya*).

[8] Rāmānuja defines valid knowledge as — *yathāvasthita vyavahārāṇuguṇa jñānam pramā*— valid knowledge is that which reveals a thing as it really is and is applicable to the interests of daily life.

Nevertheless, doubts will continue to rise and uncertainty will still remain, and determination and conviction (*sraddhā*) will falter; therefore, Bādarāyāṇa contends that it is necessary to study the Vedānta in order to have these doubts permanently removed. Also the tendency of an untrained mind is to forget, and therefore, until conviction arises, repeated study is necessary.

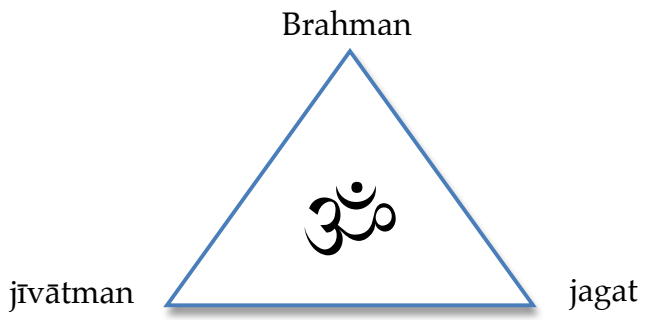
The discipline of Vedānta fortifies the mind with the necessary arguments and rationalism to help us avoid believing in false doctrines until we grow firm in our understanding and experience direct Self-realization (*ātma-bodha*).

Self-realization is a matter of unfoldment not of attainment. The pre-requisite for wisdom is the removal of certain negative and afflictive emotions and concepts, and the cultivation of the right disposition through the performance of Dharma, from study and association with those who are wise and are, therefore, capable of guiding us toward the ultimate goal.

We shall discuss spiritual practice in the last chapter.

Disagreements Between The Schools of Vedānta.

The chief metaphysical problem on which the three major schools of the Vedānta differ, is the nature of, and the relation between the *ātman* (Self) and *Brahman* (Supreme Being) and between Brahman and the world.



Some, like Madhva, hold the Dualist (*Dvaita*) view that they are absolutely separate and others like Saṅkara hold that the two are absolutely identical, this view is known as *'Advaita'* (Non-dual).

Some others, like Rāmānuja, again hold that the two are related like part and whole; this view may be briefly called *Viśiṣṭādvaita* (qualified non-dualism).

There were many other views, each specifying a particular type of identity (*abheda*), difference (*bheda*) or identity in difference (*bhedābheda*) between the jīva and Brahman, but the three prominent schools of Vedānta are those of Saṅkara, Rāmānuja and Mādhavācārya.

8. THE PURPOSE OF STUDYING VEDĀNTA

All sentient beings are basically driven by 2 forces:—

Self-preservation — Self-propagation

These two are common to all species but **Self-actualization** is specifically a human pursuit.

The fear of death and extinction and the desire for happiness security and immortality are the two most potent drives.

The Classical Darśanas (Schools of Indian Philosophy) all agree that the ultimate goal of philosophy is the extinction of sorrow and suffering (**duḥkha**) and achievement of immortal and abiding joy and happiness (**mukti** or **mokṣa**).

ko'ham, katham idam, kiṃ vā, katham maraṇa-janmanī |
vicārayāntare vettham mahat tat phalam eṣyasi ||

Annapūrṇā Upaniṣad 1.40

Who am I? How came I into being? What is it? How came death & birth? Thus inquire within yourself; great will be the benefit you will derive from such inquiry.

Yet no matter how much we strive to achieve abiding happiness we are unable to do so. This striving for happiness manifests as the "progress paradox" — today we have more of everything than our grandparents did, yet our levels of happiness seem to be inversely proportional to our material gains.

The problem facing all of us is an existential crisis called **Duhkha.**

A comprehensive modern description of *Duhkha* is:—

> *Disturbance, irritation, dejection, worry, despair, fear, dread, anguish, anxiety; vulnerability, injury, inability, inferiority; sickness, aging, decay of body and faculties, senility; pain/pleasure; excitement/boredom; deprivation/excess; desire/frustration, suppression; longing/aimlessness; hope/hopelessness; effort, activity, striving/repression; loss, want, insufficiency/satiety; love/lovelessness, friendlessness; dislike, aversion/attraction; parenthood/childlessness; submission/rebellion; decision/indecisiveness, vacillation, uncertainty.*
> (Francis Story in *Suffering,* in Vol. II of *The Three Basic Facts of Existence.)*

9. DUḤKHA — Dis-ease

All forms of suffering can be categorised under three headings:—

- *Adhidaivika* — those calamities that arise from the forces of nature, storms, tempests, bush-fires, floods, tsunamis etc.
- *Adhibhautika* — those forms of suffering which arise due to the elements, heat, cold, birth, growth, hunger, thirst, old-age, sickness and death.
- *Adhyātmika* — psychological and emotional suffering.

The only defence and remedy for the first category is forward planning and a comprehensive insurance policy!

The second category can be dealt with through education, hard work and training.

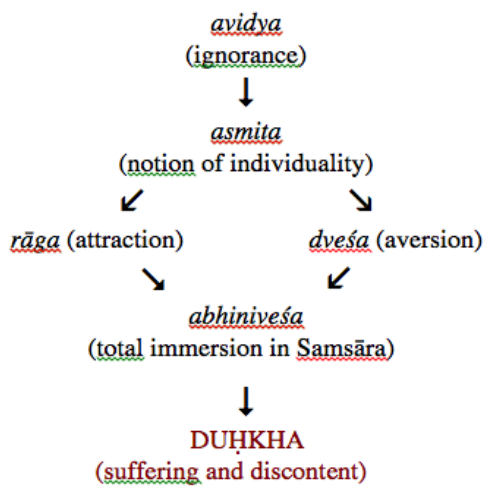
The third category requires the greatest effort, and the only remedy is the study of the Vedānta which includes both the disciplines of philosophy and psychology, as well as providing an effective therapeutic methodology.

10. THE EXISTENTIAL PARADIGM

Since the pursuit of abiding and stable happiness seems to be unstable and illusive we begin our quest by investigating the root cause of suffering?

The answer that Vedānta offers is as follows:—

avidya	Root ignorance, not knowing one's true identity. The problem is our mis-identification. We all want to be someone, to be acknowledged to be validated and to "belong." We seek meaning through our identities and roles which we play.
asmitā	"Notion of individuality" arises which in the extreme form excludes others. The myriad of identities which we cling to are based upon gender, family relationships, friends, peer-groups, race, religion, profession, interests, possessions, political affiliations etc. etc.
rāga	Attraction, craving or passion develops towards anyone or anything that supports, enhances or validates the chosen identities.
dveśa	Repulsion, aversion towards anything or anyone who negates, challenges or invalidates our chosen role.
abhiniveśa	Total immersion in our own psycho-dramas! Clinging, grasping, clutching, attachment to our identities, roles, possessions, family, friends etc. that give us identity and meaning.



This is the basic paradigm of Vedanta.

The spiritual human problem is not ontological (a problem of our nature as in Christianity) but rather epistemological — wrong notions which we hold about ourselves, the world, the nature of existence and of the Absolute. The human problem is spiritual ignorance. The function of Vedanta is to help us reboot and adjust our mental parameters as it were.

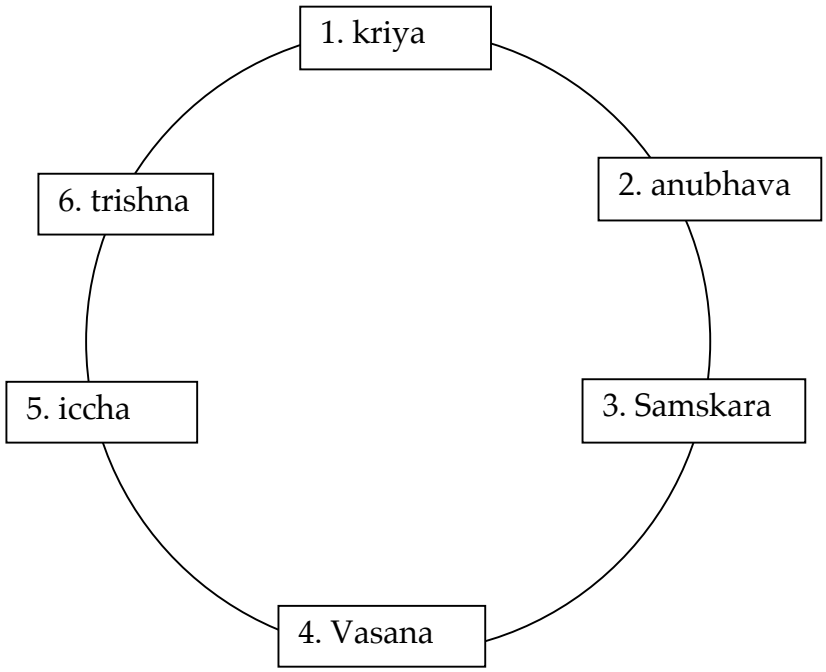
11. NIDHĀNAM — The Chain of Causality

A more elaborate unpacking of the above paradigm can be tabulated as follows:—

avidya	Ignorance of our true essential nature as *ātman*
▼	
dehābhyāsa	Mis-identification with the body, gender, relatives, friends, possessions, profession and interests etc.
▼	
abhimāna —mamata	Self-assertion & validation + possessiveness
▼	
rāga — dveṣa — abhiniveśa	Attraction, aversion and clinging to all those factors which endorse and validate our false "selves"
▼	
karma	Acting in accordance with our delusive identifications. *Karma* refers both to the act and it's consequences.
▼	
vedanā	All acts produce experiences both in the actor and the other — the experiences produce feelings of pleasure or pain or are neutral.
▼	
vṛttis	Mental modifications – the production of impressions in the mind, either positive or negative.
▼	
samskāra	Subliminal activators/conformations/karmic propensities (this process is explained in detail on the next page.)
▼	
vāsana	Habitual tendency formation which then conditions how we react to data and stimuli in our lives.
▼	

svabhāva ▼	The formation of a disposition, personality that based upon the negative and positive experiences and conditions
pravṛtti ▼	The adoption of a way of life, the way in which we go about engaging and dealing with the world around us.
janma-maraṇam ▼	All life ultimately ends in decay and death, death leads to rebirth according to the content of our *saṁskāras*.
Dukha	Repeated suffering and rebirth

Samskāras — Subliminal Activators



Kriya = an activity directed at pleasure or avoidance of pain.

Anubhava = the experience of either pleasure or pain

Saṃskāra = an impression in the mind, a subliminal activator

Vāsana = when the *saṁskāra* is reinforced, an habitual pattern formation arises

Iccha = active form of desire which impels to action

Triṣṇa = craving; objectified desire which manifests as clinging to the desired object.

Svabhāva = personality or character which is built upon these *samskāras* and *vāsanas*.

Every positive or negative experience gives rise to a mental modification (depending on the intensity of the experience), which leaves behind an impression called *Saṁskāra* which is a 'residual potency'. No modification of the mind is ever lost and so these *Saṁskāras* lie dormant in *Citta*, receding into a subconscious state as it were, lying low, ready to manifest whenever a suitable occasion arises by the power of associative thinking.

If the same experiences or similar ones are repeated, the disposition is enhanced and strengthened and issues forth in the appropriate course of *karma* (action) and so the cycle continues.

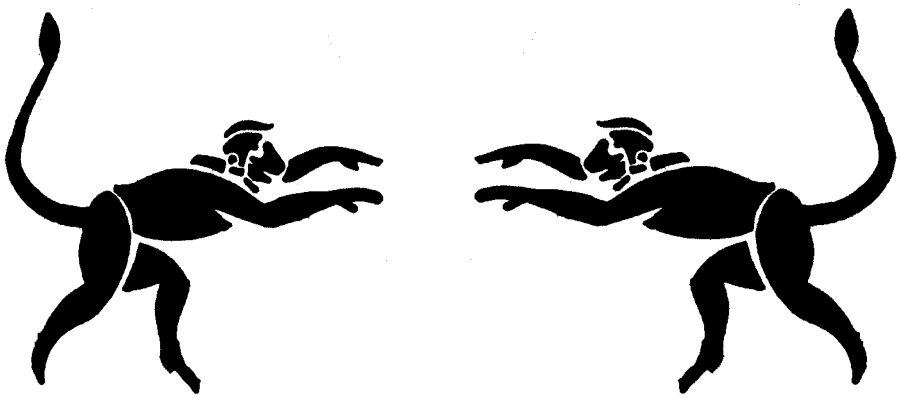
How Does a Samskāra Arise ?

smṛti hetu — something connected with a thing cause recall.

sadṛśata — similar objects will cause recall.

viparītata — opposite connotation – e.g. A palace reminds one of a hovel.

kārya-kāraṇa-sambandha — relation between cause and effect, e.g. A fallen tree reminds one of a storm.



12. MAHĀ-VĀKYAS — THE GREAT PRONOUNCEMENTS

Brahman/ ātman

In the Upaṇiṣads, the Ultimate Reality postulated is sometimes called **Brahman** (The Immensity), sometimes **ātman** (The Life force) and sometimes simply **Sat** (Being).

The function of the Vedas and the Upanishads is to impart this Knowledge of the Ultimate Reality to all humanity so as to free us from this transient and ephemeral existence which is characterized by anxiety, stress and discontent (*duḥkha*).

Scriptural declarations can be grouped under three heads, viz.,—

- *Vidhi-vākya* or injunctions of what constitutes right behavior and best practice (Dharma)
- *Nishedha-vākya* or prohibitions from acts harmful to ourselves as well as others.
- *Siddhārtha-bodha-vākya* or the *mahā-vākya* that proclaim the highest Truth, the identity of the Jīvatman with the Paramātman — of the individual Self with the Supreme Self.

The function of the first two is to purify the aspirant and make him/her fit to understand and assimilate the third; for, only in a morally purified mind will intuition dawn, and with that alone can one attain the Highest Knowledge.

> Katha Up. 2:24. One who has not desisted from immoral conduct, who is not restrained, nor one without concentration, nor even one whose mind is not still, can know This even though learned beyond compare.

There are four primary *mahā-vākyas*, one from each of the four Vedas[9]. They are:—

1. Prajñānam Brahma:—'Consciousness is Brahman.' This is called the *Svarūpabodha-vākya* or the statement that explains the nature of Brahman or the Self. This is contained in the Aitareya-Upanishad of the Rig Veda.

2. Aham Brahma Asmi:—'I Am Brahman.' This is the *Anusandhāna-vākya*, the idea on which the aspirant tries to fix his mind. This is contained in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad of the Yajur Veda.

3. Tat tvam Asi:—'That Thou Art.' This is the *upadeśa-vākya* contained in the Chhandogya Upanishad of the Sama Veda. Through this sentence the teacher instructs the student in his essential nature.

4. Ayam ātma Brahma:—'This Self is Brahman.' This is the *Anubhava-bodha vākya* or the sentence that gives expression to the inner intuitive experience of the aspirant. This is from the Mandukya Upanishad of the Atharva Veda.

Of these four Mahā-vākyas, *Tat tvam asi* is of greater importance. It is known as the *Upadeśa-Vākya* / *Upaniṣad-vākya* / *śravana-vākya*. The Guru initiates the disciple into

[9] When it is said that the Vedas are eternal and immutable it refers to the validity of these Mahāvākyas only.

spiritual knowledge (Brahma- Jñāna) only through this statement. This mahā-vākya gives rise to the other three vākyas.

The Guru instructs the disciple through '**tat tvam asi,'**—Thou art That. The disciple hears it (*śravana*), considers it deeply and reflects over the idea contained in it (*manana*), meditates on that idea (*nididhyāsana*) and enters into a state of realization (*samādhi*) which leads to the direct experience (*aparokṣa anubhuti*), signified in the assertion **aham brahma asmi**. To this experience, he gives expression through the mahā-vākya — **ayam ātma Brahma**, and also asserts the nature (*svarūpa*) of Brahman or the Self that he intuitively experiences through the mahā-vākya — *prajñānam Brahma*.

Therefore, it is essential to study this mahā-vākya in all its details, word by word, taken separately and all together, and understand its meaning. There are a number of variations on these *mahā-vākyas*.

Mahā-vākya	**Source**
sarvam khalv idam brahma All this is Brahman	Muṇḍaka 2.2.11 & Chand. 3.14.1
neha nānāsti kiñcana There is nothing (other than Brahman) anywhere.	Chāṇḍogya 3.14.1
ātmā vā idam eka evāgra āsīt | at first, there was ātman alone	Aitareya Up. 1.1 & Bṛhad Up. 1.4.1
brahma vā idam agra āsīt Brahman indeed was this in the beginning.	Brhad. 1.4.10
ātmaivedam sarvam iti all this is ātman	Chāṇḍogya 7.25.2
ātmani khalv are vijñāte idam sarvam viditam once the ātman is known everything is known	Bṛhad Up. 4.5.6
sad eva saumya idam agra āsīd ekam advitīyam. Then, being (Sat) alone was there at the beginning and it was one without a second	Chand. 6.2.1.
ayam ātma brahma this ātman is the Brahman	Brhad, 2.5.11
aham brahmāsmi I am Brahman	Brhad. 1.4.10

Here, we see that in all these different contexts, the terms *Brahman, Ātman* and *Sat* have been used synonymously.

Projection of the Universe (Cosmogony)

If Brahman/ ātman is the reality underlying the whole of the cosmos (*prapañca*) then one may ask; what is the exact relation between Brahman and the Universe.

The accounts of cosmogony given in the different Upaniṣads vary in detail, but all agree that *ātman / Brahman / Sat* is both the efficient and the material cause of the universe.

> In the beginning there was the ātman. It thought — "I am alone, let me be many — I will create the Worlds!"

Hereafter the description of the subsequent steps by which things are projected into being varies.

From these cosmogonic accounts, the creation would *appear* to be real and Paramātman a *real* Creator. But in many places it is also stated that there is no multiplicity here:—

"neha nānā asti kiñcana…" (Kaṭha, 4.11)

and that one who sees the many here is doomed to destruction:—

"mṛtyo sa mṛtyum āpnoti ya iha nāneva paśyati (Brhad, 4.4.92).

In explaining the appearance of diversity in the world the example of gold or clay is frequently cited in Vedānta. When gold or clay are made into various different articles which appear to be real the only real substance is in fact either the gold or clay.

> All objects have 3 causes:—
> *nimitta-kāraṇa* — the operative cause (the potter)
> *upadhāna kāraṇa* — the material cause (clay)
> *sahakāri-kāraṇa* — instrumental cause (the wheel and kiln)

Different names and forms (*nāma-rūpa*) make them appear as many and varied but these are merely matters of verbal distinction — the essential nature is that from which they are made.

Similarly all objects arise from the same Reality (*Brahman/ātman*), and the variegated differences are merely verbal (Chand. 6.1).

The separate, individual existence of objects in the world, is ultimately denied and the Brahman/ ātman is declared to be the only True and abiding Reality which is indescribable and even incomprehensible.[10]

Kena Up. (1.4.5) declares that (Brahman) is other than what is known and beyond the unknown. Brahman is not that which can be expressed by speech but by which the speech itself is expressed. Brahman cannot even be an object of worship.

These divergent statements about the world and God raise the following questions:—

- Is God really the creator of the world and is the world therefore real?
- If nothing exists but God, is the material world a physical manifestation of God?
- Or, is there really no actual creation and the world merely an illusory appearance?
- Is God a determinate knowable reality which can be described by suitable attributes?
- Or is God indeterminate and unknowable?

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[10] It is important to bear in mind the two tiers of truth in vedānta: *paramārthika satya* — absolute truth and *vyavahārika satya* — relative truth. Living in the southern hemisphere we are actually upside down in relation to the northern hemisphere = absolute truth; but our experience is of being right side up = relative truth.

- Is Brahman existentially identical with the *ātman* or different from it?
- What is the conclusive teaching of the Upaniṣads?

These quandaries gave rise to the different schools of Vedānta — each of them interpreting these sacred texts in different ways.

Before dealing with the different schools of Vedānta let us examine these three concepts of Brahman, Ātman and Cosmos more closely

ULTIMATE REALITY

1. BRAHMAN

Some scientists may argue that when self-manifest material particles are opportunistically organised in a specific way, life arises and from life consciousness arises as an epi-phenomena. But the principle of organisation is not found in matter. Gross matter cannot develop itself into more complex and sophisticated forms by itself.

Matter moves to a higher level of development by the help of a higher power. It cannot undergo inner development without being acted upon by something above it. We cannot ignore the primacy of consciousness.

> '*Verily, in the beginning this world was Brahman.*' (BU 1:4:10-11; Maitri 6:17).

According to the Vedas, consciousness precedes grossness — evolution and involution are two phases of the same dynamic. The higher becomes the lower — gross matter/energy emerges from consciousness. Consciousness is the nature of reality and gradually becomes more contracted and concrete and finally emerges as gross matter. Like subtle water vapour becoming solid tangible ice.

The on-going cosmic process is one of universal and unceasing change and is based on a duality which is perpetually in conflict. But all pairs of opposites have the same origin.

The term ***Brahman*** is derived from the root *brh* — 'to grow, to burst forth.' The derivation suggests gushing forth, bubbling over, ceaseless growth, expansiveness — *brhattvam*.

> 'Who knows and who can declare what pathway leads to the gods? Seen are their lowest dwelling-places only; What pathway leads to the highest, most secret regions?' Rig Veda 3:54

Śankara derives the word *'brahman'* from the root *brhati* to exceed, (*atiśayana*) and means by it, eternity and absolute purity.

For Madhva, *brahman* is the Supreme Person in whom all the good qualities are located in their fullness, *(brhanto hy asmin gunah.)*

Rāmānuja declares that Brahman is Nārāyaṇa — the Ground of Being.

The sages of the Upaniṣads attempt to establish the reality of Brahman from an analysis of the facts of nature and the facts of inner life.

2. SAT

The Brhad-aranyaka Upaniṣad refers to Brahman, the Ultimate Reality as **Sat** — *being*, (*san-matram hi brahma.*)

Since nothing exists without reason there must be a reason why something exists rather than nothing.

The world is not self-caused, self-dependent or self-maintaining. All philosophical investigation presupposes the reality of Being, *asti-tva-niṣṭhā*. [11]

The Negative Way.

Being denotes pure *affirmation* to the exclusion of every possible negation.

Non-being in the Upaṇiṣads is sometimes said to be the first principle (TU 2:7). It is not *absolute* non-being like the horns on a rabbit, but only relative non-being, as compared with later material existence.

Absolute **Being** is not an existing quality which can be found. It is not an object of thought or the result of production. It forms an absolute contrast to, and is fundamentally different from things that *are*. It can be expressed only negatively or analogically.

> It is *THAT* from which our speech turns back along with the mind, being unable to comprehend its fullness and incapable of expression (Tait.Up 2:4).

We can only describe the Absolute in negative terms. 'We say what IT is *not*, We cannot say what IT actually *is*.'

The Absolute is beyond the sphere of predication. It is the *śūnyata* (emptiness) of the Buddhists.

> It is:— 'not gross, not subtle, not short, not long, not glowing, not shadowy, not dark, not attached, flavourless, smell-less, eye-less, ear-less, speech-less, mind-less, breath-less, mouth-less, not internal, not external, consuming nothing and consumed by nothing.' (Brh.Up.2:8:8)

It cannot be truly designated in any way. Any description makes IT into some *thing*. IT is not a thing. IT is non-dual, *advaita.* This means that the Absolute is all-inclusive and nothing exists outside it. Put simply — only GOD (Brahman) really exists.

While it is non-empirical, it is also inclusive of the whole empirical world. The Absolute is described as —

> 'Full both of light and not-light, of desire and not-desire, of anger and not-anger, of law and not-law, having verily filled all, both the near and the far off, the this and the that'. (BU 4:4:5; Isa 4:5, Kaṭha 1:2:20-21)

Negative and positive characterisations are given to affirm the positivity of being.

'To say that the nature of *Brahman* cannot be defined does not mean that IT has no essential nature of its own. We cannot define IT by its accidental features, for they do not belong to IT's essence. There is nothing outside IT. As no inquiry into IT's nature can be instituted without some description, IT's *svarūpa* or essential nature is said to be *sat* or BEING, *cit* or CONSCIOUSNESS and *ananda* or BLISS. [12]

We can now identify three aspects of the Divine as—

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[11] There is a familiar distinction between *nāstika* and *āstika*. The *nāstika* thinks that nothing exists except what we see, feel, touch and measure. The *āstika* is one who holds with R.V. X. 31. 8. *Naitāvad enā paro anyad nāsti* — there is not merely this but there is also a transcendent other.

[12] They are not so much qualities of *Brahman* as the very nature of *Brahman*.

(1) The Absolute transcendent Being

(2) God, as Creative force

(3) God immanent in this material world

These are not to be regarded as separate entities but rather as different phases of the same being. Self-being (*sat*), self-consciousness (*cit*) and self-delight (*ānanda*) are one.

- It is absolute *being* in which there is no nothingness.
- It is absolute *consciousness* in which there is no non-consciousness.
- It is absolute *bliss* in which there is no suffering or negation of bliss.

Kaṭhopanisad states —

> *"Self is concealed in all things, and does not therefore appear to be there. It can be perceived only by the eye of wisdom with the help of a sharp penetrating intellect" (3.12).*

Realisation of the Self (*ātma-vidya / ātma-jñāna / ātma-bodha*) is regarded as the highest form of all knowledge (*Para-vidya*).

Self-realization is achieved through:—

1. Cultivation of mind,
2. Detachment from material sources of transient pleasure.
3. Through study & reasoning
4. Regular contemplation & meditation.

Brahman as BLISS

The Upaniṣads conceive of Brahman not only as the "Ground of all Existence"[13] but also as the ultimate source of all joy (*ānanda*).

Worldly pleasures are only the distorted fragments of that joy, just as worldly objects are limited manifestations of that Reality.

One who reflects upon the Self, not only realizes identity with Brahman but also attains Supreme Bliss. The Self, being the source of all joy is the dearest thing to a person.

Explaining to his wife Maitreyi, Yajñavālkya says that one loves another person or thing because one identifies himself with that person or thing and regards him or it as his own self. In his opinion, nothing is dear for its own sake. The spouse, child and wealth are not dear for their own sake, but all are dear because the person identifies the Self with them.

The Taittiriya Up. Defines Brahman as *satyam, jñānam* — Being & Knowledge which are the same thing, inseparable aspects of a single reality. It then gives the 3rd definition which is *anantam* – infinity. Infinity is related to another key concept *ānandam* – bliss. Only that which is infinite can produce absolute bliss. And absolute bliss is free of all imperfections (*amalam*)

> 'Where there is duality, there one sees another, hears another' (Kaṭha Up.).

[13] *Nārāyana* = *nara* – all matter and spirit; *ayana* – ground of being

The Pursuit of Bliss

But why is the Self or life so dear?

The Upaniṣads answer that life is so dear because there is joy in living. The joy that we have in daily life, however contaminated by pain and however meager it might be, sustains our desire to continue to live. All sentient beings seek to be happy no matter how much suffering they experience.

Craving for gratification is the fetter that binds us to the painful circle of birth, death and rebirth (*samsāra*). Relinquishing craving and attachment and the realization of our essential identity as immortal *ātman* is the way to attain immutable bliss.

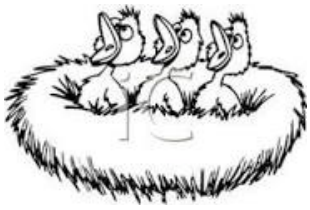
According to Kaṭha Up. (6.14), a mortal can attain immortality and unity with Brahman even here in this very life — when there is freedom from all hankering and attachment.

One may ask why God in Vedānta is not said to be associated with love as in Christianity. The answer is that *love* is an extremely loaded term and has many variations – parental, romantic, friendship, patriotic, ideological, attachment to things etc. Since everything is seen from a human perspective it is best to avoid loaded terms. Bliss or *ānanda* includes within it all forms and variations of love.

THE FOUR PHASES OF BRAHMAN

Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad says that Brahman is *catuṣ-pāt*, 'four-footed', and its four aspects are termed:— *Brahman, Īśvara, Hiranya-garbha* and *Virāj.*

The fourth section of the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* presents the concept of *tri-suparna*.



The Absolute Brahman is conceived of as a nest from out of which three 'birds' have emerged, viz. *Virāj, Hiranya-garbha* and *Īśvara*.

We thus get the four poises or statuses of reality:—

(1) The Absolute, *Brahman*

(2) The Creative Spirit, *Īśvara*,

(3) The World-spirit, *Hiranya-garbha*,

(4) The World, *jagat, virāj.*

The Absolute in itself, independent of any creation is called *Brahman.* When It is thought of as having become the universe, it is called *Virāj;* when it is thought of as the omnipresent essence moving everywhere and in everything in the universe, it is called *Hiraṇya-garbha*; when It is thought of as a Personal God, creating, protecting and destroying the universe, it is called *Īśvara*. (*Īśvara* becomes the gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva when these three functions are taken separately). The Absolute is an ineffable integral UNITY in which these four conceptual distinctions are made.

If we are able to hold these four poises together, the conflicting views which are emphasised exclusively by the different schools of Vedanta become reconciled.

1. ĪŚVARA:

The Supreme Lord, Īśvara, is the personification of Brahman who produces the universe. The *Personality* of the Godhead is not to be conceived of in human terms. He is not simply a greatly magnified person. We should not attribute to the Divine, human qualities as we know them. God *is* personal, *but* personal in an incomprehensible way. The conception of His personality surpasses all our conditioned views of human personality.

Śaṅkarācārya views the personal Īśvara as a 'lower' form of Brahman the Impersonal Absolute. The two, *nirguna-brahman* (Brahman devoid of qualities) and *saguna-īśvara* (Brahman with qualities) are not different — they are the reverse and obverse side of the same Brahman.

Absolute Brahman	**Īśvara**
Spaceless and timeless *potentiality.*	The vast self-awareness comprehending and apprehending every *possibility*.

In *Īśvara* we have the two elements — wisdom and power, *Śiva* & *Śakti, Viṣṇu* & *Lakṣmī.* By Śakti (energy), the Supreme which is immeasurable and indefinable voluntarily becomes measured and defined. It is power or śakti that ultimately controls wisdom and limits it.

In Vaiṣṇava theology this appears as the doctrine that Mother Lakṣmī as the embodiment of compassion (*anugraha-śakti*) limits and defines the justice of the Lord (*nigraha-śakti*).

2. HIRAṆYA-GARBHA;

Hiraṇya-garbha is the collective World-self and expresses itself through all individual sentient beings or *jīvātmas*. It produces the multitude of forms contained within Itself. It is the thread, *sutrātman*, on which all beings and all worlds are strung like the pearls on a string.

Śaṅkara begins his commentary on the Bhagavad-Gita with the verse:—

> 'Nārāyaṇa is beyond the unmanifest. The golden egg (*hiraṇya-garbha*) is produced from the unmanifest. The earth with its seven islands and all other worlds are in the egg.'

In the Rig Veda 10:121:1 — *Hiraṇya-garbha* is the golden germ which enters into creation after the first act of the creator. *Hiraṇya-garbha* has within itself the seeds of all things – the eternal archetype of Ideas – also known as *nāma*.

Hiraṇya-garbha is the 'great-self', (*mahān-ātma*)[14] which arises from the unmanifest — the *avyakta*, which corresponds to the primitive material or waters mentioned in the Brāhmaṇas, or the *prakrti* (primordial nature) of the *Sāṅkhya*.

Brahman is the unity of all that is named (B.U. 1:5:17). *Hiraṇya-garbha* is *kārya brahmā* or "effect *Brahman"* as distinct from *Īśvara* who is *kāraṇa Brahman* or "causal *Brahman*".

[14] For Atman as the World-self, see Atharva Veda X. 8. 44.

Hiraṇya-garbha arises at every world-beginning and is dissolved at every world-ending whereas *Īśvara* is not subject to these changes.

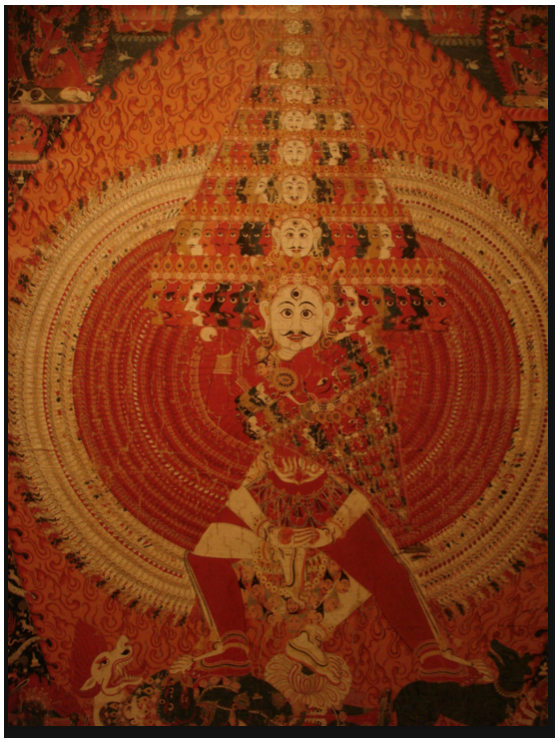
3. VIRĀJ

Virāj is the Divine, immanent in matter. The act of self-manifestation is the free expression and self-determination of the Divine mind (*iccha-mātram)*. The material world is the manifestation of *Hiranya-garbha* and the projection of *Īśvara*.

Why should the Absolute Brahman, perfect, infinite, self-fulfilled, desiring nothing, project Itself into the world? It is not compelled to do so. It may have the potentiality but it is not bound or compelled by it. It is free to move or not to move, to project itself into forms or remain formless. If it still indulges its power of creativity, it is because of its free choice as 'sport' (*līlā*).

While the World-self (*hiraṇya-garbha*) and the material world are organically related and inter-dependent, there is no such relationship between the Supreme Lord (*Īśvara*) and the world, for if there was, then the infinite would be conditioned by the finite.

The Absolute Brahman is *śūnya* or 'zero' — the sum total of all possibilities, and through its creative power one of these possibilities is freely chosen for accomplishment.



Sat is used to denote the primordial Being in its undifferentiated unity, *Satya* is the same being immanent in its differentiations.

To describe *Brahman* as the cause of the world is to give its *tatāstha* or accidental feature. The defining characteristics are in both cases due to our logical needs.[15] The Universal Self (*paramātman*) is like the sun which is the eye of the whole universe and is untouched by the defects of our vision. He is said to fill the whole world and yet remain beyond its confines.

> 'Verily motionless like a lone tree does the God stand in the heaven, and yet by Him is this whole world filled' (S.Up 3:9).

[15] They are said to be *kalpita* or constructed, as the non-dual Brahman is said to possess these qualities on account of its association with the mind (*antah-karana*). They are manifestations through an imperfect medium and therefore limited revelations of *Brahman.*

Personal vs Impersonal

There is an on-going argument between the schools of Vedanta as to which is superior — the Personal God (*saguṇa īśvara*) or the Impersonal Absolute (*nirguṇa Brahman*).

In the metrical Upaniṣads, as in the Bhagavad-Gita, the Personal is said to be superior:

puruṣān na paraṃ kiñcit — there is nothing beyond the Person[16].

It is doubtful whether the author of the Brahma Sūtra accepted the distinction of *saguna* and *nirguna* in regard to Brahman. Even the so-called *nirguna Brahman* is also not without determinations.

Bādarāyana makes a distinction between the super-personal (*apuruṣa-vidhah*) and the personal (*puruṣa-vidha*), i.e. between *Brahman* and *Īśvara*. The latter is not a concession to the intellectually challenged (as stated by Śaṅkara).

The *nirākāra* (formless), and the *sākāra* (with form), are just two different aspects of the *same* Reality.

The distinction between the two is practical. The spiritual practitioner can choose either the *nirguṇa* or *saguṇa* in his spiritual practices (as declared by Krishna in Chapter 12 of the Gita).

In Brahma Sūtra 111. 3 it is stated that the *akṣara* texts which describe Brahman negatively as 'not this, not this' are 'not useful for meditation.'

We have thus the four sides of one whole:

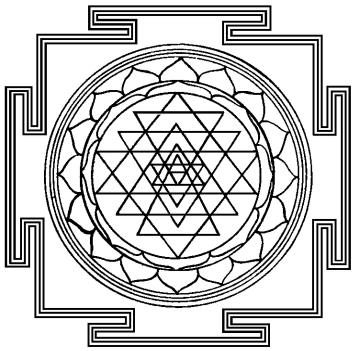
(1) The transcendental absolute.

(2) The causal principle of all differentiation;

(3) The innermost essence of the world; and

(4) The manifest world.

They are all co-existent and not alternating poises where we have either a quiescent Brahman or a creative Lord. These are simultaneous sides of the ONE Reality.



[16] Puruṣa literally means that "which fills" or the one "who resides within the city (of the body)" — so it could be interpreted both as impersonal and personal.

ULTIMATE SUBJECTIVE REALITY — ĀTMAN

The word '*ātman*' can be derived from *an* 'to breathe.'[17] It was originally applied to the breath of life. Gradually it's meaning was extended to cover the life-force, the Self or essential being of the individual.[18]

Śaṅkara derives *ātman* from the root which means 'to obtain', 'to eat' or 'enjoy' or 'pervade all.' *Ātman* is the principle of one's essence and transcends it. When we gradually eliminate all delusory concepts of self, once we detach from false ideas of who we are, we finally experience self-knowledge, *ātma-jñana*. The *Ātman* is the super-reality of the *jīva*, the individual being.

The Rig Veda 10:16:4 speaks of the unborn part (*ajo bhāgaḥ*). There is an unborn and immortal element in us all, which is not to be confused with body, mind and intellect. These instruments are not the Self but it's external expressions. Our true Self is a pure existence, self-aware, unconditioned by the modifications and conditioning of thought and intellect.

Just as, in relation to the universe, the *real* is Brahman, while name and form (*nāma-rūpa*) are only a play of manifestation, so also the individual identities which we assume in relation to others— male/female, parent/child, teacher/student, employer/employee etc. are the varied expressions of the One Universal Ātman.

Brahman is the eternal substratum underneath the drive and activity of the universe, and *Ātman* is the foundational reality underlying the consciousness of the individual, the ground of the Self.

Jīva is a synonym for *ātman* and also literally means 'that which breathes'. It referred originally to the biological aspect of nature which goes on throughout life, in waking, dream and sleep. It is also called *puruṣa* in the sense of *puri-śaya* or 'that which dwells in the citadel of the body.' This means that the biological body serves the ends of the Spiritual Self or psyche. It is this Self which reaps the fruits of deeds and survives the death of the physical body. It is the *bhoktṛ,* the enjoyer, *kartṛ,* the doer. It is the *vijñāna-maya-ātma* the conscious Self.

The *jīva* is the individualised *ātman* which consists of a material body, the life-force (*prāna*), regulating the unconscious processes of the individual, and the principle of conscious activities (*manas*) which uses the five sensory organs (*indriyas*) of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste and the five organs of action, viz. speech, hands, feet, excretory and generative organs. All these are organised by *vijñāna* or *buddhi* (intellect).

> 'He who knows the Self more and more clearly obtains fuller being. In plants and trees sap only is seen, in animals rudimentary consciousness. The Self is more clear in humans for they are most endowed with intelligence. Being thus endowed they think of the future, they know the world and what is not the world. By the mortal they desire the immortal. As for animals, hunger and thirst comprise their knowledge. But these humans are the sea; they are above all the world. Whatever they reach they desire to go beyond it.' Aitareya Aranyaka 2:1.3.

The basis of the notion-of-individuality (*ahaṅkāra*) is *vijñāna* or intelligence which envelopes itself in mind and body. At the back of this whole phenomena is the Universal

[17] In Hebrew also the word for soul is '*nefesh'* which is that which breathes.

[18] It is best not to use the English word 'soul' to translate Ātman. The Ātman is the essential consciousness principle in all life forms whereas 'soul' according to the Abrahamic religions is a *thing* possessed only by human beings.

Consciousness, *ātman,* which is our true essence — like a movie screen which is unseen while the movie is being projected onto it.

States of Consciousness

There are 4 states of consciousness.

1. The externalized consciousness (*jāgrata*), which interacts with the world and day to day life. A common shared space, the objective world.
2. The dreaming consciousness (*svapna*), the inner world of our dreams, thoughts, emotions, and experiences. The private inner space of our subjective reality.
3. The consciousness in deep sleep (*suṣupti*), or coma after waking from which one remembers nothing other than "I was." There is consciousness but no content – just pure awareness.
4. The final reality is the active universal consciousness (*turīya*), a transcendent state which is not to be confused with the three previous states. In the state of *turīya* the Self no longer has any awareness of duality, there is only pure BEING which is not an abstract metaphysical category but the *authentic spiritual Self.*

The other forms belong to objectified being. Self is not the 'objective' reality, nor something purely subjective. The subject-object relationship has meaning only in the world of objects, in the sphere of discursive knowledge. The Self is the subject which sees and not the object seen. Whatever is an object belongs to the not-self. The Self is the constant witness-consciousness.

The four states of consciousness on the subjective side stand for the four aspects of Self; *vaiśvānara* — the experiencer of gross things; *taijasa* — the experiencer of the subtle, *prājña* — the experiencer of the unmanifested objectivity, and the *turīya* — the Supreme Self.

> Through all months, years, seasons and aeons, through all (divisions of time) past and future the consciousness remains one and self luminous. It neither rises nor sets. (Pancadasi 1:7)

The *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad*, by an analysis of the four modes of consciousness, waking, dream, deep sleep and illumined consciousness, makes out that the last – *turīya* is the basis of the other three.

By looking upon *Īśvara* as *prajña*, it is suggested that the supreme intelligence which dwells in the sleeping state holds all things in an unmanifested condition. The divine wisdom sees all things, not as human reason does in parts and relations, but in the original reason of their existence, their primal truth and reality.

Macrocosm	Consciousness	Aspects of Self	Microcosm	Antaḥ-karaṇa
Brahman	Turīya	Turīya	Ātma	Citta (memory)
Īśvara	Suṣupti	Prajña	Kāraṇa śarīra	Ahaṅkāra (ego)
Hiraṇyagarbha	Svapna	Taijjasa	Sūkṣma śarīra	Buddhi (intellect)
Virāj	Jāgrata	Vaiśvānara	Sthūla śarīra	Manas (cognitive mind)

The Doctrine of the 5 Sheaths (pañca-kośas)

In the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad 3*, Bhrigu approaches his father Varuna and asks him to explain to him the nature of Brahman. He is given the formal definition and is asked to supply the content by his own personal reflection.

> *'That from which these beings are born, that in which when born they live, and that into which they enter at their death is Brahman.'*

Bhrigu meditates and first concludes that matter (*anna*) is the basic principle. But upon deeper reflection he is not satisfied, for matter cannot account for the forms of life. *(anna-maya-kośa)*

He next concludes that the life-force (*prāṇa*) is the answer. Prāṇa is different from matter but cannot be the ultimate principle either. He reflects further. *(prāṇa-maya-kośa)*

He comes to the realization that the cognitive mind (*manas*) is the ultimate principle. But the cognitive mind has different grades. The instinctive consciousness of animals is quite different from the intellectual consciousness of human beings. *(mano-maya-kośa)*

Then Bhrigu affirms that intellectual consciousness (*vijñana*) is Brahman. Humans alone have the capacity to change themselves by their own effort and transcend their limitations so it doesn't explain everything. *(vijñāna-maya-kośa)*

Then after much further meditation he finally arrives at the truth that spiritual freedom or bliss (*ānanda*) is the ultimate principle. Here the search ends, not simply because his doubts are satisfied but because all doubts are stilled by the vision of Self-evident Reality. *(ānanda-maya-kośa)*

The Upaniṣad suggests that he leaves behind the discursive reason and contemplates the One and is lost in bliss. It concludes with the affirmation that absolute Reality Brahman is *satyam* — Being, *jñanam* — consciousness, *anantam* — infinity.

There are some teachers who affirm that *ānanda* is the nearest approximation to Absolute Reality, but is not *itself* the Absolute Reality. For it is a logical representation. The experience gives us peace, but unless we are merged in it we have not attained the highest.

All these *kośas* with which we identify on some level were perceived to be changing modes; unsubstantial and impermanent. These are all merely the outer coverings which conceal an inner abiding reality which cannot be identified with any of these, though all of these are grounded in it and are its external manifestations.

Kośa	Characteristics
1. Anna-maya-kośa	Existence, birth, growth, change, decay and death.
2. Prāṇa-maya-kośa	Hunger and thirst, heat and cold, metabolism in general.
3. Mano-maya-kośa	*Sankalpa-Vikalpa* (thinking and doubting), anger, desire, exhilaration, grief, love, fear, delusion, devotion etc.
4. Vijñāna-maya-kośa	Discrimination and decision or determination, agency and enjoyership.
5. Ānanda-maya-kośa	*Priya, Moda, Pramoda*. — the 3 degrees of empirical bliss. Perceptive bliss, contiguous bliss and experiential bliss.

Matter (*anna*) + life force (*prāṇa*) comprise the gross physical body — *sthūla-śarira,*

Life-force *(prāṇa)* + instinctive-mind (*manas*) make up the subtle body — *sukshma-śarira,*

Intelligence (*vijñāna*) makes the causal body — *kāraṇa-śharira*

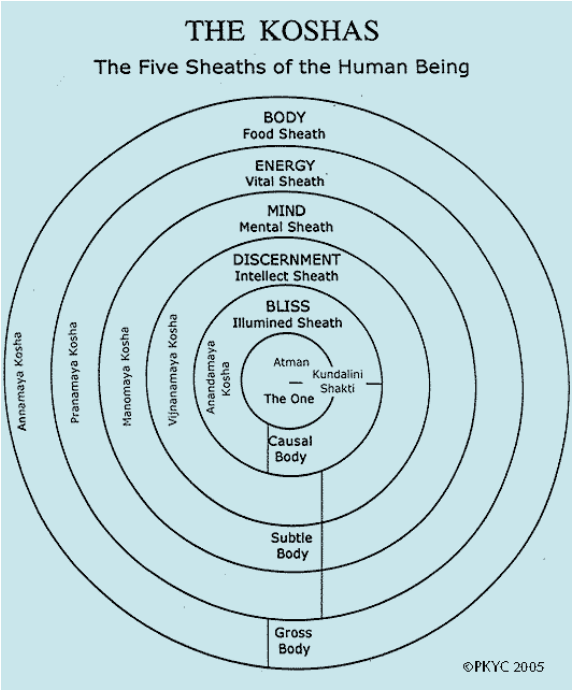
Universal Self *(atman)* is a mode of consciousness sustaining the other bodies.

The concept of individuality (*ahaṅkāra*) is the *atman* combined with memory and moral being which are changing formations.

The term *puruṣa* is sometimes used for the *ātman* which is higher than *buddhi* (intellect). *Puruṣa* is the subjective light of consciousness that is reflected in all beings.

The natural sciences, physics and chemistry, anatomy and physiology, psychology and sociology treat humans as objects of inquiry. They show that we're a link in the chain of living beings, one among many. We have a body and a mind which belong to us, but our self is not derived from any of these, though it is at the root of them all.

The *ahaṅkāra* is a unity of body, life, mind and intelligence. It is not a mere flux, as some early Buddhists and Hindus thought. Intelligence, which is the unifying principle gives us the ego-consciousness. The *ahaṅkāra* is a changing formation on the background of the Eternal Being, the pivot around which our mental and vital activities are organised.



Composition of the Individual		
Pañca Kośas — The Five Sheaths		Tri-kāya — triune Bodies
Anna-Maya-kośa	Physical body of matter	*Sthūla-śarīra*
Prāṇa-Maya-kośa	Life-force = prāṇa, apāṇa, vyāna, udāna, samāna	*Sūkṣma-śarīra*
Mano-Maya-kośa	Manas, buddhi,	
Vijñāna-Maya-kośa	Ahaṅkāra = sense-of-individuation Comprises all the subliminal activators (saṃskāras)	*Kāraṇa-śarīra*
Ānanda-Maya-kośa	Cit - consciousness Sat-cit-ānanda Ātma	

The *ahaṅkāra* is perpetually changing, moving up and down, up towards union with the divine Godhead or down to the extremes of selfishness, stupidity and sensuality. The self-transcending capacity of the *jīva* is the proof that it is not the limited entity it takes itself to be.

What is the relation of the Universal Self to the individual Selves?

Different views are held on the matter by the 3 Vedāntācāryas.

- *Śaṅkara* — the Universal Self is identical with the individual self. [19]
- *Rāmānuja* — The individual self is a mode (prakāra) of Brahman, eternally one with and also different from It — like the body and the Self.
- *Madhva* — The individual Self is eternally and completely different from the Universal Self.

Jīvas — singular or plural.

Though the Self is *essentially* one in all, in the manifested world, there is an *amśa*, fragment, part or ray or mode of the Self which presides over the movements of our personal lives through the ages.

The Divine has many modes of expression on many levels. The Self, therefore, as an *aṃśa*, represents an *idea* in the divine mind, and the different Selves are all ideas in the mind of the Supreme Consciousness. All the individual egos exist only through the Self and have no reality apart from It.

The insistence on the unity of the Supreme Self as the constitutive reality of the world and of the individual Selves does not negate the empirical reality of the individual jīvas.

The plurality of individual Selves (*jivas*) is admitted by several of the Upaniṣads. The individual ego is subject to *avidyā* ignorance when it believes itself to be unique and different from all other beings. The result of this separatist sense-of-self (*ahaṅkāra*) is disharmony and alienation from the universe and others. This failure to harmonise with the universe expresses itself in physical and mental suffering (*duhkha*).

The concept of the unity of the Self does not make the distinctions and experiences of the individual Selves irrelevant. There is no mixing up of the fruits of action (*karma*), as the different individual jīvas are kept distinct by their individual identification with *buddhi*. The possession of intelligence gives us the capacity for moral choice. We may either turn to the Indwelling Spirit (*antaryāmi*) or pursue the separate interests of the ego (*ahaṅkāra*). One leads to wisdom and liberation, the other to ignorance and repeated death.[20]

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[19] Commenting on the sutra:— *aṃśo nānā vyapadeśād anyathā cāpi*— (the individual spirit is a part of the Lord inasmuch as it is not taught that they are different and also the contrary), Sankara indicates that 'the individual and the Lord, are related as sparks to fire', in which the heat is the same (not with standing that the sparks are distinguishable from fire)' and concludes that 'from these two doctrines of difference and non-difference the meaning of participation, *amśatva*, follows.' S.B. 2:3: 43.

[20] 'In each human body the two principles of immortality and death are established. By the pursuit of delusion we reach death; by the pursuit of truth we attain immortality.' (Mahābhārata)

When we forget our true nature and become absorbed in the things of the world, we experience suffering. Alienation from our true nature is *naraka* – hell, and union with it is *svarga* – heaven.

So long as we are subject to ignorance (*avidya*), we are separated from the Divine and are immersed in our limited psycho-dramas. When we attain self-knowledge, we merge into the Divine Being and realise the Infinite, Universal Consciousness in which we all exist.

THE UNIVERSE
MĀYĀ & AVIDYĀ

Now let us investigate another core concept in Vedānta — *Māyā* – often mistranslated as "illusion".

The complex and multi-faceted, multi-dimensional fabric of the world, with its suffering and joy etc. seems to be no more than an unsubstantial dream — a phantasmagoria dancing on the fabric of pure Being — referred to as **Māyā**.

The Upaniṣadic prayer:–

> *'lead us from unreality to reality, from darkness to light, from death to immortality'*

— assumes a distinction between reality, light and immortality on one hand, and unreality, darkness and death on the other.

- The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad 2:4:2* warns us not to seek reality and certainty in the unrealities and uncertainties of this world.
- The *Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad 8:3:1—3* tells us that a covering of untruth hides from us the ultimate Truth, even as the surface of the earth hides from us the golden treasure hidden under it. The Truth is covered by untruth, *anṛta.*
- The *Brhad-araṇyaka* and the *Īśa Upaniṣads* speak of the veiling of truth by a disc of gold and invoke the grace of God for removing the veil and letting us see the truth.
- According to the *Śvetasvatāra Upaniṣad* 2:15 we can achieve the cessation of the great world-illusion, *viśva-māya-nivṛttiḥ* by the worship of God.

There are many passages in the Upaṇiṣads where the world of duality is said to be only 'apparent'.[21] The existence of duality is not accepted as absolutely *real*. In the Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad it is suggested that all things are reducible to ONE reality (consciousness), all duality being mere modifications thereof.

- In the *Maitri Upaniṣad*, the Absolute is compared to a fire-brand, which, when spun around at high speed, creates a substantial fiery circle – This may suggest that the world is a mere 'appearance'. Even here the intention may well be to contrast the reality of the Absolute with empirical reality without making the latter an illusion.
- When the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* asserts that the universe is founded in consciousness and guided by it, it assumes the *reality* of the universe and not merely its *apparent* existence.

[21] 'Where there is a duality as it were (*iva*).' B.U. 2: 4:14 see also 4: 3.31.

Form — *rūpa,* is the revelation of the formless *a-rūpa*. A thing comes into being when we observe it. When a thing is not being looked it, it remains an indeterminate mass of probability since it is in fact nothing but a mass of quantum energy.

Name — *nāma* is not the word by which we describe the object, but it is the power or the character of reality which the form of a thing embodies. The Infinite is nameless for it includes all names.

The world of name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*) exists because of an observer — *atman* — which sees and names things. Both matter and the Ātman arise from consciousness. *Māyā* from this perspective means that *Brahman* without losing It's integrity is the basis and the cause of the ephemeral universe which has no substantial existence apart from the observer.

The cause is logically prior to the effect – and the effect (universe) is a modification of the cause (Brahman). The finite *Prapañca*[22] is the self-limitation of the infinite *Brahman*. These are the two different statuses of the one Reality which are both present simultaneously in the universal awareness.

The dependence of the world on Brahman is explained in different ways:—

- In the Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad, Brahman is defined as *tajjalan* — that (*tat*) which gives rise to (*ja*), absorbs (*li*) and sustains (*an*) the Universe.
- The Brhad-araṇyaka Upaniṣad argues that *satyam* consists of three syllables, *sa, ti, yam*, the first and the last being real and the second unreal, *madhyato anṛtam*. The fleeting appearance is enclosed on both sides by an eternity which is real.

The universe arises from Brahman and returns to Brahman (TU 3; BU 3:8). Different metaphors are used to indicate how the universe arises and how the emanation takes place while the *Brahman* remains all the while ever-complete, undiminished and full.

The many manifestations of Brahman are like waves in the sea of consciousness. Brahman does not 'create' the world but *becomes* it. Cosmogony is *self-expression*. It is not the making of something out of nothing. It is the self-projection of the Supreme.[23]

The *Svetasvatara Upaniṣad* mentions the different views of creation held at the time of its composition, that it is due to time, to nature, to necessity, to chance, to the elements, to the Person or the combination of these. It repudiates all these views and traces the world to the *power* of the Supreme.[24]

'As a spider sends forth and draws in (its thread), as herbs grow on the earth, as the hair (grows) on the head and the body of a living person, so from the Imperishable arises here the universe' (MU 1:1:7).

'As from a blazing fire sparks of like form issue forth by the thousands even so, many kinds of beings issue forth from the Immutable and they return thither too.'(MU 2:1:1)

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[22] *Prapañca* means that which is projected from the five senses. The world that we each inhabit is the world as we ourselves project it – not as it actually is.

[23] In the Rig Veda there are suggestions that the Imperishable is the basis of the world and that a personal Lord *Brahmanas-pati* (X.72. 2), *Visva-karman* (literally the All-maker), *Purusa* (X:90), *Hiranya-garbha* (X:121:1) produces the world. The Upaniṣad refer to the early cosmological speculations, but these are not their real interest.

[24] Gaudapada mentions different theories of creation. Some look upon creation as the manifestation of the superhuman power of God, *vibhuti;* others look upon it as of the same nature as dream and illusion, *svapna-*

The *Svetasvatara Upaniṣad 3:10* describes God as *māyin*, the wonder-working powerful Being, who creates the world by His powers.[25] Here *Māyā* is used in the sense in which the Rig Veda employs it, the divine art or power by which the divinity makes a likeness of the eternal prototypes or ideas inherent in his nature. Indra is declared to have assumed many shapes by his *Māyā*. [26]

The Supreme Brahman is both transcendent and immanent:—

- It is the one, breathing breathless (*tad ekam, anid avātam*).
- It is the manifest and the unmanifest (*vyakta-avyaktah*).
- The silent and the articulate (*śabda-aśabdaḥ*).
- It is the real and the unreal (*sad-asat*).[27]

Māyā is that which 'measures out', moulds forms in the formless. Īśvara is the controller of the power of *Māyā*; he is not subject to it. If Īśvara were subject to *Māyā* he would not be infinite-supreme-existence. Any being *compelled* to manifest itself is not free. Īśvara has in himself the power of manifestation, non-manifestation and other-manifestation, (*kartum, akartum, anyathā-kartum*).

If we consider that changelessness is the criterion of Reality; then the world of manifestation is *unreal* since change is the very nature of all existence. Changing things imply non-existence at the beginning and non-existence at the end.[28] All nature is in ceaseless movement, aspiring to the next higher stage of evolution. Matter is Brahman.[29]

The Upaniṣads clearly state that the waking state and the dream state are quite distinct. The objects of the dream state are *illusory*; not so those of waking experience.

> 'There are no chariots in that state (of dreaming), no horses, no roads. He himself creates chariots' horses, roads.' (B.U. 4: 3. 9 and 10.)

Imaginary objects exist only during the time we imagine them, (*kalpana-kāla*), but factual objects exist not only when we perceive them but also when we do not perceive them, (*bāhyas ca dvaya kālaḥ*). The spatio-temporal order is a fact, not a state of mind or a phase of consciousness.

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māyā-svarupa; others trace it to the will of God *iccha-matram prabhoh srstih*. Still others look upon *kāla* or time as the source; some look upon creation as intended for the enjoyment of God (*bhoga*); still others attribute it to mere sport (*krida*), but Gaudapada's own view is that creation is the expression of the nature of the Supreme, 'for what desire is possible for Him whose desire is always fulfilled?'

The world is the revelation of God's nature. To the question, why does a perfect being instead of remaining eternally concentrated in itself suffer the accident of manifesting this world, the answer is that manifesting is of the very nature of God. We need not seek a cause or a motive or a purpose for that which is, in its nature, eternally self-existent and free. The sole object of the dance of Siva is the dance itself.

[25] This power or *Shakti* is contained in the Supreme as oil in oilseeds. The power is referred to as *Shakti* or *Māyā*. Narada tells Rama in the Devi Bhagavata, that this power is eternal, primeval, and everlasting: — Nothing is able to stir without its aid. When we distinguish the creation, preservation and dissolution in the form of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, their power is also this *Shakti*. The energy of everyone is a part of the divine *Shakti*.

[26] RV.6: 47.18; see B.U. 2:5. 19.

[27] R.V. 10: 5. 7. M.U. 2: 2. 1. Prasna 2: 5. 6.

[28] The Rāmāyana says: 'All worldly pursuits end in dispersion; buildings in destruction; meetings in separation, births in death.'

[29] *annam brahmeti vyajanat* — that which is consumed is also Brahman — T.U. III.

Vidyā /Avidyā — Knowedge and Ignorance.

Avidyā (ignorance) is mentioned in the Upaniṣads as the source of delusion and suffering.

The *Chandogya Upaniṣad 1:1;10* distinguishes between *vidyā* or knowledge which is power and *avidyā* or ignorance which is impotence.

Māyā applies to the objective universe, while *avidyā* is subjective. We are subject to *avidyā* when we think of the multiplicity of objects and individual egos as substantial and fundamental and a reality independent of an observer.

Avidya gives rise to self-reference and becomes a knot which has to be untied before we realize the Self in the recesses of our mind.[30]

Māyā is concerned not with the objective *existence* of the world but with its *meaning*, not with the reality or unreality of the world but with the way in which we look upon it. When we are asked to overcome *Māyā*, it is an injunction to avoid worldliness. The provisional reality conceded to the world is not ultimate — it is only empirical.

If we keep in mind the fourfold character of the Supreme, we will avoid confusion in regard to the status of the world. If we regard the world process, which is a perpetual becoming, it is a mixture of being and non-being, (*sat* and *asat*), the *puruṣa* and *prakrti.*

Hiranya-garbha and his world (*virāj*) are both subject to time, and should be distinguished from the eternal. But the temporal becoming is by no means **false**.

INTUITION AND INTELLECT:

Usually our intelligence (*buddhi)* is engaged in discursive reasoning and obtains knowledge (*jñāna*) which is at best imperfect, through the processes of doubt, logical reasoning and skilful demonstration. Ordinary knowledge deals with the data supplied by the sense organs and collated by *manas*.

Intuitive knowing (*vijñāna*) is immediate as distinct from the discursive and mediated knowledge. It is more immediate than sensory perception, for it overcomes the distinction between the knower and the known and the process of knowing. It is perfect knowledge, while all other knowledge is incomplete and imperfect in so far as it does not bring about an identification between subject and object.

All ordinary knowledge is indirect and has only symbolic or representative value. The only effective knowledge is that which penetrates into the very nature of things. But in general forms of knowledge this penetration of the subject into the object is limited and partial.

Science assumes that an object can be known only if it is broken up into its simpler constituents. If anything organic is handled in this manner, its significance is lost. By employing intuitive consciousness we know the object with less distortion and more actuality. We get to perceiving the thing *as it is.*

Knowledge presupposes unity or oneness of thought and being, a unity that transcends the differentiation of subject and object. It is *unveiled* rather than acquired. Knowledge is concealed in ignorance and when ignorance is removed, knowledge shines forth.

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[30] MU 2:1:10

The knowledge which the unenlightened mind and the senses give us, is a misleading report. Yet that report is the only basis from which we have to proceed. What the world and the individual seem to be, are a distortion of what they really are, and yet through that distortion we arrive at the reality.

Logical reasoning is incapable of comprehending the unity of *Brahman* and *jīvātman*, the absolute and the relative.

Truth in spiritual life is neither the reflection nor the expression of any other reality. It is reality itself. Those who 'know' (i.e. contemplate) the truth become the truth. (*brahma-vid brahmaiva bhavati*).

While *vijñāna* (intellect) deals with the world of duality, *ānanda* (bliss, joy) implies the fundamental unity of subject and object, non-duality. Objectification is alienation. The objective world is the 'fallen' world, disintegrated and conditioned, in which the knowing subject is alienated from the object of knowledge. It is the world of disruption, disunion, alienation and separation.

Higher and Lower Knowledge

The Upaniṣads distinguish between *apara-vidya*, lower knowledge and *para-vidya* or higher wisdom. While the former gives us knowledge of the Vedas and the sciences, the latter helps us to gain the knowledge of the Imperishable.[31]

The *Taittiriya Upaniṣad 2:3* reduces the knowledge of the Vedas to an inferior position by assigning it to *mano-maya* (mind-made) which has to be surmounted before final truth is attained.

The *Brhad-aranyaka Upaniṣad 3:5* teaches that, while those who put their trust in the intellect cannot attain insight into Brahman, yet by those who are childlike (*bālya*) are able to apprehend His being. *Bālya* includes humility, receptivity to teaching and an earnest search. The Rishi asks us to give up the pride of learning — *Pāṇḍitya.*

It is through letting go of striving and struggling to intellectual understand that the conditions are realised for the revelation of the Supreme in the individual Self.

> "Therefore having become calm, subdued, quiet, patiently enduring and collected, one sees the Self in one's own mind". BU. 4: 4. 23.

[31] M.U. 1:1: 4 -5.

VEDĀNTA & ETHICS

The Upaniṣads insist on the importance of an ethical life. We're responsible for our acts and their outcomes. Evil is the free act of the individual who uses his freedom for his own self-gratification, which arises from his alienation from the Real. If we do not renounce negative acts, we cannot attain freedom.[32]

Our spiritual task is to strive for illumination to become one with the Divine. This means that we must give up our selfish, self-centred pursuit of happiness and efface our delusive identifications by surrendering to the Divine.[33]

> *Ācāra-hīnam na punanti vedāḥ*
> "The Vedas do not purify the ethically deficient."
> Vasiṣṭha Dharma śāstra 6:3

Free will is assumed by the Upaniṣads, though the limitations of *karma* are mentioned. "He fetters himself by himself, as a bird by its nest."[34] Our freedom increases to the extent to which we align ourselves with our higher divine nature — the *antar-yāmin*.

Ethical Virtues

The ethical virtues we are called upon to adopt are mentioned in several passages of the Upaṇiṣads. In the *Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad 3:17*. Life is compared to a sacrifice where the fee is asceticism, generosity, integrity, non-injury and truthfulness. The Taittiriya Upaniṣad gives a list of students' duties:—

- One should not be negligent of truth, virtue, personal welfare, prosperity, study and teaching.
- One should perform only those acts which are irreproachable.
- In case of doubt concerning any act of conduct, the student should follow the practice of those Brahmanas who are competent to judge, apt, devoted to the truth, compassionate and lovers of virtue.

In one passage all the virtues are brought together under the three *da's* which are heard in the voice of the thunder, namely:—

- *dama* — self-restraint, self-control and discipline
- *dāna* — generosity and self-sacrifice
- *dayā* — compassion.

> *yo māṃ sarveṣu bhūteṣu santam ātmānam īśvaram | hitvārcāṃ bhajate māuḍhyād bhasmanyeva juhoti saḥ || (Bhagavatam)*
>
> The Lord says: anyone who does not care for those sentient beings who are in need of care and simply takes to the worship of God, his effort is wasted — like offering ghee into ashes.

Prajāpati conveys this teaching to the three classes of his creation, gods (*deva*), humans (*manuṣya*) and antigods (*asura*).[35] Śaṅkara makes out that gods have desires (*kāma*), humans suffer from greed (*lobha*) and demons from anger (*krodha*). By the

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[32] Commenting on Kaṭha 1:2:2-3, Ramanuja writes:— "This verse teaches that meditation which should become more perfect day by day, cannot be accomplished without the devotee having broken with all wrong-doing." R.B. IV.1.13.
[33] *Anurāgād virāgaḥ*
[34] Maitri 3: 2.
[35] BU. 5: 2.

practice of the three injunctions we free ourselves from the sway of craving, greed and anger.

1. Dama is self-control. We should reduce our wants and be prepared to suffer in the interests of truth.[36] *Tapas* – austerity, *Brahmacarya* – continence, and *Mauna* – silence are the ways to attain self-control.

- *Tapas* is self-discipline undertaken for spiritual ends. It is exercised with reference to the natural desires of the body and the distractions of the outer world. It consists of exercises of an inward kind, meditation, self-analysis and outer acts like fasting, sexual abstinence or voluntary poverty. Strength is developed by resisting temptation. Renunciation, *nyāsa*, is superior to *tapas* or austerity or asceticism. The latter is a means to the former. It is not to be made into an end in itself.[37]
- *Brahmacarya* is usually translated as *continence* but literally means 'moving in the Divine' and refers to the vow of studentship of which sexual restraint is one aspect along with other disciplines such as obedience to the teacher, study and practice etc.
- *Mauna* – the vow of silence is advised. By the discipline of silence we curb the excesses which flow from the tongue, heresy, backbiting, flattery. When one observes silence one's activities are harmonised with the silent creative power of the Divine.

2. Dāna is generosity. It is both freedom from greed and graciously giving assistance to those in need. 'There is no hope of immortality by wealth.'[38] Possessiveness is condemned. The *Taittiriya Upaniṣad 1:2:1* regulates the skill of giving: one should give with conviction, one should not give without conviction, one should give liberally, with modesty, with fear (of consequences), with empathy.

3. Dayā is *karuna*, compassion. We should try to cultivate friendliness to all beings (*maitri*) abhor all cruelty and ill-will.[39] As long as we remember an injustice, we have not forgiven either the person or the action. It is by the cultivation of compassion as a proactive attempt to liberate others from suffering that we can overcome our narrow self-interest.

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[36] "The wise person overcomes anger through mind-control, lust through the renunciation of desire. He can attain mastery over sleep by developing the quality of *sattva*. Through steadfastness he should protect the organ of generation and the stomach. With (the help of) the eyes he should protect the hands and the feet. Through (the power of) mind he should protect the eyes and the ears and through conduct he should protect mind and speech. Through constant vigilance he should shed fear and through the service of the wise, he should overcome pride." (Brahma Purana 235 40—42)

[37] "Do the frogs, fish and others who live from their birth to death in the waters of the Ganges, become yogis?"
ājanma-maraṇāntaṃ ca gaṅgādi-taṭinī-sthitāḥ | maṇḍūka-matsya-pramuhāḥ yoginas te bhavanti kim ||

[38] B.U. 2: 4:2.

[39] Devi Bhagavata says:—

There is no virtue like compassion and no vice like the use of violence.
dayā-samam nāsti puṇyam, pāpam hiṃsā-samam na hi.

Renunciation

The general impression that the Upaniṣads are world-denying is not quite correct. They insist on a spirit of detachment (*vairāgya),* which is *not* the same as *indifference* to the world. It is not abandonment of objects but rather *non-attachment* to them. We do not raise ourselves above the world by contempt for the world. It is a spirit of equanimity which is insisted upon. To be tranquil is to envy no one, to have no possessions that another can take from us, to fear none.

Renunciation (*Samnyāsa)* does not mean we should neglect social duties or worldly obligations but should only give up *attachment* to them and the expectation of rewards. Detachment is opposed to attachment, not to enjoyment. Enjoy through renunciation is the advice of the Isa Upaniṣad.

There is a popular verse which makes out that one should give up attachment, but if one is not capable of it, one should cultivate attachment; only it should be attachment to all.[40]

We should liberate ourselves from selfish likes and dislikes. The body and mind cannot be used to channel the Divine so long as we wish to use them for our own ends.

Indifference to the world is not the main feature of spiritual consciousness. The withdrawal from the world is not the conclusive end of the spiritual quest. After self-realization there is a return to action in the world accompanied by a persistent refusal to take the world as it confronts us as absolute.

Intention

Good and evil do not depend on the acts one does or does not do, but on the intention with which one acts. If one's intention is good, one's acts will be good. Our goal should be not so much external conformity as inward purification. From goodness of *being* good will and good works flow.

Contemplation

Good works by themselves do not give us liberation. They cleanse and purify the mind and produce the illumination which is the immediate condition of liberation. Contemplation is the way to *mokṣa*. It means suspension of mental activity, withdrawal into the interior solitude in which the Self is absorbed in the Divine. Different methods of spiritual practice are recommended for different temperaments, and they are all permitted.[41]

The importance of Spiritual Discipline.

Even as we have an intellectual discipline for the theoretical understanding of the world, we have a moral and spiritual discipline for the direct apprehension of truth. Just as we cannot understand the art of swimming by merely talking about it and can

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[40] *tyaktavyo mama-kāraḥ, tyaktum yadi śakyate nāsau* | *kartavyo mama-kāraḥ kiṅtu sarvatra kartavyaḥ* ||

[41] See B.G. 5:5. Vasistha says:— "To some [*karma*] yoga is impossible; to others the path of wisdom (*jñana yoga*). Viewing thus God has revealed two paths."

learn it only by getting into the water and practising swimming, so also no amount of theoretical knowledge can serve as a substitute for the practice of the Dharma.

We can know God only by becoming godlike (*devo bhūtvā devam yajet*). To become godlike is to become aware of the Divine in us, by returning consciously to the divine centre within us, where we have always been without our knowing it.

Detachment (*vairāgya*) is the essential means for the attainment of wisdom (*jñāna*).[42]

We must cultivate a Dharmic disposition. God is revealed only to those who believe that He is.[43] When in doubt, later tradition asks us to give the benefit of the doubt to the theist (Pascal's wager). For if there is no God, there is no harm in believing in Him; if there is, the atheist would suffer.[44]

The *Svetasvatara Upaniṣad 2: 14 -15*. tells us that we should purify ourselves to reach the goal, since even a mirror can reflect an image properly only if it is cleansed of its impurities. We must renounce selfish desire, relinquish attachment to material possessions, become free from self-centred thinking. The path is "sharp as the edge of a razor and hard to cross, difficult to tread".[45]

The importance of a Guru

A teacher (guru) who has attained realization may be of great help to the aspirant.[46] Truth has not only to be demonstrated but also communicated. It is relatively easy to demonstrate a truth, but it can only be communicated by one who has thought, willed and experienced the truth.

We all have the capacity for self-delusion so the Upaṇiṣad declares that one that has a teacher really knows (*ācāryavāna puruṣo veda.* CU 6:14:2)

The proper teacher must be one who embodies truth and tradition.

The need for introversion.

The aspirant should develop the practice of introversion, of withdrawing the attention from the outside world and looking within (*pratyahāra*). We must silence our speech, mind and will. We must strip away the outer sheaths in complete detachment, return to our natural inner stillness and fix our attention on the essential Self which is the ground and reality of the whole universe.

Several forms of meditation are prescribed in the Upaṇiṣads. Symbols (*pratīka*) are used as supports for meditation. We are free to use the symbols which are most in conformity with our personal tendencies. Meditation on AUM (*pranava*) is suggested in the *Mandukya Upanisad.*

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[42] Cp. Sankara's *Viveka-cudamani* 376, which compares detachment and knowledge to "the two wings that are indispensable for the Self, if it should soar unrestricted to its eternal home of freedom and peace."
[43] Kaṭha 2: 6: 12 and 13.
[44] *Nāsti cet nāsti no hani, asti cet nāstiko hataḥ*
[45] Kaṭha 1. 3. 14.
[46] C.U. 4: 9:3. Kaṭha 1:2:8-9.

Divine Grace.

It is said that the Self cannot be realised except by those whom the Self chooses.[47] Self-realisation is possible through the grace of the Divine. God-realization is the fruit of both personal effort and Divine Grace. Only the Spirit in us (*antaryāmi*) can raise us to enlightenment. We do not so much hold the idea of the Real as the idea holds us. We are possessed by it — this possession is Grace.

Conclusion

Vidya and *avidya* are two ways of apprehending Reality. Both are forms of relative knowledge and belong to the manifested universe. Knowledge formulated logically is not the same as a direct and immediate realization of the Real. Whatever words we use, whatever concepts we employ, they all approximations and fall short of reality.

The experience (*anubhāva*) is beyond all manifestation, and is complete in itself. *Vidya* stresses the harmony and interconnections of elements which make up the world; *avidya* affirms the separateness, mutual independence and conflict.

Vidya helps us to appreciate intellectually the logical ideas about the nature of the Divine ground-of-being and the nature of the direct experience of it in relation to other experiences. It indicates the means by which we can attain Brahman.

The theological knowledge or *vidya* is different from the experience (*anubhāva*) of it. The experience is recorded as a pure and direct intellectual intuition in the Vedas (*sruti*).

But *vidyā* is also understood as *jñāna* which is of the essential nature of the Divine Reality. It is the wisdom hidden beneath the sheaths of ignorance. It is one with the Supreme Self, which is self-evident and needs no proof (*svataḥ-siddha*), self-valid certainty.

Wisdom is pure reason, capacity for fundamental truth. It is the possession of the Self or it is the Self that penetrates into its own ground and depth and becomes our essential being.

[47] Kaṭha 1:2:23; MU 3:2:3

KARMA AND REBIRTH

The law which governs this world of becoming (*samsāra*) is called **Karma**. If we neglect the laws of hygiene and health, we risk getting sick; if we neglect the laws of morality, we wreck our spiritual evolution. The law of Karma is not external to the individual it reflects our inner nature and reality.

The Vedic gods were regarded as the maintainers and guardians of the Cosmic Order, (*rta*). God, for the *Svetasvatara Upaniṣad*, is the administrator of *karma*, (*karma-adhyakṣah*), God adjudicates the law of karma as well as being the embodiment of love. The working of *karma* is dispassionate, it is perfectly just, neither cruel nor merciful. Though we cannot escape from the workings of this principle, there is hope, for if we are what we have made ourselves, we may make ourselves what we will. If we miss the right path, we are *not* doomed to an eternity of suffering. There are many opportunities and paths by which we can spiritually evolve with the complete assurance that we will ultimately arrive at the Divine.

Belief in rebirth is a natural development from the views of the Vedas and the Brāhmaṇas and receives articulate expression in the Upaniṣads.[48]

The Upaniṣads give us detailed descriptions of the manner in which a person dies and is born again.[49] The transition is illustrated by certain examples. As a grass-hopper, when it has come to the end of a blade of grass, finds another place of support, and then draws itself towards it, similarly this self, after reaching the end of this body, finds another place of support and then draws himself towards it. As a goldsmith, after taking a piece of gold, gives it another, newer and more beautiful shape, similarly does this self, after having thrown off this body, and dispelled ignorance, take another, newer and more beautiful form, whether it be of the ancestors, or demigods or gods or of Prajāpati or Brahma or of any other beings.[50]

These passages bring out several aspects of the theory of rebirth. The Self finds out its future body before it leaves the present one. The Self is creative in the sense that it creates a body. At every change of body, the Self takes a newer form. The state of each existence is conditioned and determined by one's conduct in the previous existence. From the *Brhad-aranyaka Upaniṣad* it appears that all the organs (sense-potentialities) accompany the departing Self, which enters into the *samjñāna* and becomes possessed of knowledge and consciousness, *vijñāna*. The results of learning and conduct cling to the Self.[51]

The *Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad* speaks of two ways open to mortals, the bright and the dark, the way of the gods and the way of the fathers.[52] Those who are only ethical, performing works of public utility, travel by the path of smoke, dwell in the world of the ancestors till

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[48] See R.V. 10: 16. 3. Satapatha Brahmana 1: 5:3:4; 10: 3.:3.:8.

[49] See B.U. 4:3:37-38; 4:4: 1-5 and 9. 7. See Kaṭha 1:1: 5-6.

[50] B.U. 4:4. 3-5:— "As a person puts on new clothes in this world, throwing away those which he formerly wore, even so the Self puts on new bodies which are in accordance with its acts in a former life." Vishnu Smrti 20:50. See B.G. 2:13, 22.

[51] Cp. with this the Buddhist view that the migrating Self consists of *vijñana* and the other four *skandhas* (aggregates) of *vedana* — feeling, *samjña* — perception, *samskara* — mental dispositions and *rupa* — corporeal form.

[52] See RV 10:19:1. B.G. 8: 24 - 26.

the time comes for them to fall down, then they are born again according to their deserts. (C.Up. 5:10: 1-6).

The descriptions may be fanciful, but the principle of the ascent and the descent of the Self is what the Upaniṣads allude to. Beautiful characters attain covetable births and ugly ones miserable births (CU 5:10:7 KU 1:2). Heaven and hell according to the Upaniṣad world-view belong to the world of time – they are impermanent and only serve to fast-track the unfolding Karma of the individual.

It is sometimes suggested that the Self before undergoing rebirth experiences reward or punishment for its deeds in appropriate places. The original Vedic belief of reward in heaven or punishment gets mixed up with the doctrine of rebirth (BU 6:2 CU 5:3 – 10).

LIBERATION

The *Rig Veda* is primarily concerned about the length of days on earth in prosperity and happiness and life in heaven in the company of the gods after death. In the Brāhmaṇas, the performers of various rites are promised the reward of community of like-minded beings, companionship and fellowship with the gods. Liberation was primarily freedom from want.

When the Absolute *Brahman* was recognised, the gods became intermediaries through whose influence unity with the Absolute is obtained. When *Brahman* and *Ātman* are identified, the highest goal is declared to be unity of the two.

Liberation is different from living in paradise (*svarga*) which is a part of the conditioned world. One may live in heaven for ages but when the merit is exhausted one returns to earth. Liberation (*mokṣa*), on the other hand, is a state of permanent union with the Paramātman. Life in paradise is a another form of self-centred hedonism, while the ultimate is liberation from it. While heaven is time extended, the Liberation is time transcended.

M.B. also tells us that the knower of Brahman has neither movement nor departure.
sarva-bhūtātma-bhūtasya samyag-bhūtāni paśyataḥ | devāpi mārge muhyanty a-padasya padaiṣiṇaḥ ||
'He who has attained the state of the self of all beings, who has attained the perfect vision of all beings — about the path of such a person the gods themselves are perplexed, seeking to discover the place of one who has no place at all.'

Liberation does not mean a departure in space to a new abode. Arrival and departure have no meaning in the context of Liberation. The passages where the Self is said to go by the rays of the sun and to the sun, or from the moon through the worlds of fire, wind, Varuna, Indra and Prajāpati to *Brahman*, speak of the Self on the pathway to perfection in an eternal here and now.

He who knows *Brahman* becomes *Brahman* (BU 44:9). Perfection is a mental state, not contingent on change of time or place. It is an experience of the present, not a hope of the future. Time and space are mental constructs. The past is a memory of events and the future is hope for fulfilment of desires.

'When all desires that dwell in the human heart are cast away, then a mortal becomes immortal and (even) *here* he attains to Brahman. Freedom is not a future state on whose coming we wait in expectation. It is life in the spirit, in God who is the foundation and power of life.[53]

[53] *Mokṣasya na hī vāso'sti na grāmāntaram eva vā | Añjāna-hṛdaya-granthi-nāśo mokṣa iti smṛtaḥ ||*

There are four aspects of *mokṣa* mentioned in the Upaṇiṣads. They're distinguished as:—

- *sālokya* — conscious co-existence with the divine in the same realm;
- *sarūpya* or *sadhārmya* — similarity of nature with the divine, reflecting its glory;
- *samīpya* — intimacy with the Divine;
- *sāyujya* — communion with the divine bordering on identity.

The different emphases we find in the Upaniṣads, in regard to the state of Liberation, can be understood if we bear in mind the integral or fourfold character of *Brahman* discussed earlier. In some passages oneness with *Brahman* is stressed; in others communion with the Supreme Person and in still others devotion to the Cosmic Spirit and participation in the work of the world. Union with God may take many forms.

Another way of looking at these 4 states of *mokṣa* is to regard them as stages in the gradual spiritual unfoldment. Mokṣa means liberation from ignorance and suffering so —

Stage of Realization	Freedom achieved
1. The first stage is *sālokya* — the realization that the entire world is pervaded by the Divine. (Viṣṇu means That which pervades the entire universe and everything in it.)	Freedom from the idea that the world is separate and independent from us and is an ultimate source of pleasure.
2. The second stage is *sarūpya* or *sadhārmya* — realization that every being is interconnected and all apparently separate jivas are embodiments of the One Divine.	Freedom from *ahaṅkāra* and the notion of difference and the *other*, thus being able to cultivate empathy and compassion for all beings.
3. The third stage *samīpya* — is intimacy with the Divine; the God-realization when the nature of the *saguṇa īśvara* is cognized and one surrenders to Him.	Freedom from self-effort to achieve liberation and the relinquishing of all self-imposed burdens.
4. The final stage *sāyujya* — communion with or unification with the Divine, bordering on identity.	Freedom from rebirth and suffering.

There are certain general characteristics of the state of *moksha* or freedom:—

- It is conceived as freedom from time (Atharva Veda 10:8:44). As birth and death are the symbols of the progression of time, life eternal or *mokṣa* is liberation from births and deaths — freedom from space and time.
- It is the fourth state of consciousness beyond the three worlds, what the Bhagavad-gita calls *paramam brahma* or *brahma-nirvāṇa*.[54]

Freedom is not in a particular place nor has one to go to some other village in order to obtain it; the destruction of the knot of ignorance in our hearts is known as freedom. (Siva Gita 13:32.)

[54] In Buddhist texts it is *nirvāṇa dhatu* beyond the three worlds. In the Atharva Veda IV. 14. 3, the fourth sphere is *svar*, the light beyond the triad of *prthivi, antariksha* and *dyaus*. The Brahmanas are concerned only

- It is freedom from subjection to the law of karma. The deeds, good or bad, of the released cease to have any effect (BU 4:4:22). Even as a horse shakes its mane, the liberated Self shakes off its sin; even as the moon comes out entire after having suffered an eclipse from Rahu, so does the liberated individual free himself from mortal bondage. (CU 8) His works consume themselves like a reed stalk in the fire (CU 5:24:3). As water does not stop on the lotus leaf, works do not cling to him (CU 4:14:3). Works have a meaning only for a self-centred individual. Liberation is the destruction of bondage, which is the product of ignorance. Ignorance is destroyed by knowledge and not by works. Freedom is not a created entity; it is the result of recognition.

Knowledge takes us to the place where desire is at rest (*a-kāma*), where all desires are fulfilled (*āpta-kāma*), where the Self is the only desire (*ātma-kāma*).[55]

The law of *Karma* prevails in the world of *samsāra*, where our deeds lead us to higher or lower stations in the world of time. If we obtain knowledge of the eternal reality, *Brahman* or *ātman*, deeds have no power over us.

The state of *mokṣa* is beyond good and evil. The knower of the self ceases to be tainted by action (TB 3:12:9:8). He goes beyond the ethical, though rooted in it.[56] The path of virtue and vice is a means, not an end. The end is beyond the law of injunction and prohibition of good and evil.[57]

The liberated one conforms spontaneously to the ethical standards and practices. To one who has knowledge of the self, non-violence and other virtues come naturally without any effort.

One who is liberated while living is known as *jīvan-mukta*. One is freed from the bonds of conditioned existence. One's appearance continues without much external change. While *jīvan-mukti* is liberation during life, *videha-mukti* is liberation after death. In either case one is freed from conditioned existence. Rāmānuja does not accept the possibility of *jīvan-mukti* and affirms *videha-mukti* only.

There is a suggestion about *krama-mukti* or gradual release. When the liberation is only partial and temporary, the individual descends again into the separative existence and higher consciousness is contracted. The memory of that experience, however, will continue to work until the mental impurities are removed.

Yajñavalkya centres his attention on oneness with the Absolute *Brahman*, a state where there is no desire, there is no passion, not even any consciousness (*pretya samjña nasti* – B.U. 2:4.12; 4:5:13).

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with the sphere of the gods. On the matter of the fourth transcendent sphere they sometimes adopt an agnostic attitude. SB 1:2:1:12

[55] Satapatha Brahmana 10:5:4:15, B.U. 3: 4: 2; 4: 4:12.

[56] Kaṭha, 2: 14; see also CU. 8:4:1; MU. 3:1:3; KU. 1:4

[57] In Majjhima-Nikaya (2:22 ff.) it is said that arrival (*patipanna*) involves a destruction without residue of good and bad conduct (*kusala* and *akusala sila*). It is an eradication of all ethical values. In the parable of the raft (Majjhima 1. 135, 260 and Sutta Nipata 21) the distinction of right and wrong, the exercise of the discriminatory consciousness are of no more use to one who has crossed to the other shore than a boat would be to one who has reached shore. These values are for crossing over, not for possession, *nittharanatthaya, na gahanatthaya*.

When honey is prepared by the collection of various nectars, one cannot discriminate from which flowers they were drawn; even so when the Selves are merged in the Real, they cannot discriminate from which bodies they come. (CU. 6:6:10; BU. 4: 3:21)

The Self rises above the distinction of subject and object which characterises all empirical consciousness. It transcends time and space. This is impersonal immortality where one achieves absolute unconditioned being.[58] It is illumined consciousness and not oblivion of consciousness.

There is also the account where the Self becomes one with the Supreme Person. He who knows "I am *Brahman*," becomes the universe.

Out of the peace and poise of *Brahman* arises the free activity of the liberated jīva. Essential unity with God is unity with one another through God. We are freed from provincialism into a universal perspective, as we become aware of something vaster, profounder, greater than our individual worlds that we inhabit.

There are scriptural passages which suggest that the liberated jīva retains its own form freed from the imperfections of the empirical ego and untouched by worldly pleasure and pain.[59] The liberated jīva's desires are fulfilled by its mere will.[60] The jīva is spoken of as sinless and one with the highest Person.

Non-separation or *avibhāga* from *Brahman* is suggested in many passages.[61] Non-separation is not *absolute identity*. There are passages where the jīva is said to possess adjuncts, which create individuality and others where these are denied. Bādarāyana reconciles the two views by affirming that the assumption or non-assumption of individuality is entirely a matter of choice for the liberated jīva. It can, if it so chooses, enter into many bodies created by its own will even as the flame of a lamp can convert itself into several flames.

When we refer to Absolute *Brahman*, we emphasise four states:—

- Illumined quiescence
- Object-free consciousness
- The total absence of sorrow and negativity

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[58] Cp. Viveka-Chudamani, ascribed to Sankara. It also occurs in Gaudapada's Karika, on Ma. U.

na nirodho na cotpattir na baddho na ca sādhakaḥ ।
na mumukṣur na vai, mukta ity esā paramārthatā ॥

There is no destruction, nor is there origination. There is no one bound nor is there one practising discipline. There is no seeker of freedom nor is there the freed. Such is the highest state.

citte tu vai parāvṛtte na yānaṃ no ca yāyinaḥ. (Lankavatara Sutra. Sylvain Levi's ed., P. 322.)

'When the mind returns to its natural abode there is neither the path nor anyone who traverses it.

yasmin sarvam idam protaṃ jagat sthāvara jaṅgamam ।
tasminn eva layam yāti budbudāḥ sāgare yathā ॥11॥

All this universe, movable and immovable is inter-woven in him. They all merge in him like bubbles in the sea. Culika Up. 17.

[59] Though endowed with divine qualities Audulomi contends that the nature of the liberated Self is pure intelligence and it cannot have the qualities which are dependent on limiting adjuncts. B.S. 4:4:6, *upādhi-sambandhādhīnatvāt tesāṃ na caitanyavat svarūpatva-sambhavaḥ.*

[60] B.S. 4: 4:8. CU 8:2:1.

[61] B.S. 4:4:4 S.B. 4:4 - 6.

- The pure bliss infinitely surpassing all human joys, far exceeding anything conceivable.

This very insight makes the Ātman one with Brahman. By knowing the eternal we understand the true nature of God, the world and the individual.

Bondage does not consist in assumption of birth or individuality, but in the persistence of the ignorant sense of a separate, selfish ego. It is not the embodiment that creates the bondage but the frame of one's mind.

The enlightened being has no fears. It uses the world as the stage and condition for the manifestation of spiritual freedom. It may assume birth for the purpose of helping the world.[62] The enlightened being does not aim at the improvement of humanity, but his/her life itself is a service. Renunciation has become the natural consequence of wisdom. The *Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad 8:1:5:6* distinguishes desires that bind from the desires that liberate, and speaks of the Supreme Self as desiring and purposing truth.

For the enlightened one, *samsāra* and *mokṣa* or *nirvana*, time and eternity, the phenomenal and the real, are all *one*. Enlightened beings become a light, a power of the Truth to which they have struggled and attained, and help the development of others.[63]

Whether after enlightenment one takes an active interest in the world or renounces it is a matter of temperament. Yajñavalkya chooses to retire to the forest, while Janaka rules a state. Whatever they do, they help those like us who are lost in the world of sorrow and suffering.

According *to Viveka-cuḍāmani*:— "Themselves having crossed over, they remain out of compassion for others and in order to help them also to make the crossing." Until all beings are liberated, the liberated ones work in the world assuming individual bodies. Spirit and material existence (*ānanda* and *anna*) are the highest and lowest rungs of a continuous series.

VEDANTA & RELIGION

The Upaniṣads use the inherited forms of Vedic religious worship as means for the realisation of the Supreme.

The Vedic mantras are addressed to various cosmic powers (devas), symbolic of important aspects of the Supreme Brahman. They teach the religion of conviction (*śraddha*) and worship (*upāsana*). The *Brāhmaṇa* Texts deal with rites (*kriya*), and by their performance we are said to gain our ends (*puruṣārtha*). Both these methods are taken up by the Upaniṣads and reinterpreted.

While the Upaniṣads recognise that Liberation is the supreme goal of life, they are aware that many are not ready for the supreme sacrifice — the relinquishing of the ego. They need some preparation for it. They need emotional satisfaction, and for their sake

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[62] *lokānugraha evaiko hetus te janma-karmaṇoḥ* Kalidāsa: Raghu-vaṃśa "The only reason for you to take birth is for the sake of compassion for the world."

[63] Aryadeva in his *Citta-vishuddhi-prakarana* says that the great Selves who have won the fierce battle of life attempt to save others:—

mahā-sattvo maho-pāyaḥ sthira-buddhir atantritaḥ | *jitvā dustara-saṅgramaṃ tārayed aparān api* ||

devotional and ritualistic practices are tolerated. Rituals are not useless, for they lead us on by the upward path by directing our minds and hearts to the Divine and gradually wean us from selfishness into the true Dharma of selflessness. Till the goal is reached, the law of Karma works, and we get the rewards for our worship and piety according to the intensity of our conviction and devotion.

The different forms of conviction (*śraddha*), worship (*upāsana*), and practices of yoga are treated as means to the supreme end of self-knowledge or *ātma-darśana*. Repeatedly the Upaniṣads speak of the God who is hidden (*nihitam guhāyām*). God is not easily comprehended and does not disclose himself to us easily and openly. He remains shrouded in mystery, and yields only when our total self yearns for God.[64]

THE GOALS OF HUMAN LIFE (puruṣārthas)

The goals of human existence are four which are divided into two categories:—

1. **Tri-varga** — *Dharma* (ethics), *Artha* (wealth) and *Kāmā* (pleasure) and
2. **Apavarga** — *Mokṣa* or Liberation

1. Dharma

The first of the goals is *Dharma*, a word which is difficult to translate into English. It has been variously translated as duty, faith, religion, righteousness, sacred law, justice, ethics, morality and so on. Dharma is complex and also pertains to obligatory rules and duties as prescribed by the Vedas for an individual in accordance with the caste[65] and stage of life[66] to which he or she belongs.

Dharma is derived from the root *dhṛ* which means 'to uphold' or 'to maintain' and refers to that behavior which upholds or maintains order and harmony in the world. In a wider sense, Dharma is the secret glue, the binding force, which upholds and regulates this entire creation just as the gravitational force controls and holds together the entire material universe. It is the constitution that defines our roles and responsibilities, our social and moral order, our purpose and goals and the positive and negative incentives that direct our actions and the consequent results. It is responsible for order, regularity, harmony, control, predictability and accountability.

Dharma exists in all planes, in all aspects and at all levels of creation. However to comprehend the true nature of Dharma is not an easy task. What we consider as right and wrong or Dharma and Adharma may not stand the test of truth. Hence to practice Dharma we are advised to rely upon the scriptures and follow the injunctions contained there in.

The sources of Dharma are the Vedas, the Dharma-shastras, (including Bhagavad Gīta),

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[64] Cf. Vishnu-dharmottara 1:58.
"O Rama, the Supreme is pleased with him who is ever endowed with non-violence, truthfulness, compassion and kindness to all creatures."

Ahiṃsa satya-vacanaṃ dayā bhūteṣu anugrahaḥ | yasyaitāni sadā rama, tasya tuṣyati keśavaḥ ||

[65] The four castes are historically the (1) priests (*brahmins*) (2) nobility/elite (*kṣatriyas*) (3) merchants and farmers (*vaiṣyas*) (4) peasants (*sūdras*). In modern society they would be (1) intellectuals, (2) political and management class, (3) business community (4) workers.

[66] The four stages of life are (1) student (*brahmacāri*), (2) householder (*grihastha*), (3) forest-dweller/retiree (*vanaprastha*), (4) renunciate/monk (*sanyāsi*)

the consensus of the wise and learned and our own conscience. In ancient India Dharma-shastras (law books) played an important role in guiding people but most of their views on society, economics and politics are irrelevant in the present day. It is important also to note that what constitute Dharma is not the fixed and dogmatic command of an omnipotent creator but rather the teaching and example of wise beings (*sadhus*) determined by place (*deśa*), time (*kāla*) and circumstances (*pātra*). One should also remember that Dharma should not be viewed as end in itself but the means to a still higher end, Liberation.

Dharma falls under a number of categories such as *sva-dharma* — one's personal ethical and moral path, *kula-dharma* — duties and obligations within a family, *jāti-dharma* — the rules of a community, *rājya-dharma* — the duties of citizens, *stri-pum-dharma* — role duties of men and women, *shishya-guru-dharma* — mutual duties and obligations of students and teachers. Hinduism asserts that rights follow duties and are mutually constitutive of each other. Once we practice our Dharma we are entitled to claim rights and privileges.

Artha

Artha means wealth. Vedānta recognizes the importance of material wealth for the overall happiness and well being of the individual and society. A house-holder requires wealth, because he has to perform many duties to uphold Dharma and take care of the needs of his family and society. A person should not pursue wealth for wealth's sake but to further Dharma and help others to achieve their goals. Hinduism therefore rightly places material wealth as the second most important objective in human life. While Dharma and Moksha are meant for oneself, wealth and pleasure are to be pursued for the sake of others. Lord Vishnu is the ideal role model for a householder. He leads a luxurious life, served by the goddess of wealth herself, but is very dutiful, helpful, responsive and righteous and bent on the service of all sentient beings.

Hinduism advocates simplicity and detachment, but does not glorify poverty. Wealth is not an impediment to self-realization, but *attachment* to wealth is. Desire for wealth is different from greed for wealth. Selfless desire for wealth is preferable to selfish desire for wealth. Money and wealth are a form of divine energy and are to be used for the collective good. Wealth is the basis for all Dharma — it is impossible to act for the upliftment and welfare of other beings if we don't have the resources, so the pursuit of wealth is encouraged and endorsed. What is proscribed is greed, monopolization and the selfish hoarding of resources. The Vedic hymns are mostly invocations addressed to gods and goddesses for bestowing wealth and prosperity. However they also emphasize the need for right intention, right means and moderation in the pursuit of wealth. Amassing wealth for the family and for the welfare of oneself is not sinful, but monopolizing and taking what does not belong to one is. Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism benefited greatly in the past by the individual contribution of wealthy patrons.

According to Hinduism all experiences are self-created and ultimately provide an opportunity to learn and develop. Renunciation does not mean to abandon wealth or denounce the wealthy — it means cultivating *detachment* from wealth. To become indifferent to the comforts and discomforts of life caused by wealth.

Hinduism advocates moderation and balance in the pursuit of material and spiritual goals. Some Hindus think otherwise, ignoring the fact that what is applicable to an ascetic does

not apply to a householder. Swami Vivekananda rightly said that religion was not for the hungry. A person who is beset with survival problems would hardly find any solace in religion. Soothing words would not comfort a hungry person as much as a meal.

Kāma

Kāma in a broader sense means *desire* and in a narrow sense sexual desire. Both Hinduism and Buddhism consider desire and attachment to be the root cause of human suffering. But what is actually condemned is not desire *per se,* because as long as one is embodied there will be desire, but rather *selfish* desire. According to the Bhagavad Gita, desire leads to delusion and bondage to the cycle of births and deaths. The way to happiness is to become detached from the sense objects through such practices as yoga and meditation and to perform desireless actions as offerings to the Divine out of a sense of duty, accepting the Supreme Being as the doer and without hankering after the fruit of one's actions. Manu observed that people perform sacrifices because of the desire for rewards, with the expectation that actions will bear fruit. Not a single act here on earth appears ever to be done by one free from desire. All desires and pleasure projects should be fulfilled through the Dharma.

Hinduism differs from other religions in its interpretation and approach to the subject of sex. Sex can be either a means to liberation and happiness in life or a great hindrance and cause of suffering depending upon how we approach it. In any case ultimately one has to transcend sexuality in order to grow spiritually. It can be done either by abstaining from it or by indulging in it. The former is the way of the Vedanta and the latter the way of the Tantra. One is the way of suppression and the other the way of expression through detachment and understanding in which sexual energy is sublimated and transformed into a higher form of energy. It is just the way you learn to handle fire. In both cases the difficulties are way too many and so are the risks. The libido is the most powerful of all forces and unless it is positively channeled and harnessed one will be bound by *māyā*.

In Hinduism sexual activity is permitted so long as it is practiced according to the principles of Dharma. Sex partners should never be exploited or used as a means for self-gratification. Marriage is a sacred institution in which both the husband and wife merge their energies and destinies to promote each other's growth in the Dharma and proceed towards Liberation by performing their respective obligatory duties, which only married couples can perform. Sexual relationships are complex and can also be the source of great stress and discontent. In the context of marriage sexual needs must be discussed between the parties and compromises reached to ensure the harmony and stability of the family.

While the law books draw a clear demarcation between legitimate and illegitimate sex, sex by itself is not considered unclean or sinful. Sexual desire is an important and legitimate aspect of all forms of existence and serves to perpetuate life on this material plane. Creation itself is a continuation of the union between Purusha and Prakriti, the male and female aspects of the manifest universe. Creation ends when this union ends. Sexual desire is also the last stronghold of Prakriti and the final refuge of our attachment to *samsāra*. It is the most difficult psychological obstacle to be overcome as it is linked to one's sense of self and desire for self-continuity. In most people it perpetuates the delusion of self and serves as a fetter which keeps them bound to the cycle of births and deaths.

The ambivalent attitude of Vedānta to the subject of sex is based upon the dichotomy and

tension between of the householder (*grihastha*) versus the renunciate (*sannyasi*). It becomes evident as we go through the scriptures and find in them various stories related to the libidinous activities of various gods and goddesses and the struggle and tension with celibate and powerful sages. While on the one hand we have the monastic school of Vedānta that considers celibacy as the greatest virtue and source of immense spiritual power and a necessary precondition for Liberation, on the other we have the householder school with its focus on reproduction, pleasure, prosperity and continuation in *samsara*.

Some of the myths give us an impression that the gods are oversexed beings who cannot control themselves from temptation. Besides sensuous gods, there are celestial nymphs of indescribable beauty who add passion and drama to Hindu mythology. At times they are directed by Indra to descend to earth in order to disturb and distract the minds of celibate ascetics who are absorbed in deep meditation. Even Siva, Vishnu and Krishna are not above reproach. Many divinities and legendary heroes, including Bharata the founder of the Indian race are born out of illegitimate sexual conduct. Scholars however tend to consider these stories of sexual union to be symbolic in nature and not to be taken literally.

Mokṣa

The pursuit of Dharma regulates our lives and keeps us on the righteous path. The pursuit of *artha* and *kāma* enrich our experience and impart valuable lessons. The pursuit of *moksha* or Liberation liberates us from suffering and rebirth. The pursuit of *Dharma* should begin in the early age when one is initiated into religious studies. The pursuit of *artha* and *kāma* begins in most cases after one becomes a householder. The pursuit of *moksha* however is the most important of all aims and can begin at any time. The other aims are preparatory for this final aim. However, in most cases, though not correctly, *moksha* becomes an important pursuit in the old age during the age of retirement. *Moksha* is both a *puruṣārtha* (human goal) and a *paramārtha* (transcendental aim), which is important for all sentient beings.

The purpose of these Puruṣārthas is to ensure that people would not neglect their obligatory duties in their deluded state by becoming obsessed with particular desires that may lead to moral and social decadence and destruction of family values. The four Puruṣārthas are responsible for balance in human life. They make life a rewarding and enriching experience. They cater to the spiritual and material aspirations of human beings and lead them in the right direction on the path of liberation.

THE DISCIPLIC PROCESS

Three stages are mentioned as preparatory to God-realization (*brahma-sakṣātkāra*),

1. *śravana* or listening to the teaching,
2. *manana* or reflection upon their import, and
3. *nididhyāsana* or contemplation and assimilation.

The first step *śravana* — is to learn what has been thought and taught about the subject from authentic teachers. We should listen to them with conviction (*śraddhā*) based on sound reasoning. *Śraddhā* is the conviction in the existence of the transcendent, *āstikya-buddhi* as Śaṅkara, calls it. We should have conviction in the integrity of the seers whose selflessness has enabled them to realize the Ultimate Reality by direct intuition. The truth of the Vedic propositions can be verified if we are prepared to fulfil the necessary conditions and put in the required effort.

In the second stage of *manana* or reflection, we attempt to clearly comprehend by the application of logic, inference, analogy etc. The truth of the Vedic propositions can be inferred by logical reasoning. Listening to the teachings of the Scriptures is done with the application of reason. There is a great insistence on the need for logical inquiry.[67] Without it faith will degenerate into credulity. Without the input of faith, logical reason may become mere speculation rather than actual application. While the Scriptures declare the truth by enunciation, philosophy establishes it by argument.

The distinction between *Sruti*, what is heard, and *Smrti*, what is remembered, between direct experience and traditional interpretation, is based on the distinction between *śravana* and *manana*. The primary sources of spiritual knowledge are the *śruti or Vedas*, they are experiential; the formulated conclusions are interpretations. *Śruti* represents the evidence, *Smrti* records a doctrine. When there is a dispute between the two we get back to the evidence. In Vedānta methodology one is always encouraged to review the evidence afresh each time there's a doubt.

The doctrinal statements, laws and procedures of the Smṛtis are conditioned by the historical situations in which they were produced. We must be able to sift out the propositions behind the doctrinal conclusions if we are to understand their contemporary significance.

Logical knowledge acquired by a study of the Scriptures and reflection on their teaching is only *indirect knowledge*. It is not a direct perception of reality. Thought must mature into realisation. *Nididhyāsana* is the process by which an intellectual conclusion is transformed into a dynamic and experiential one.[68]

Nididhyāsana is different from *upāsana*. Both are forms of meditation or contemplation. In *upāsana* there is the distinction between the worshipper and the worshipped — subject/object, but in *nididhyāsana* there is a complete integration in which the teaching becomes totally internalized.

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[67] Wisdom cannot be attained by any means other than inquiry.

notpadyate vinā jñānaṃ vicāreṇa-anya-sādhanaiḥ. — Sankara

Vasistha says:— 'The word even of a child, if it is reasonable, should be accepted. All else should be rejected even if it be said by the Creator.'

[68] Even if we study the Vedic texts and all the Scriptures we cannot know the truth of reality if we are the victims of intellectual pride. Muktika Up. 2:65.

Meditation is just holding oneself steadily in front of the truth. The whole mind is centred on the object to the exclusion of all else. Even *upāsana* is defined by Ramanuja as the continued flow of an identical current of thought – like the flow of oil from one vessel to another. We can practise meditation in any direction, place or time in which we can concentrate our mind.[69]

Upāsana or worship is the basis of the doctrine of *bhakti* or devotion. As *Brahman* is not described in the early Upaniṣads in sufficiently personal terms, the later ones like the *Kaṭha* and the *Śvetasvatara* regard the Supreme as a personal God who bestows grace. Devotion to a personal God is recommended as a means for attaining spiritual development.[70]

In all the three stages, a teacher may be found useful. Only those who act in the right way are the acharyas.[71] There are three kinds of disciples:–

- One who understands what is taught along with the proof, when heard only once, is the good pupil;
- One who understands what the teacher says but cannot control the mind, is the middling.
- One who understands it only after hearing many times and after giving himself and his teacher much trouble is the bad pupil.

The truth can be intellectually taught only up to a point. It has to be assimilated by personal effort, by self-discipline.

Different aspects of the teaching have been exclusively emphasised in various passages which leads to the impression that the Upaniṣads do not give us any single coherent view. The absolutistic (*nirguṇa*) and theistic (*saguṇa*) views of the Upaniṣads are not exclusive of each other. They are different views of the same thing. Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja emphasise different aspects of the teaching of the Upaniṣads.

Importance of Symbols

Symbols are used to make the truth intelligible, to make the un-hearable audible. They are used as tangible supports for contemplation. Some of these symbols are common to all religions. Fire and light are usually adopted to signify the Ultimate Reality. Water to signify purity. It means that the experiences of people do not differ much from one part of the world to another.

According to Vedānta the individual is free to select for worship any form of the Supreme. This freedom of choice — *iṣṭa-devata-arādhana* means that the different forms are all included in the Supreme. The acceptance of one form does not mean the rejection of others.

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[69] *yatra diśi deśe kāle vā sādhakasya ekāgratā bhavati tatra eva upāsīta. Sankara Bhāṣya. 4:1:11*

[70] S.U. 6: 21 and 23. Images, pilgrimages, ceremonies are all accessories to devotion.

The Bhagavata X. 10. 38. asks us to love the Supreme with all our being:— "Lord may our speech be engaged in recounting your qualities, our ears in hearing your stories, our hands in doing service for you, our mind in the remembrance of your feet, our head in bowing to this world which is your dwelling-place and our eyes in gazing at the saints who are your living images on earth."

[71] *svayam ācarate yas tu ācāryas so'bhidhīyate*

The Supreme Wisdom cannot be expressed except through symbols. These symbols are not entirely subjective. It is true that different objects appear differently from different points of view, but the validity of the different points of view need not be denied. Statements about reality are definitions of the relationship between those making them and the reality which they are describing. Symbols have a meaning, and this meaning is objective and shared. They may be indicative of psychological states, separate existences, and may be different in their qualitative content, but their meanings can be studied and understood.

Religion deals with the human search for the eternal, the sources of joy and truth, and particular formulations are but approximations to the Unutterable. Our minds are conditioned by the circumstances of time and place. The conception and expression of the Universal Truth can only be partial according to the differences of race and character.

The Upaniṣads lay stress on psychological discipline and direct personal spiritual experience, they do not insist on any single set of dogmas, rites or codes. They are also aware that we may touch on different aspects of the spiritual experience when we attempt to define it. We may use any symbols and methods which help to bring about a transformation of consciousness.

God is in every one of us ready to help us though we generally ignore Him.[72] Whatever be the form we start with, we grow to the worship of the one Universal Spirit immanent in all.[73] The worship of the conditioned form is recommended as a preparation for the apprehension of unconditioned Absolute.[74]

The *Darsana Upaniṣad* says:—

"The vulgar look for their gods in water, those of wider knowledge in celestial bodies, the ignorant in (images made of) wood or stone but the wise see the Supreme in their own self. The yogins see the Supreme in the Ātman, not in the images. The images are conceived for the sake of contemplation by the ignorant."

Spiritual training begins with the external, with word and gesture in order to produce the spiritual content, but we should not stop at any stage short of re-unification with God.[75] There are those who regard the forms they worship as final, though the Upaniṣads declare that the Real has aspects of both tranquil transcendence and cosmic universality.

The advocates of *bhakti* look upon the worship of the personal God as the highest bliss,[76] though those who regard the Absolute as super-personal declare that it is somewhat lower

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[72] The Bhagavata says that "fire is the god of the twice-born (*brahmins*), the (innermost) heart is the god of the wise, the image of the ignorant, for the wise— God is everywhere.

[73] Pingala, the prostitute, got disgusted with her life and said:— "Casting aside this eternal lover who is near (in my own heart), is my beloved, gives me joy, gives me wealth, I foolishly seek another (from outside), who does not fulfil my desires, who gives me only sorrow, fear and blind infatuation and is petty."
She resolved:— "He is the friend, most beloved Lord and one's own self to all embodied beings. I shall earn Him by offering myself to Him and play with Him as Goddess Lakshmi does." (Bhagavata 11:8:31-35).

[74] Commenting on Brahma Sutra 3:3:59' Sankara argues that every individual is at liberty to choose the form of worship according to one's liking and perform it. The direct union with the object of meditation is the result of each of these meditations.

[75] Mahanirvana Tantra XIV. 122. The highest form of worship is the realisation of the Supreme in all, the meditation of the Supreme is the middling state; prayers to and praises of him with the silent repetition of his name is the lowest and external worship is the lowest of all.

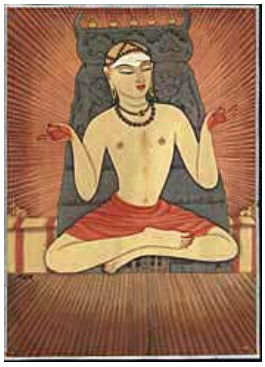
[76] Cp. Vedanta Desika.
tvam cet, prasīdasi tavāsmi samīpataḥ cet tvayy asti bhaktir anaghā kari-śaila-nātha
saṃsṛjyate yadi ca dāsa-janas tvadīyaḥ saṃsāra eṣa bhagavan apavarga eva.
O Lord, if Thou art gracious, if I am (always) Thy side, if there is in me pure devotion to Thee,
If I am in the company of those who are Thy servants, then this *samsara* is itself *moksha*.

than the highest, that those who do not get beyond the stage of the worship of the Personal God, enter, on death, into a heavenly state of existence but don't reach *mokṣa*.

Each individual has to achieve insight by personal effort after long and persistent practice (*sādhana*). The Supreme is not so much an immanent God as an *experienced* God. When there is the vision in meditation of the Supreme, which is entirely beyond the power of the Self to prepare for, or bring about, we feel that it is wholly the extraordinary grace of God. In a sense all life is from God, but the heights of contemplation which are scaled by few are attributed in a special degree to divine Grace. After the vision the light may fade, darkness may afflict the Self, but the Self can never lose altogether what it has once seen. Our effort thereafter should be to renew the experience, make it the constant centre of all our activities until the completely Real is completely known.

There are references to visions and auditions and other psychic phenomena (*siddhis*) which sometimes accompany spiritual unfoldment. But they are a distraction and sometimes tempt one to remain on the wayside without pressing forward to the goal. These visions and auditions are not an essential part of the path and should be disregarded. In other religions, too, we have these varieties of mystic experience.

The Upaniṣads are far from dogmatic, and rather espouse an attitude of acceptance of all forms of worship — this has been a persistent character of India's religious life.[77]



[77] Bardosa the Portuguese explorer writes of Krishnadeva Raya a King of the Vijayanagar empire:— "The King allows such freedom that any man may come and go and live according to his own creed without suffering any annoyance and without enquiring whether he is a Christian, Jew, Moor or Hindu." *An Advanced History of India* by R. C. Majumdar, H. C. Ray, Chaudhuri and K. Datta (1946), P. 379.

THE THREE SCHOOLS OF VEDĀNTA

Vedānta is a philosophical methodology which can be seen as a bell-curve. At one end are the Absolute non-dualists and the other end the Dualists with the qualified non-dualists in the middle. The different schools and teachers are at different points on the scale.

The various teachers of Vedānta (*Vedāntācāryas*) attempted to resolve and reconcile the various conflicting statements of the Upaṇiṣads. The first attempt was made by Bādarāyana who wrote the Brahma-sūtras. Subsequent ācāryas commented on the Brahma-Sutras and gave their own interpretations. Out of different rival schools that came into existence in this way, that of Saṅkarācarya is the leading one.

Most Yoga teachers in the west and most courses in Indian Philosophy present Advaita (Non-dualism) as the authentic Vedānta. Next in popularity, comes the Viśiṣṭādvaita School (Qualified non-dualism) of Rāmānujācārya. These two are the most widely known schools of Vedānta, the third school of Dvaita (Dualism) is less popular and has the least number of adherents.

Agreement between the two major schools

Both Saṅkara and Rāmānuja reject theories which explain the world:—

- either as a product of material elements which by themselves spontaneously combine to form objects,
- as the transformation of an insentient Prakṛti (Nature) that spontaneously evolves and diversifies,
- as the product of two kinds of independent reality i.e. (a) Prakṛti (Primordial Matter) and Puruṣa (Spirit) — with the latter as an efficient cause acting on the former as the material cause, to produce the Universe.

Both ācāryas agree that an insentient cause cannot produce the world and even the dualistic proposition of two ultimate independent realities, one sentient and another insentient, producing the world by mutual interaction, is unsatisfactory.

Both accept the Upaniṣadic dictum that "All is Brahman" (*Sarvam khalvidam Brahma*).

Both agree that matter and mind are not independent realities but are together grounded in the same Brahman (consciousness)

Both are monists and believe in one Absolute Independent Reality which pervades the world of multiple objects and Selves.

ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

Non-Dualism / Monism

The Godhead — Brahman

According to Saṅkara, the Godhead (Brahman) can be viewed from two different points of view. An ordinary practical stand point (*vyavahārika*), and an absolute (*paramārthika*) stand point. From the practical point of view where the universe *appears* to be real, Brahman may be regarded as the cause, the creator, the sustainer, and the destroyer of the world and therefore, also as an omnipotent and omniscient Personal Being, He then appears as possessed of all the qualities needed for carrying out these three functions. God in this aspect is called *Saguṇa Brahman* or *Īśvara* and can be considered as an object of devotion and worship. This understanding of God is true only from the practical point of view, so long as the universe *appears* to be real.

This can be illustrated by the example of shepherd who plays the role of a king. On stage he wages war, conquers a country and rules it. In this case describing the actor as a shepherd is termed the 'essential description' (*svarūpa-lakṣana*). But the description of him as a king, ruler, and conqueror is the 'accidental description' (*taṭastha-lakṣana*) and does not involve his essential being.

Similarly, the description of the Godhead as Consciousness, Truth, Infinitude (*satyam, jñānam, anantam Brahman* — Tait. Up. 2.1) is an attempt to describe His essence (*svarūpa*) whereas the description of Him as Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of the world or by any other characteristic connected with the world, is a mere accidental description and it holds good only from the practical point of view (*vyavahārika*). The Godhead as it really is without any reference to the world, is called by Saṅkara *Para-brahman*.

Saṅkara attempts to reconcile the immanence and the transcendence of God taught in the Prasthāna Trayam, in the light of rope/snake analogy. As long as the world is perceived to be real the Godhead can be said to be immanent just as the snake imagined in the rope is nowhere else except in the rope. God is not really touched by the imperfections of the world just as the rope is not affected by any illusory characteristic of the snake.

Worship of God

The worship of God is based essentially in a perception of difference between the adoring devotee and the God adored. This difference is based upon nescience and the failure to realise that the Godhead is identical to the Self. So the act of worship and the God worshipped are connected to our lower stand point (*vyavahārika dṛṣṭi*) from which the world appears as real and God appears as endowed with the many appropriate qualities in relation to the world.

Brahman from the higher or transcendental point of view (*paramārthika dṛṣṭi*) is

devoid of all qualities which relate to the world. Brahman in this aspect is devoid of all distinctions (*nirguṇa*), external as well as internal (*sajātiya, vijātiya, svāgata bhedas*). According to Saṅkara, Brahman, in the absolutely transcendent aspect, cannot be described at all and is, therefore called indeterminate or characterless or Nirguṇa. The description of Brahman as Infinite, Truth and Consciousness, though more accurate than the 'accidental description', cannot directly convey the idea of Brahman. It only serves to direct the mind towards Brahman by denying of it finiteness, unreality and unconsciousness.

Though the creator-ship of God is only apparent, yet His importance and value should not be under estimated. It is only through the lower stand point that we can gradually mount up to the higher. Advaita Vedānta teaches a gradual ascension to Truth. An ordinary person who regards the world as a self-sufficient reality feels no urge to look beyond it and search for its cause and ground.

When one realises the nature of life as suffering and sees that the world is transient, ephemeral and unsubstantial, one then looks for something which sustains the world from behind. One then discovers God as a creator and sustainer of the world. One feels admiration and reverence and begins to meditate upon the creator. God thus becomes the object of reverence and meditation. With further spiritual advancement the Advaitin attains the realisation that Brahman is in fact the only reality and the world a mere appearance. Thus at the first level, the world alone is real; at the second, both the world and God are real and at the last, only the Godhead. The first is an atheistic understanding, the second a theistic and the last the Absolute Monism of Saṅkara.

Saṅkara like Patañjali accepts the utility of meditating upon God (as Saguṇa Brahma) as it purifies the mind and prepares one for gradually reaching the highest view of the oneness of all things.

The Universe

Saṅkara tackled the problem of reconciling the Upaniṣadic teaching about the creation, taken in literal sense, with the teaching that there is no multiplicity here whatsoever. The Upaniṣadic description of the Brahman as being ultimately devoid of all attributes becomes unintelligible if the creation is taken to be real. The teachings about the negation of all multiplicity when Brahman is realised also presents a problem — if the world were real how could it disappear? The dawning of the knowledge of Reality can only negate the unreal appearing as real, not what is actually real.

If the world were a mere appearance, Saṅkara posited, like an object in a dream or an illusion, then the present appearance of the world becomes intelligible as does its disappearance on the dawning of the knowledge of Reality. This reconciliation has been suggested by Upaniṣads themselves. Even in Rig Veda (6.47. 18), the one Indra (God) is said to appear in many forms through powers of creating illusion (*māyā*). The Bṛhadaraṇyaka (2.5.19) also accepts this. The Svetaśvatara clearly states that the origin (Prakṛti) of the world lies in the magical power (*māyā*) of Brahman.

Māyā

The doctrine of Māyā is central to the philosophical position of Saṅkara. It is a mysterious power of creation indistinguishable from Brahman, just as the burning power of fire arises from the fire itself. The ignorant take the appearance of this world as absolutely real, but the enlightened ones who can see through it, find nothing but the Godhead, the one Supreme Reality behind this illusory phantasmagorical world.

In order to understand the process by which illusion occurs, the analogy of snake and rope is used. In the dark, a coiled rope is mistaken for a snake and gives rise to fear. The moment the light is turned on the illusion of the snake is dispelled and the rope is seen for what it actually is. The ignorance that creates the illusion does not simply conceal the real nature of the substratum — the rope, but positively distorts it i.e. makes it appear as something else. It is ignorance '*avidya'* or '*ajñāna'* with its double function of concealment or *āvarana* of reality and distortion or *vikṣepa* of it into something else in our mind, that is responsible for the illusion.

In relation to Brahman, *'māyā'* is only the will to create the appearance. It does not affect Brahman Himself. Ignorant beings like us, are deceived by it and see the many instead of the one Brahman. It is the reason that māyā is also called '*avidya'* or nescience and is conceived as having double function of concealing the real nature of Brahman the ground of the world, and making Him appear as something else, namely, the world.

The Process of Creation

When Saṅkara identifies Māyā with Prakṛti, he means that this creating power is the source or origin (prakṛti) of the apparent reality. Saṅkara holds that Brahman does not undergo any real change, change is only apparent.

Illusory or apparent modification of any substance, as of a rope into the snake is called '*vivarta'*, and real modification, as of milk into curd, is called '*pariṇāma'*. Saṅkara's theory of creation, as described above, is, therefore, known as *"vivarta-vāda"* which clearly differs from the Sāṅkhyan theory of evolution (by the real modification of Prakṛti), called *'pariṇāma-vāda'* Rāmānuja's theory also is a kind of *pariṇāma-vāda* as he admits that the insentient element of Prakṛti in the Godhead really changes into the world. Both *vivarta-vāda* and *pariṇāma-vāda* agree, however, that the effect is already contained in its material cause and, therefore, both come under the rubric of *satkārya-vāda* or the theory that the effect (*kārya*) is existent (*sat*) in the material cause, and is not a new thing produced.

In all illusion there is projection or *'adhyāsa'* — the snake is projected by the imagination onto the rope, and likewise the world onto Brahman. Based on some Scriptural texts, Saṅkara admits that Māyā is *'avyakta'* or unmanifest, or even identifies Māyā with Prakṛti having the three guṇas of *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas*. This Prakṛti should not be confused with the Sāṅkhya theory of Prakṛti as an independent Reality. It is simply a power of Brahman, and absolutely dependent on Brahman.

The Self.

A human being is composed of a Self and a mind/body complex. But the mind/body which we perceive is, like every other material object, merely on illusory appearance. When this is realised, the reality that remains is the Self which is nothing other than Brahman.

The cardinal formula of the Upaniṣads is; *'Tat tvam asi'* — That thou art. The word 'thou' here implies essential consciousness which is the characteristic of the ātman and the word '*that'* implies the pure consciousness which forms the essence of Brahman. Between these two complete identity exist and is taught by Vedānta. Here identity between the ātman and Brahman is a real identity between terms which appear as different. Being identical with Brahman, the ātman is in reality what Brahman also really is. It is the supreme Brahman the self luminous, infinite, consciousness. The ātman appears as the limited, finite self because of its identification with the mind/body which is a product of ignorance.

Bondage

The ātman is encased in the gross physical body (*sthūla śarīra*) and the subtle mind body (*sūkṣma śarīra*). When the gross body perishes on death, the ātman together with the mind-body migrates to the next gross body. Both of these bodies the gross and the subtle are the product of Māyā. Due to ignorance, the ātman erroneously identifies itself with the mind/body complex. This is called bondage. In this state it forgets that it is really Brahman. It behaves like a finite, limited, miserable being which runs after transitory worldly objects (*rāga*) and is pleased to get them, and suffers at their non-attainment (*dveṣa*). It identifies itself with a finite body and mind (*antaḥ-karaṇa*) and that I am so and so (*moha*). This gives rise the conception of the self as the 'Ego' or I. This limited ego differentiates itself from the rest of the existence. The ego (*aham*) is not the real self (*ātman*), but is only an apparent limitation of it — a reflection in the mind.

The consciousness of the ātman becomes contracted by the physical embodiment. The senses and *'antaḥ karaṇa'* become the instruments through which limited cognition of objects takes place.

There are three levels of consciousness in which we all operate. Ordinary externalised consciousness, ie. the waking experience, internalised consciousness or dream state and dreamless sleep or unconsciousness. When one is awake, one identifies with the gross body, as well as with the internal and external organs. When one dreams or thinks actively one is conscious of objects that arise from memory, and therefore, the feeling of self- limitation as subject or knower opposed to the objects known still persists. In the dreamless or unconscious state one ceases to perceive objects and consequently one ceases to be knower as well. The polarity between subject and object, the opposition between the knower and known, vanishes altogether. One no longer feels that one is confined to and limited by the body. But yet consciousness does not cease in dreamless sleep. Otherwise how could we remember at all on waking from

sleep that we had a sound and dreamless sleep, if we were unconscious then? In the fourth state called turiya the dichotomy of subject and object also vanishes and the ātman is cognised as unlimited consciousness and bliss.

Liberation

Ignorance is not dispelled merely by formal learning of the Vedāntic teachings. Only repeated meditation leads to a full and empirical realisation of the Truth and the living of a life in accordance therewith. Once erroneous conceptions are negated and true Self-realisation dawns one can declare with conviction *'aham brahmo'smi'* — I am Brahman! Thus the illusory distinction between the ātman and Brahman is dissolved and one attains liberation (*mukti*) from bondage.

Even after attainment of Self-realisation the body may continue because it is the product of 'Karma' (*prārabdha karma*). But the liberated one never again identifies with the body. The world still appears as before, but one is not deceived thereby. One feels no desire or attraction for the agreeable nor repulsion from the disagreeable. One is free from all suffering — this is known as *'jīvan-mukti'* (the liberation of one while one is alive). It is the state of perfect enlightenment while embodied as taught by the Buddhists, the Sāṅkhyans, the Jains and some other Indian thinkers.

Altruism

Saṅkara, following the Gītā holds that actions bind one only when performed with attachment. But one who has obtained perfect knowledge and perfect satisfaction, is free from attachment and motivation for gain and is not, therefore, affected by success or failure. Saṅkara attaches great importance to disinterested actions which are valuable for self purification (*ātma-śuddhi*) even to those who have not yet obtained perfect realisation. To those who have obtained perfect realisation selfless activity is also necessary for the well-being (*loka-saṅgraha*) of those who are still in bondage. An enlightened person is a role model whose life should be worthy of imitation. Altruism is not an essential feature of the perfect life, but rather desirable. In his own life Saṅkara follows this ideal of altruistic social service, This ideal has been also advocated by eminent modern Vedāntist like Swāmi Vivekananda and Pt. Lokamanya B. G. Tilak.

VIŚIṢṬĀDVAITA VEDĀNTA
Qualified Non-dualism

In expounding his version of Vedānta, later known as Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, Rāmānuja attempts to harmonise the claims of revelation, intuition, personal experience and reason. He accepts as means of valid knowledge:— *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference) and *śabda* (revelation). Under the rubric of Verbal Testimony he accepts both the Vedas and the Tamil hymns of the Aḷvār saints as equally valid.

Rāmānuja's World View

Rāmānuja accepts the Upaniṣadic account of creation literally. God is omnipotent and projects the manifold universe out of Himself by a gracious act of will. Both the *'acit'* (insentient matter) and *'cit'* (sentient selves) are present within the Being of the all inclusive Godhead (Brahman). Insentient Matter (*acit*) is the source of all the material objects and as such called 'prakṛti' (i.e. root of origin).

Prakṛti is admitted by Rāmānuja, as in Sāṅkhya, to be an *'aja'* (eternal reality). Rāmānuja understands Prakṛti to be an 'expression' or 'mode' of God under His direct control — just as the human body exists for, and remains under the control of the sentient Self. During the state of '*pralaya'* (dissolution), this primordial insentient 'Prakṛti' remains in a latent, '*sūkṣma'* (subtle) and *'avibhakta'* (undifferentiated) state. From this Prakṛti, Nārāyaṇa projects the World of diverse objects in accordance with the deeds of jīvas in their births prior to the last dissolution.

Rāmānuja holds that the material universe is as *real* as Brahman. Regarding the Upaniṣadic texts which deny the multiplicity of objects and assert the unity of all things, Rāmānuja holds that these texts do not mean to deny the reality of the many, but only teach that it is the same Brahman pervading all of them and on which all are dependent for existence just as all gold articles are dependent on the substance gold. What the Upaniṣads deny is the *independence* (*apṛthak-sthiti*) of objects but not their *dependent* existence.

Rāmānuja espouses the view that the process of creation and the created world are not illusory, and all cognition is true (*yathārtham sarva-vijñānam*), and no unreal, object is perceived in this world. Even the mirage for example is a real perception as it is simultaneously seen by many people, but is does not conform to the criteria of valid knowledge which must be practicable.

Māyā

In accordance with the Sveśvatara Upaniṣad, Rāmānuja takes Māyā to be either God's awesome power of *real* creation or the eternal insentient primal matter which is in Brahman and which is transformed into the real world.

Rāmānuja's chief objections against the Advaita theory of Māyā or *avidya* as superimposition is that it has no locus. It cannot be said to inhere in an individual self (*jīva*), because the concept of individuality is itself produced by Māyā, and the cause cannot depend on its effect. Neither can Māyā/avidya be said to inhere in Brahman, because then Brahman would cease to be omniscient. If Māyā is said to *conceal* Brahma (as Advaitins believe), then its self-revealing nature will be negated. The Advaitin's rejoinder that Māyā is *'anirvācanīya'* (indescribable) is logically absurd because things are either real or unreal — there cannot be a provisory category.

Rāmānuja's Concept of God

According to Rāmānuja, the Personal God is the One Absolute Reality Nārāyaṇa, possessed of two integral modalities; Matter and the innumerable jīvas. The One Absolute contains the many within itself.

This monism of Rāmānuja is known, therefore, as 'Viśiṣṭādvaita' which means the unity (*advaita*) of Brahman qualified (*viśiṣṭa*) by real parts (the sentient and the insentient).

Three types of *'bheda'* (distinction) are generally distinguished by the Vedāntins:—

- *vijātīya-bheda* — a heterogenous distinction where an object differs from other objects of different classes.
- *sajātīya-bheda* — a homogenous distinction where an object belongs to same class,
- *svagata-bheda* — an integral distinction which exist between the parts within an object.

In the light of this threefold classification of distinctions, Rāmānuja hold that Brahman is devoid of two kinds of external distinction (*vijātiya* and *sajātiya*), because there is nothing besides the Godhead, either similar or dissimilar. But it has internal distinctions (*svagata-bheda*), as there are within the Godhead different sentient and insentient substances which can be mutually distinguished.

Rāmānuja believes that Nārāyaṇa possesses an infinite number of boundless positive attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, benevolence, compassion, loving kindness, generosity, condescension, gentleness etc. etc. Therefore, Nārāyaṇa is not devoid of qualities (*nirguṇa*), nor indeterminate (*anirvācanīya*) but replete with positive attributes (*saguṇa*). The Upaniṣads denial of qualities in Brahman is only suggesting that Brahman is free from all negative qualities and imperfections.

Rāmānuja's concept of God is a kind of theism. In this narrow sense Nārāyaṇa is both immanent and transcendent, and also a Person, i.e. in the sense of a self-consciousness Being possessed of will and not a magnified human character! Nārāyaṇa is the object of worship and the goal of our religious aspiration.

The Self

Rāmānuja holds that the identity between Paramātman and jīvātman as taught in

the Upaniṣads is *qualified* rather than absolute. It is incredible that the finite jīva could be identical with Nārāyaṇa in every respect. The jīva is non-different from Nārāyaṇa in the sense that Nārāyaṇa pervades and controls all jīvas and the universe. Just as a part is inseparable from the whole, a mode or quality is inseparable from its substance, or a living body from the spirit which controls it from within, similarly the jīva is inseparable from Nārāyaṇa.

The Upaniṣadic dictum "That thou art" (*Tat tvam asi*) should be understood in a similar way. Here, the term 'that' stands for Paramātman, the omniscient, omnipotent creator of the universe, the term 'Thou' stands for Paramātman existing in the form of jīvātman (*acid-viśiṣṭa-jīva-śarīrakam*). The identity thus asserted is, therefore, between Paramātman with certain qualification and Paramātman with certain other qualifications — identity of the same substance though possessed of different qualities.

According to Rāmānuja, the human being consists of a mind/body vehicle & a jīvātman. The body is made of matter which is a part of Nārāyaṇa. It is obviously finite. The jīva is, of course, not *made* but is eternal. It is also a limited mode of Nārāyaṇa, and cannot, therefore, be omnipresent. The all pervasive nature of the ātman as described in Upaniṣads, cannot, therefore, be taken, in the literal sense. The pervasiveness of the ātman means that the ātman is so subtle (*sūkṣma*) that it can penetrate into every insentient material substance. Having denied that this jīvātman is omnipresent, Rāmānuja affirms that it is infinitely small (*aṇu*).

The jīva comprises of a ray of consciousness and has consciousness as an attribute as well — like the lamp that is self-luminous as well as illuminating other objects. In dreamless sleep and even in the state of liberation, when the jīva is free from embodiment it always remains conscious of itself as 'I am'.

The *Svetasvatara Upaniṣad 4:6,7* says:—

> 'Two birds, inseparable friends cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit, the other looks on without eating. On the same tree man sits, grieving, immersed, bewildered by his own impotence (*an-isa*). But when he sees the other lord (*Isa*), contented and knows his glory, then his grief passes away.'

Bondage

The conjunction of a jīva with a body comes about due to its 'Karma'. The jīva is enters into a particular kind of body and circumstances that it rightly deserves. When it becomes embodied, its essentially expansive consciousness becomes contracted by the conditions of the mind, and the body it possesses due to Karma. In spite of being infinitesimally small, the jīva radiates consciousness to every part of the body in which it is embodied — just as a small light illumines the entire room in which it is present. The Jīva identifies itself with the body and this gives rise to '*ahaṅkāra*' or sense-of-self — the identification of the Self with the non-self. — this is also known as *Avidyā* or ignorance which is grounded in Karma.

Liberation

Mokṣa or Liberation is achieved through the four means taught by the Gīta.

1. KARMA YOGA — THE YOGA OF ACTION

Karma Yoga is defined by Rāmānuja as the dutiful performance of those actions (*Dharma*) both of a daily and periodic nature that are prescribed by the Scriptures with reference to one's social status and marital state such as. These prescribed activities are centered around the key concepts of *yajña* — sacrifice, *dāna* — charity, *tapas* — austerity/self-discipline, *anaśah* — periodic fasting and specifically the five Great Sacrifices known as *Panca-mahā yajña*. These are to be performed by the aspirant until death and are never to be abandoned, because according to the Gita they are the purifiers of the wise, they destroy past karma in the form of *saṃskāras* (sub-liminal activators) which is an obstacle to the spiritual path. This purification is achieved in two ways:

1. Purity of Diet: from purity of food arises purity of mind; from purity of mind steady remembrance. Pure food is defined as only those edible things which have first been offered to the God.

2. Performance of *yajna, tapa dana* with the right attitude serves to detach the mind from sense-objects and turns it towards the Ātman within.

The result of any act depends upon the purpose to which it is applied, not on the action itself: based upon the Mimāmsa principle of the variety of application' — *viniyoga pṛthaktva nyāya*.

Karma Yoga purifies the mind in two ways:

1. As an act of worship it pleases the Supreme Person who then erases the impurities — the *samskaras* — impressions/sub-liminal activators left upon the mind by past karmas.

2. As mental renunciation — it removes the ego-sense [**ahamkara]** and turns the mind away from attachment and identification with the objects of the senses.

The ultimate purposes of Karma Yoga is to prepare the mind for Dhyāna Yoga.

2. JÑĀNA YOGA — THE WAY OF KNOWLEDGE

For Rāmānuja *Jñāna Yoga* is the path of introversion or renunciation. He discusses this Yoga as an alternative to, or a supplement to Karma Yoga in preparing the mind for meditation — *Dhyāna Yoga***,** but he does not recommend this path to those who are desirous of liberation.

The Way of Knowledge is an actionless, entirely mental discipline based on the traditional idea of complete renunciation of action. Its main aim is diminish sensory input so as to focus the mind entirely upon the Ātman. *Jñāna Yoga* has 4 stages of maturity:

1. Renunciation of all worldly activities, and practicing withdrawal of the senses from contact with the sense-objects, and focussing of the mind upon the Self.

2. Developing complete indifference to pleasure and pain.

3. Practicing constant reflection, undisturbed by feelings of love, fear, anger, joy etc.

4. Establishing of the mind exclusively upon the Ātman, having renounced the desire for anything else. (*sthita-prajña*),

Rāmānuja explains that **Jñāna Yoga** cannot be practiced without first disciplining oneself by Karma-Yoga. This mental preparation for *Dhyāna-Yoga* can be achieved by engaging actively in the world in a constructive but non-attached manner through the discipline of Karma-Yoga alone, and therefore **Jñāna Yoga** with all its attendant difficulties and pitfalls should not be practised as a discipline in itself.

3. BHAKTI YOGA — YOGA OF DEVOTION

Rāmānuja opines that a realisation of the Ātman is a preparatory requisite to the Higher Meditation — *parāvidya* or meditation upon the Supreme Being — Nārāyaṇa.

Through the consistent practice of Karma-Yoga the mind becomes pure — freed from the mental contaminants such as selfishness (*kāma*), anger (*krodha*) and greed (*lobha*). It becomes calmer and unruffled by the distraction of the senses — once this state has been achieved, the practice of meditation or Dhyāna-Yoga may be commenced. But it is also necessary to realize that any attempt to control the senses by self-mastery alone is ineffective and unacceptable — it can only be done with the complete recognition of, and reliance upon Nārāyaṇa. So any attempt to control the mind by one's own effort without relying upon the Divine is bound to end in failure.

4. ŚAṚĀṆĀGATI

Liberation cannot be attained simply by human effort — it can be obtained only by the Grace of Nārāyaṇa. Although Grace is liberally given to all, there has to be a preparation to receive it. This act of preparation is called *'Prapatti'* or *'Saraṇāgati'* — taking refuge is not the *cause* of Grace but simply the renouncing of self-effort which then allows the free flow of Grace. The liberated jīva becomes similar to God (*brahma prakāra*) or attains unity with God.

DVAITA VEDĀNTA
Dualism

Mādhavācārya, the founder of the Dvaita philosophy lived in the 12th century and renounced the world at a very early age. He was blessed with extra-ordinary intellect and wrote a commentary on Bhagavad Gita, Brahma-sutras and Upaniṣads. According to him the whole universe is divided into two main categories:—

The independent or *svatantra* Supreme Being.

The dependant or *asvatantra* existence.

The independent or *svatantra* Being is God who is absolutely perfect and infinitely auspicious in every respect. He is the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Supreme Being who is to be known and contemplated upon as Brahman who is identified with Viṣṇu.

Differences

The Dvaita system recognises *Bheda* absolute difference between the one Supreme Being: and the tiny and yet eternal and immortal spiritual jīva. The doctrine of Absolute Difference is couched in five ways:—

(a) The Lord is absolutely distinct from the jīva.

(b) He is absolutely distinct from insentient matter.

(c) One 'jīva' is absolutely distinct from another:

(d) 'jīvas' are absolutely distinct from matter.

(e) When matter is divided, the pieces are absolutely distinct from one another.

Pervasiveness of The Supreme Being

The Supreme being is omnipresent, i.e. He is not limited by time and space and is present within every atom of every substance as well as without, but this characteristic of omnipresence does not make the Supreme Being a formless impersonal being — He still remains as the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

The Jīvas

Although all the jīvas are said to be atomic, there is a graduation among them, according to the higher or lower capacities with which they are endowed. Some superior jīvas are destined for release and others that are inferior are destined to be eternally incarnating in samsāra.[78]

Bhakti

In Dvaita philosophy also, Bhakti is the foremost of all means of attaining

[78] Some scholars, noting the similarity of this particular teaching on the 'elect' and the 'damned' with Semetic religions suggest that he may have been influenced by discussions with Christian missionaries.

Mokṣa. The intense love which proceeds from a knowledge of the greatness of the Supreme Personality of Godhead becomes the bond between the Lord and the jīva. All duties performed must be the outcome of that Bhakti and it should be cultivated until the jīva is finally liberated according to its destiny.

Mukti

There are various classes and grades among the liberated jīvas in the Viṣṇu's heaven but they are not at variance with (jealous of) each other because all have attained to the direct knowledge of Brahman and are free from faults.

Other Schools of Vedānta

Dvaitādvaita-Vedānta — Dualistic Non Dualism (Nimbārka c 1162)

Also known as Bhedābheda Vedānta, Nimbarka teaches that Brahman is one with all but has three distinct forms: the inanimate world, the individual jīva and God. In his religion Viṣṇu replaces Brahman. He was the founder of the Rādha-Kṛṣṇa sect who worship the boy Kṛṣṇa and his beloved Rādha.

Śuddhādvaita Vedānta — Pure Non- Dualism (Vallabha c 1459)

śuddhādvaita-vāda teaches that the individual jīva is itself the same substance as Brahman with ānanda or the 'Bliss' attribute of *Sat-Cit-ānanda* (Brahma) rendered imperceptible. The world and jīva are real as is their mutual relationship. The world is *not* illusion or Māyā, but a subtle form of God; hence the soul and Brahman are identical in their pristine (śuddha) state.

Acintya Bhedābheda Vedānta — Inconceivable Dualistic Non-Dualism (Sri Chaitanya 1485-1533)

This school teaches that there is both difference and non-difference between all individual jīva and Brahman but this dual relationship which is one of both difference and non-difference is logically inconceivable. The school established by this great mystic of Bengal is called Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism of which the Hare Kṛṣṇas are a branch.

Pūrnādvaita Vedānta — Integral Non-Dualism (Aurobindo 1872-1850)

Aurobindo teaches that the Absolute of philosophy, the God of religion, the World and the Souls are all ONE. Aurobindo's system is a comprehensive synthesis of all the traditional interpretations of Vedānta. God or Brahman has an infinite richness of content. Brahman has three states of being. It is pure transcendence, cosmic universality, and an infinite plurality of spiritual individuals or Jīvātmans. The last two may be less fundamental and primal but not less real. Brahman or the Absolute is at once *Nirguṇa* (without qualities) and *Saguṇa* (with qualities) and hence both static and dynamic.

This system combines the goals of Mokṣa sought by Vedānta with the endless creativity and dynamism of the Tantrika teachings and the Universal Compassion and Love of Vaiṣṇavism and Mahāyāna Buddhism.

All schools of Indian philosophy recognize that there are 2 distinct principals at work in the world in which we live — there is **matter** (*prakrti*) and there is **consciousness** (*puruṣa*). Let us now examine these two concepts.

Traditionally the debate was usually with other schools of Indian thought such as the followers of Sankhya, Vaiśeṣika or Jains and Buddhists. Seeing that the orthodox Hindu schools of philosophy no longer exist as separate schools and have been subsumed into Vedānta we shall address the Abrahamic systems of thought.

Vedānta vs the Abrahamic Religions

The Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) hold that God is the creator of the world (matter) which He spontaneously did in 6 days. Archbishop Ussher in the 1700's computed the creation to have occurred Sunday 23rd October 4004 BC. At 9am. Johannes Kepler estimated 3992 BC and Sir Isaac Newton thought it was c 4000 BC. Many Fundamentalist Christians hold with the "Young Earth" theory but vary in their estimates of it's age.

God created the world in a complete and final state, without compulsion, from nothing (*ex nihilo*).

After creating the material universe God created human beings and gave them souls.

- Vedāntins query how something can arise from nothing? From nothing, nothing arises!
- If we believe that the material world is the product of nothingness it would mean that matter is only a mirage, a dream and has no intrinsic reality. Yet how are we to explain objectivity?
- If the Abrahamics believe that God alone is Real and has created the world *ex-nihilo* then they must accept that nothing but God actually exists and that the world is an illusion!! A position which they vehemently oppose! Asserting both the reality of the world and the reality of a creator God.
- Science has proven beyond doubt that the world is 13.7 billion years old and is constantly evolving. Homo-sapiens has been around for over 200,000 years. The question arises; have all humanoids had souls all this time or were they given souls only 5000 years ago? At exactly what stage of the evolutionary process were evolving human beings united with souls? The dinosaurs obviously had consciousness – but did they have souls?
- What exactly is the "soul"? Is it merely an inanimate life-force? What is the relationship between consciousness and "soul"? What is the locus of consciousness? Biocentrism establishes consciousness as a fundamental aspect of the Universe. Matter it is argued arises from consciousness — how does the soul fit in with this schema?

- If God is a perfect Being then why does He create the universe? If it is for his own glorification then He must desire the adulation of His human creatures and is therefore an ego-maniac!

The Vedānta raises other minor objections in its refutation of the other standard systems, but for the most part these objections pertain to the contradictions of terms used by the other systems in establishing their position.

As far as the order of cosmic evolution is concerned, the Vedānta accepts the order as outlined in the Sāṅkhya and explained in the Vaiśeṣika.

These systems assume the existence of a Primal Cause and devote their efforts to presenting the pattern of cosmic evolution and the interrelation of its parts.

They were occupied with presenting an interpretation of nature for those who were not interested in inquiring into the nature of the fifth and Ultimate Cause.

Fundamentally, all the six systems of Hindu philosophy are in perfect accord; but each has its special contribution to the whole.

The outstanding contribution of the Vedānta, aside from its analysis of the reasoning used by the other systems, is the additional category called **Brahman**, which causes the initial impulse in nature.

SĀDHANA

According to the Advaita (Non-dualist) school, the four-fold discipline to be practiced by the spiritual aspirant (*sādhaka*) consists of:—

1. *Viveka* — right discrimination between the eternal and non-eternal, the real and the unreal. This comes from proper study and reflection.

2. *Vairāgya* — right dispassion and indifference to the unreal and transitory. This consists of renunciation of all motivation to enjoy the fruit of action both here and hereafter.

3. *Ṣaṭ-sampat* — right conduct, which consists of the six acquirements, namely:

- *Sama* — tranquillity or regulation of mind by the practice of withdrawing thought processes from worldly affairs.
- *Dama* — self-restraint or regulation of conduct, restraining the senses from externally directed action
- *Uparati* — tolerance and renunciation of all sectarian religious observances with the object of acquiring wisdom. Rejecting the efficacy of ritual in achieving *mokṣa* (Liberation from suffering and rebirth)
- *Titīkṣa* — forbearance, bearing heat and cold, fame and blame and transcending all other pairs of opposites.
- *śraddhā* — development of conviction that the practice will lead to the goal. This conviction should be grounded on logic and supported by reason.
- *Samādhāna* — balanced mental equipoise and attentiveness to the practice; freedom from torpor, laziness, and carelessness.

4. *Mumukṣutva* — right aspiration, which consists of earnestness to know the Ultimate Principle and thereby to attain Liberation from suffering now and future rebirth. This will come when one dedicates one's entire life to this single goal.

There are three categories of aspirants who will accomplish their ultimate goal they are:—

1. Those who act with zeal and conviction.
2. Those who perform all actions for the good of all sentient beings.
3. Those who are continually immersed in meditation.

Spiritual according to Rāmānuja consist of Seven Aspects (*sādhana saptaka*)

SĀDHANA SAPTAKA — The Seventhfold Practice

1. viveka (discrimination) — apart from the general connotation of this word which is discriminating between the material and the spiritual, the beneficial and the harmful etc., for Srivaishnavas this term refers to more particularly to discrimination in relation to one's eating habits. The mind and body are the instruments of spiritual knowledge and devotional service respectively. They are comprised of the food we eat, and must therefore be kept healthy and pure by regulating the type of food that is consumed. Purity of diet is

considered as essential for the purity of mind and subsequent spiritual practice. There are three defects (*dosha*) associated with food which should be avoided.

- *jati-dosha* — food which is of unsuitable origin ego meat, fish, onions, garlic, alcohol, fermented food and drink, drugs, tobacco etc.
- *ashraya-dosha* — defective source — meaning food which is prepared and offered by an unknown person, an intoxicated person, a sick person, degenerate person, a menstruating woman or a person in a state of ritual impurity, or an immoral person.
- *nimitta-dosha* — a contingent defect arising from the presence of an impure thing like a hair in the food, or the food having come in contact with an impure thing, such as the hem of a garment, being touched by someone's foot or food that was left uncovered overnight. Food that was tasted during the cooking process or smelt, and the leavings off the plate of another, or food or drink that has touched the lips of another person are all considered as impure and unsuitable for consumption by a Vaishnava.

(The rules regarding food and eating are quite complex and one should inquire of a practicing Srivaishnava for more details regarding actual practice.)

2. vimoka (non-attachment) — All resources are regarded as belonging to the Supreme Person and intended for the use of all beings on the planet. Whatever we accumulate for personal use should be regarded as a *borrowed article* of which we are merely the custodians. In this manner one should remain unattached to family, possessions, desires etc. Every effort should be made to care well for them but attachment should be discouraged. Everything we own and do should be offered up to the Lord.

3. abhyāsa (practice) — Constant Dharma practice which includes the chanting of the names of the Lord, recitation of the sacred mantras, remembrance and retelling of His pass-times and glories, meditating upon Him, mindfulness of the Divine Presence pervading all beings and all things and practicing the teachings of the acharyas.

4. kriya (ritual) — the daily rituals are; worship of the Lord — *bhagavad aradhanam* — according to one's ability, the recitation of the three jewels (*ratna-trayam*) and the Five Great Sacrifices (*pancha-maha-yajña*).

5. kalyāna (virtues) — These are divided into two categories of moral and intellectual virtues. The moral virtues are:—

- *ahimsa* — Non-violence in word, deed or thought to any living being.
- *satyam* — Truthfulness.
- *ārjavam* — Straightforwardness, integrity and honesty.
- *dayā* — Compassion to all living beings.
- *dāna* — philanthropy — the active form of compassion where an attempt is made to alleviate the sufferings of others with whatever resources we may have.
- *indriya nigraha* — Control of the senses.

- *kshama* — Forgiveness.
- *tapas* — Self-discipline.

The intellectual virtues which should be cultivated are:—

- *grahana* — A quick grasp of Vedantic truths.
- *dharana* — Retentiveness and recollection of lessons learnt.
- *smarana* — A constant mindfulness and contemplation of the spiritual truths.
- *pratipadana* — Exposition of the doctrines to others in a lucid manner.
- *uha* — Cultivating the practice of inferring the unknown from the known.
- *apoha* — Developing a competency for analogising i.e. developing analogies and metaphors and drawing comparisons in order to illustrate difficult concepts.
- *vivarana* — Cultivating a keenness for perceiving distinctions ie. between the true and the false.
- *tattva-jñānam* — Developing a sincere interest in obtaining knowledge of all the facts relating to any subject.

6. an-avasadhana (cheerfulness) — Freedom from dejection and despondency owing to unfavourable circumstances, frustration of desires, or unfavourable conditions of time and place. One should also avoid the recollection or brooding over past sufferings and sorrows as this type of mental activity is unhelpful to spiritual progress.

7. an-uddharshana (non-exultation). — One should avoid over-excitement and rejoicing at any success one may achieve, but should rather cultivate inner-tranquillity and equanimity.