

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



August 2016

Vol. 121, No. 8

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Analysis of Vedanta Philosophy I*

The first group of religious ideas that we see coming up—I mean recognized religious ideas, and not the very low ideas, which do not deserve the name of religion—all include the idea of inspiration and revealed books and so forth. The first group of religious ideas starts with the idea of God. Here is the universe, and this universe is created by a certain Being. Everything that is in this universe has been created by Him. Along with that, at a later stage, comes the idea of soul—that there is this body, and something inside this body which is not the body. This is the most primitive idea of religion that we know. We can find a few followers of that in India, but it was given up very early. The Indian religions take a peculiar start. It is only by strict analysis, and much calculation and conjecture that we can ever think that that stage existed in Indian religions. The tangible state in which we find them is the next step, not the first one. At the earliest step the idea of creation is very peculiar, and it is that the whole universe is created out of zero, at the will of God; that all this universe did not exist, and out of this nothingness all this has come. In the next stage we find this conclusion is questioned. How can existence be produced out of non-existence? At the first step in the Vedanta this question is asked. If this universe is existent it must have come out of something, because it was very easy to see that nothing comes out of nothing, anywhere. All work that is done by human hands requires



materials. If a house is built, the material was existing before; if a boat is made the material existed before; if any implements are made, the materials were existing before. So the effect is produced. Naturally, therefore, the first idea that this world was created out of nothing was rejected, and some material out of which this world was created was wanted. The whole history of religion, in fact, is this search after that material. Out of what has all this been produced? Apart from the question of the efficient cause, or God, apart from the question that God created the universe, the great question of all questions is: Out of what did He create it? All the philosophies are turning, as it were, on this question. One solution is that nature, God, and soul are eternal existences, as if three lines are running parallel eternally, of which nature and soul comprise what they call the dependent, and God the independent Reality. Every soul, like every particle of matter, is perfectly dependent on the will of God.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 1.393-94.

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Contents

Traditional Wisdom	583
This Month	584
<i>Editorial: Impressing the Mind</i>	585
The Limits of Knowing: How Absolute is Science?	587
<i>Bharatwaj Iyer</i>	
Environmental Wellbeing:	592
Materialism versus Idealism in Indian Philosophy	
<i>Dwaita Hazra</i>	
Self-Realisation through Mathematics	597
<i>Siddhartha Sen</i>	
Mandukya Upanishad	608
<i>Swami Ranganathananda</i>	
Vedanta Answers	617
<i>Swami Smaranananda</i>	
Traditional Tales: Pilgrimage or Guru?	619
Reviews	621
Manana	627
Reports	629

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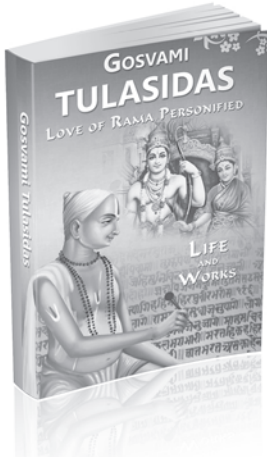
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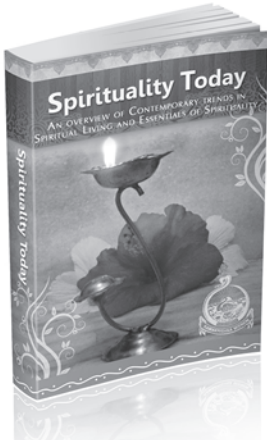
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The Universal Temple of Bhagwan Shri Ramakrishna (Under Construction) An earnest Appeal for generous donations

Dear Sir / Madam,

Please accept our greetings and best wishes.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Aurangabad located on Swami Vivekananda Marg (Beed Bypass) is a branch center affiliated to Headquarters, Belur Math (near Kolkata). This ashrama is conducting various service activities in the field of health, education, child welfare, as well as spreading spiritual message of eternal religion as propounded by Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

This ashrama has taken up a new project of erecting a temple of Shri Ramakrishna. The work was commenced in December 2009 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2016. The day of inauguration has been fixed tentatively as 13th November 2016, Sunday.

The temple will be a unique and imposing monumental structure of its kind in entire Marathwada region in general and Aurangabad city in particular. It will add a cultural and spiritual dimension to the historical city of Aurangabad. It will be a great attraction and a place for worship, prayer, meditation and inspiration for the local people. It is also expected that the good number of general public visiting Aurangabad city as tourists for visiting world heritage sites such as Ellora & Ajanta and pilgrims for visiting Ghrishneshwar Jyotirling, Shirdi, Paithan etc. will include visit to the temple in their itinerary. It is aimed for the benefit of one and all without distinction of caste, creed, and nationality.

The estimated cost of the entire project is Rs. 15 Crores. So far Rs. 11.00 Crores have been spent through public contribution. The balance amount of Rs. 04.00 Crores is needed to complete the construction of the Temple.

We earnestly appeal to you to donate generously for this noble cause. Your support will indeed go a long way in our endeavor to erect this magnificent architectural edifice in the memory of Shri Ramakrishna who was the unique harmonizer of all the religions of the world and who dedicated his life to bring peace and welfare of mankind.

We value your help and co-operation immensely.

Yours in the service of the Lord,

(Swami Vishnupadananda)
Secretary

Proposed Universal Temple of Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna



Model of the Proposed New Temple

Temple Dimensions

Length: 156 ft. Breadth: 076 ft. Height: 100 ft.

Temple Construction Area : 18000 Sq.ft.

Garbhagriha : 24ft. x 24ft.

Temple Hall for Prayer and Meditation

70ft. x 40ft. Seating Capacity - 450

Auditorium (Ground Floor)

80ft. x 57ft. Seating Capacity - 500

The entire Temple will be built in Chunar sandstone
and interior in Ambaji and Makarana marble.

Ceiling of the Temple Hall will be done in Teak Wood

Estimated Cost : Rs. 15 Crores

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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Maitrayaniya Upanishad

August 2016

Vol. 121, No. 8

मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

अयं वाव खल्वस्य प्रतिविधिर्भूतात्मनो यद्वेदविद्याधिगमः स्वधर्मस्यानुचरणं स्वाश्रमेष्वेवानुक्रमणं स्वधर्मस्य वा एतद्भ्रतं स्तम्बशाखेवापराण्यनेनोर्ध्वभागभवत्यन्यथाऽवाङ्मित्येष स्वधर्मोऽभिहितो यो वेदेषु न स्वधर्मातिक्रमेणाश्रमी भवत्याश्रमेष्वेवानवस्थस्तपस्वी वेत्युच्यत इत्येतदयुक्तं नातपस्कस्यात्मज्ञानेऽधिगमः कर्मसिद्धिर्वेत्येवं ह्याह ।

तपसा प्राप्यते सत्त्वं सत्त्वात्सम्प्राप्यते मनः ।

मनसा प्राप्यते ह्यात्मा यमाप्त्वा न निवर्तता इति ॥

॥४.३॥

Ayam vava khalvasya pratividhir-bhutatmano yadveda-vidyadhigamah svadharmasya-anucharanam sva-asbrameshv-evanukramanam svadharmasya va etad-vratam stambashakhe-vaparani-anenorddhvabhag-bhavaty-anyatha'van-ityesha svadharmo'bhihito yo vedeshu na svadharmatikramena-ashrami bhavaty-ashrameshv-evanavasthas-tapasvi vetyuchyata ityetad-ayuktam natapaskasy-atmajnanēdhigamah karmasiddhir-vetyevam hyah. Tapasa prapyate sattvam sattvat-samprapyate manah, manasa prapyate hyatma yamaptva na nivartata iti (4.3)

Acquiring the knowledge of the Vedas and the performance of one's duty is indeed the antidote for the elemental self. Performing one's duties according to one's stage of life is the rule for one's duty. Others are like branches of a stem; through it one goes upwards, otherwise downwards. What is prescribed in the Vedas is one's duty. One does not belong to a stage of life by transgressing one's duty. It is not proper to say that one does not belong to any stage of life because of practising austerities. However, without practising austerities self-knowledge or perfection of work cannot be attained. For thus has been said: 'By austerity goodness is obtained and from goodness understanding comes and from understanding the self is attained, attaining which one does not take birth again.'

(4.3)

THIS MONTH

HOW DOES THE MIND record impressions, which later give results in the form of tendencies that govern the course of our life? Why should the mind form impressions in the first place? How do these impressions produce results? These questions are analysed in **Impressing the Mind**.

Bharatwaj Iyer, a masters student of finance and economics in the University of Mumbai, analyses certain logical inconsistencies inherent in the absolutism assigned to scientific method in **The Limits of Knowing: How Absolute is Science?**

In **Environmental Wellbeing: Materialism versus Idealism in Indian Philosophy**, Dwaita Hazra, a research scholar at the Cultural Studies Research Department in Jain University, Bengaluru, shows how Indian philosophical systems other than Charvaka are supportive of the welfare of others and consequently environmental conservation. The author places materialism as a thought opposed to ecological protection.

In **Self-Realisation through Mathematics**, Siddhartha Sen, Emeritus Fellow, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, delineates some core concepts of Vedanta from a scientist's and a mathematician's perspective. He then relates these concepts to the concepts of Self and consciousness. He then goes on to analyse the abstract nature of these concepts and draws a parallel with the abstract concepts of mathematics and explores the similarities. Towards the end of this paper, he recounts the life and work of the great mathematician Alexander Grothendieck,

who lived a life of a hermit towards the end of his life. This article is based on a talk delivered at Centre Védantique Ramakrishna (Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre) in Gretz, France on 24 May 2015 by the author.

The need to go beyond common sense to understand Reality is emphasised and it is established how nothing is real, not even the concepts of bondage and liberation, in the seventh instalment of the edited transcript of a series of lectures on **Mandukya Upanishad** given by Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, who was the thirteenth president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, has been asked various questions regarding various aspects of spiritual life by the young and old alike, over a period of time. The fourth instalment of the collection of such questions and his answers to them is given in **Vedanta Answers**.

Guru or Pilgrimage? is the retelling of a conversation between Acharya Shankara and his disciple Padmapada about pilgrimage and what a pilgrim has to be careful about. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Arulneri Kathaigal*.

In **The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss**, David Bentley Hart, an Eastern Orthodox scholar of religion, philosopher, writer, and cultural commentator tries to define God and the experience of God. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

Impressing the Mind

EVERY PERCEPTION leaves an impression on the mind. This perception could be through the senses or through the memory of a perception. Every action also produces a mark on the mind. That is because while performing an action, the mind refers to previous perceptions and also makes new ones. An action could be one that produces some material effect or one that produces knowledge.

The action that produces a material effect impresses the mind not only by the action itself, but by the qualities of the material produced by such action. For instance, if one is engaged in the action of cooking, it involves the mind broadly at two levels: the process of cooking and analysing or assimilating what has been cooked. The recipe is remembered and the earlier or previous experiences regarding such cooking come to mind—how the food tasted, smelled, and looked like. The mind relives the entire experience. Some parts of the experience are accentuated, some others attenuated.

Thus the first part of the action of cooking is to remember or draw from memory the previous cooking experiences. However, this memory is put into action again. The recipe and the related experiences in the mind come out as action. Only this time, there are many changes. So, every time one cooks, one also modifies one's memory of cooking. This cycle of unending retrieval of memory and its modification enforces and adjusts the impressions of such actions that the mind holds. So, the experience one has of any kind of action is not an

isolated memory or even a series of memories, but a constantly modified version of what is derived out of various instances of recalling and

We create impressions on the mind because of three reasons: the stuff the mind is made up of, its dual nature, and the primal ignorance. Once created, impressions on the mind work in cycles, creating further impressions till it is rid of all dualistic leanings.

re-acting. Hence, no experience is made up of just one incident.

Human experiences or life experiences are complicated and so are their memories. Though we suppose that when one cooks, the previous memories of cooking alone are recalled, in reality what is recalled is any experience that resembles any of the experiences that occur while cooking. If the cook sees a particular colour of food, she or he is reminded of the object that had the same colour. The same is true for appearance and smell of the food that is cooked. That would mean that even if a person were to cook for the first time, there would be numerous experiences which that person would recall.

Let us suppose that a person does some action for the first time and does not have any previous experience of any action. That is, this is the first action of the person. Let us also suppose that it is the first lifetime of this person. With no experiences to recall and a clean slate for the mind, why does this person leave a mark on one's mind

with one's action? What is the basic cause of any action creating a mark on our minds?

To understand this, we should understand what the mind is made up of. Mind is matter. Matter as we see it, is composed of five elements: space, air, fire, water, and earth. These elements, as we perceive them, contain parts of the other elements. We do not perceive these elements in their pure form. In their pure form they vary in the quality of being impressed upon. And this variation is predominant even in the mixed forms that we perceive. It is difficult to make an impression or mark on space. The difficulty reduces with air, but it is very difficult to make a mark on air also. This difficulty gradually reduces with the other elements and is finally completely removed in earth, which can be impressed or made a mark upon with ease.

Thus, the element directly connected with the mind is the earth. Earth produces food. Mind is sustained by food. Mind dies without food. It takes all the characteristics of food, both specific and general. Just like the food we consume is digested and makes our bodies, the mind is influenced by all matter it comes into contact with. Space or vacuum can have no influence on the mind. But an untrained mind would not be able to stay in a vacuum.

Since mind is susceptible to impressions because of its containing the five elements, particularly the element earth, the only way to make mind free of impressions is to make it free of elements or to destroy it. And the best way to destroy it is to transcend the elements.

A seed sown in earth leads to the birth of a sapling. Any matter, including thought, when in interaction with the mind, creates desires and consequent chains of bondage. That is why if we need to free the mind of bondage, we need to train it to get dissociated with matter. That

comes from practice. Training the mind to be independent of desires would eventually free the mind. Also, the process of recalling old experiences has to be stopped. The mind thinks and acts in patterns. We need to get free of the established grooves of thought. By training our mind to think free from a logical pattern of cause and effect, we can get used to non-linear thinking, which would help us to break free of various mental and physical conditionings.

Another important reason why the mind is influenced by any matter or action is that it is prone to dualistic dealings. An impression can be made only when something or someone is susceptible to impressions or is open to influence. By its very nature, the mind needs an external being or object to establish its existence. It cannot exist in the knowledge of non-duality. Matter comes into existence only by perception. And thus, all that is perceived is matter. Light cannot exist in the absence of shade, knowledge cannot exist in the absence of ignorance, and the perceiver cannot exist in the absence of the perceived. Similarly, the mind cannot exist without thought. Since thought is the seed of all our dealings with this universe, the mind cannot exist without the universe. Mind is the manifestation of ignorance.

We create impressions on the mind because of three reasons: the stuff the mind is made up of, its dual nature, and the primal ignorance. Once created, impressions on the mind work in cycles, creating further impressions till it is rid of all dualistic leanings. Mind can be free of suffering only on its annihilation. Control of thoughts and practice of detachment are some of the several methods to kill the mind. The search for spiritual knowledge is an attempt to lose one's individuality and get identified with the one whole that is manifested through ignorance as this universe.

The Limits of Knowing: How Absolute is Science?

Bharatwaj Iyer

RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS are considered either wrong or without meaning by the atheistic, rationalistic, and scientific, and they are accused of a certainty born of the heart rather than the mind. Scientific knowledge or scientific certainty does not, on the other hand, suffer such derision or outright indifference and even strident ostracism. For, scientific knowledge is claimed to be based on hard facts and corroborative evidence, whereas religious knowledge is at best philosophical and at worst superstitious.

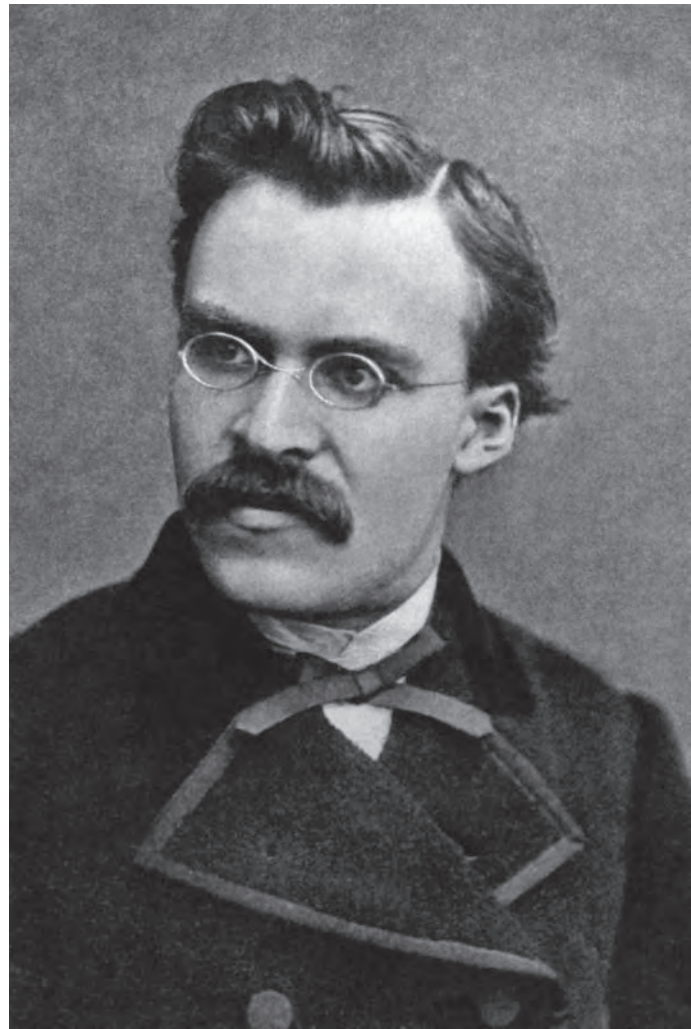
Speaking even of more reputed endeavours like deductive logic or philosophy we find the same attitude as materialism, empiricism, and the more extreme variant of reductionism stand tall as the only *really* sure and indubitable kinds of knowledge. Inductive rather than deductive methods, experimentation rather than pure reasoning—the kind we find in *The Ethics* of Spinoza—rule the intellectual day.

But how far really is scientific knowledge itself certain? How much of it ultimately depends on purely logical or philosophical foundations, out of which the scientific method evolves as a kind of emergent property? How first really are scientific first principles? These are pertinent questions which only a lazy and already certain mind can avoid looking at.

Nothing is certainly certain, that is the only certainty. There is a lot of pith and truth in that axiom but it may seem odd for something like

that to come from a defence of a religious position, if that is what this is. In fact it truly is such a defence but only accidentally. In reality this essay is a defence of uncertainty, the old-fashioned business of all philosophy, and the exponents of scientific rationalism have mistaken themselves to be such defenders. Making Nietzsche's desire—of being capable of saying in ten lines what

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)



others take a whole book—my own, I end this abruptly begun preface as abruptly and jump to the very argument.

What really is scientific knowledge? Or what really is the scientific method—claimed to be the only workable method—of acquiring knowledge about the universe? There are four historical-philosophical components that go to make up this method; there is also a fifth involved which rather works like an operational framework than a component. These components that I am going to enumerate are more or less categorical, the reader may add more if her or his knowledge allows; but whatever one might add, the basic principles remain the same. The components are: (1) The Parmenidian identity of being and knowing, (2) the Ockhamist parsimony in explanation or theorisation, (3) the shift from deduction to induction, and (4) The Popperian *criterion* of falsifiability. Added to these is the crucial notion that knowledge or knowing is propositional; that truth is essentially a statement. Let us look into these and construct our critique.

The Identity of Being and Knowing

We humans have five senses with whose instrumentation we perceive whatever it is that we term external reality. The data from the external world is registered in the subject through the medium of the sense organs and a representation of reality is created in it. When we say that thought is identical to being what we mean is that the representation of external reality in the subject is faithful to the reality as it is in objectivity. Now that seems fairly simple but it is not as straightforward as it seems. The idealist would come by and say that the representation is all happening in the mind alone like Bishop Berkeley does. The idealist position is not that very easy to refute. Bertrand Russell in his *Problems*

of Philosophy ultimately resorts to common sense to do so. Whether refutable or not, it could be refuted only *philosophically*. It cannot be refuted scientifically as science already *presupposes* a real world, and would require the real world to be objectively true in order to be science at all. So already we are making philosophical choices foundationally—not scientific ones—in order to build our scientific method.

A Kantian thinker on the other hand would say that the simulation or representation of reality in the mind can never be entirely a faithful objective copy of the external world because of the filtration of data through the sense organs—and they are to be found at different variations in their evolutions, possessing various capacities throughout the animal kingdom—and hence can be nothing but an incomplete distortion. But as we do not have any other faculty to know the world as it is in itself—pure reason being ruled out—we have to proceed with what we have and take the representation to us to be final. This is pretty much how science proceeds to know the external world. Again, its base or foundation is found to be philosophical and hence not entirely beyond refutation. But there is no way—common sense excluded, and we know how reliable that is; and even science excluded—to know if external reality is not completely different in radical ways from the simulations created in the machinery called the organism, which is doing the simulation for the evolutionary survival and environmental adaptation of the same machinery.

Parsimony in Explanation

This method in a nutshell is a method of expediency in solution finding. The Ockham's razor principle works by considering that explanation to be the best which requires the least explaining to do. If a doctor and a shaman were to meet

a cancer patient and each were to give causes for the ailment of the patient from one's own professional expertise, it could be imagined to go somewhat on these lines. The doctor would through the knowledge of anatomy and genetics declare that cancer is due to unregulated cell division, and may even be able to demonstrate the process using modern techniques. The shaman, let us imagine, says that the cancer is caused because Lupans Dos, the angry god in Pluto sends his angels and demons to the earth who are in constant combat against each other. Disease happens in the body when in that particular locality the demons win and the angels lose. Both are explanations no doubt, and both can be useful in their own ways. But it would be noticed that the latter explanation has to take such a long winding and over-branching route toward the solution that it raises more questions than it explains. In the former explanation there is least distance between the proposition and the proposition-corroborating material facts and so explanation is least required, or simplest in form. Mental highways need not be interminably created in order to piece everything in the proposition together—which is what makes the explanation simple. Though not exhaustive I believe my illustration would be of help to beginners.

But the question that arises at this point and cannot avoid demanding attention is how can the principle prove itself? Or can it? And if not, should it remain indubitable? One way of proving could be on the basis of results. We could say the principle helps for it is useful in giving us results. But the solution begs two questions. How do you know as a truth that utility is the correct criterion for knowledge and can the principle itself be proven on the basis of this utility? If the simplest explanation is the best of all explanations, can that be applied to the Ockham's razor itself? It is somewhat like asking if consciousness

can be conscious of itself. In order to prove the Ockham's razor itself to be the simplest and best explanation we need to presuppose the razor and thus accept its validity even before the argument is begun, and so end up in circularity. If the razor is not amenable to the razor—due to the razor and its victims being of different orders of explanation—then ought we not to be more wary of the surety of our scientific foundations? Ought we not to dig into the roots of the whole structure again and again ad infinitum? Is scientific dogmatism not dogmatic?

An objection can be raised here, which I hinted at in the previous paragraph. We could say that here there is a confusion of facts to be proven or explained and a lack of clarity in the methodology used to do the explanation. But that in my opinion raises another issue. It is far from clear what line it is that divides a principle from a fact. Sam Harris in a completely different context argues for the thinning of the line dividing values and facts. What makes the principle itself stand outside of verifiable reality in a God's-eye like stand, becoming a sort of unquestionable first principle whose claim to legitimacy is the results it produces, which results too in their own case depending on the principle for their standing.

This is a difficult problem but one thing is clear. Something cannot, on being labelled a principle, be outside the jurisdiction of verification, for otherwise dogmatism will be the result.

The Shift to Induction

This component faces the same problem that the preceding and the succeeding ones do, and I fear either being too prolix or repetitive. The validity of induction cannot be proven inductively or experimentally because then experimentation would be presupposed and thus already considered valid before being experimentally



Benedict de Spinoza (1632–77)

proven to be so. If experimentally proven facts alone are truths, then going by strict logic, experimentation itself cannot be a truth, but only a philosophically chosen—with valid and interesting reasons of course—principle. Experimentation cannot be proven experimentally but only through its effects which already depend on it for explanation. Again the roots of science are seen to be philosophical and not indubitably empirical or scientific.

For those of my readers who are not very familiar with the induction-deduction divide I provide the following illustration. The sun rises in the east; now that is my claim. There are two ways in which I can go about making that claim. I could rationally deduce this proposition in my mind and write it down in my notebook in my room and then go to my terrace about six in the morning and see the sun rise in the east, thus getting

my claim vindicated every day. Or I could get up at six every day in the morning and run to the terrace and see the sun rising in the east, mentally making a note of it. That done I could get back to the room and the notebook and make this claim about the sun's rising, the claim resulting from my repeated observations. The former approach is deductive, and the latter inductive in nature.

Falsifiability

Falsifiability on the face of it, is unconditional. It is not falsifiable in itself. I request the reader to consider this proposition which stands as the first demonstration in the first book of Spinoza's *Ethics*: 'By that which is self-caused, I mean that of which the essence involves existence, or that of which the nature is only conceivable as existent.'¹ What really do you think is wrong with this proposition? Of course, it isn't found or observed in the real world! If not observable in the real world, it cannot be experimented, and so can never be found to be either true or false. In short, this statement is not falsifiable and therefore lacks meaning.

Now I urge you to consider how the tables turn when falsifiability as a concept is considered. Falsifiability, like the concept of a self-caused being, cannot be observed as and in itself in the external world. And thus cannot be experimented as well, and by extension also must be unfalsifiable. If that which is not falsifiable is without meaning, falsifiability too should be considered meaningless. But if it seems to work and have glorious practical results and therefore seems to be true, then our reasoning is losing track.

Once again science is seen to be founded on philosophical rather than indubitably scientific ground. I proceed now to conclude my treatment of the whole of this subject.

Science, if it is the combination of these

components, is not in itself scientific—a proposition completely self-evident to some, but one that deserves being made. It is as a method philosophical, what is scientific being the *effects* of the endeavour of science. Science as a method cannot be falsified because you are trying then to falsify falsifiability and by so trying accepting falsifiability as a criterion before proof. *Science itself cannot be scientifically proven or disproven because to do so will presuppose the validity of science before the proving is done.*

Science then is not in its foundational and essential elements seen to rest on anything as rock solid as scientific dogmatists will like us to accept; this acceptance itself being, for reasons already discussed, rank dogmatism. By this I do not at all suggest that the foundations of science are, for this reason, wrong or dubious.

May it be placed on foundations any, I am also not suggesting that anything has been taken away from science. All the great and important contributions of this marvellous tool called the scientific method stay as they always did, and that without dispute; but also, without final absolute authority. This does nothing but open the doors to knowledge through methods, ways, and techniques erstwhile unknown or unconsidered.

I began the essay with words about religion and religious dogma. It is here that I shall bring that other component that I call an operational framework: truth as proposition. The subject is vast and cannot be contained in the space of this essay and interested readers ought to consider Lloyd Gerson's *Ancient Epistemology* for a fuller exposition of this crucial issue. To put it briefly, the issue is that modern epistemology looks at truth as propositions, as statements which to be true need to be repeatable and predictable in external reality. But a different sort of epistemology is to look at truth as external reality or reality itself: existence itself for Mulla Sadra or

the moral universe represented in the very being of Christ for his disciples or the unmanifest universal Self for Sri Ramakrishna. Neither of the two kinds of epistemologies has a higher hand for reasons detailed; even if it does, it is only a conceptual or abstract stand. Let me finish with a few words on religious faith.

Albert Camus begins his essay on Sisyphus with the limitations inherent in reason. The flight of reason on its own has a limit beyond which it will require to coil back on itself which it will find impossible to do. Thomas Nagel displays an aspect of this problem with his critique of reductionism in his book *Mind and Cosmos*. The human being is not a mental being; it is being, like William Barrett reminds us in his classic introduction to existentialism called *Irrational Man*. Truth to the human being is not mental truth but the whole truth, related and experienced through one's whole being. It is here that Kierkegaard's leap becomes so very important to us. We are called upon by existence to make a choice, a choice to embrace the whole of life with the whole of our faculties: from ratiocination, intuition, imagination down to faith. It is religion that offers the use of this wide range of faculties to the human being and there lies its importance. The subject, again, is a long one which I will treat fully in another place.

In this essay I have attempted to put forward what I found to be certain logical inconsistencies inherent in the absolutism assigned to the scientific method. If what I have said is proven to be completely mistaken, I would consider myself fortunate enough to break out of one more of the many bubbles that life makes us live in.



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Environmental Wellbeing: Materialism versus Idealism in Indian Philosophy

Dwaita Hazra

ENVIRONMENTAL WELLBEING solely depends on our lifestyle. Indian tradition is rich in philosophical thought processes that enrich us with many precious teachings of how one should live life. Indian philosophical schools are very different in their approach towards living life. But one inbuilt similarity can be observed in most of the ancient Indian philosophical schools. The two very different ways of seeing life can be termed as materialistic and idealistic approaches.

Apart from the idealistic schools, Indian philosophy has only one school that stands out as odd. That is the materialistic Charvaka school. That matter is the ultimate reality is the basis of their philosophical thought process. Matter is their starting point and also the end point. They consider seeking pleasure and having wealth as the ultimate goal of human life. This theory of giving pleasure the main role in human life is called hedonism. This word has been derived from the Greek term *hedone*, which means 'for pleasure'. All hedonist theories deal with two main points—pleasure and pain. They all concentrate on how to avoid pain and attain maximum pleasure.

Charvaka was the earliest hedonist philosophy. They persisted for about two thousand years starting from 600 BCE. Their theory involves scepticism and hedonistic egotism. Hedonistic egotism supports everything that makes us happy in life. Sometimes it speaks of attaining

practical training, which makes one free from moral emotions, sympathy, and guilt. For their approach they were not much appreciated among other philosophical schools. Cyrenaic of ancient Greek was founded by Aristippus (c. 435–356 BCE). They were also sceptics and hedonistic egotists. After that Epicureanism came into being. It was founded by Epicurus (c. 341–271 BCE). However, Epicureanism was a different kind of hedonism. It involved happiness but in a restrained way. It was somehow more about pleasure of the mind than physical pleasure. Epicurus advised his followers to avoid towns, especially marketplaces, in order to limit the resulting desires for unnecessary things. According to him, once we experience unnecessary pleasures such as those from sex and rich foods we will then suffer from the painful and hard to satisfy desires for more and better of the same. Epicureans trained themselves to desire for the basics which will not interfere with other's lives. They were selfish and egotistic but in a restrained way. Being hedonistic egotists, Charvakas do not include interest or happiness of other beings and only concentrate in satisfying one's own self.

'Eat, Drink, and Make Merry'

According to them pleasure is the highest end of life. The goal of human life is to attain the maximum amount of pleasure in this life, avoiding pain as far as possible. A good life is a life of greatest enjoyment. Wealth is good as the means

of enjoyment. Wealth and enjoyment are the only rational ends. Matter is the ultimate reality.

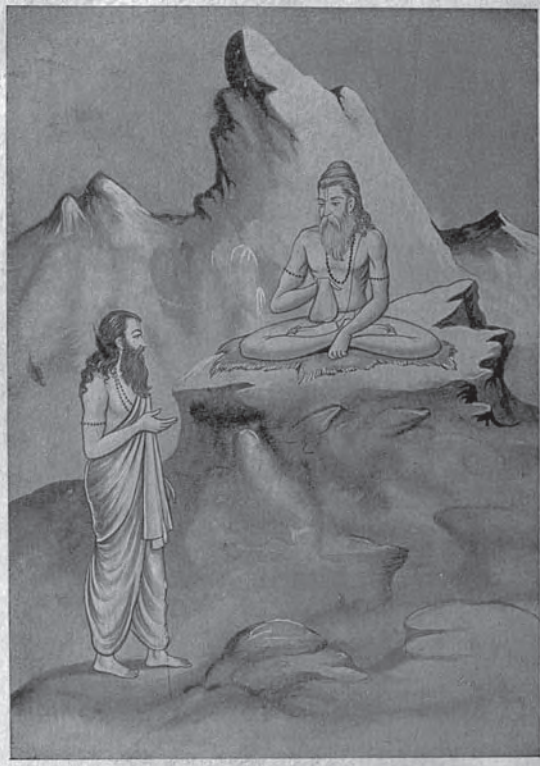
Indian tradition does not approve of this way of thinking, which leads to individualism and a selfish lifestyle. Vedanta finds ultimate joy in self-realisation. Humans cannot live like animals. Animals only find joy in material things. Therefore Vachaspati Mishra called Charvakas to be 'the animals of animals'. We find in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* that Yajnavalkya tells his wife Maitreyi: 'It is not for the love of the wealth that wealth is dear, but for the love of the self is wealth dear.'¹ A completely materialistic approach was never appreciated in Indian philosophy.

However, Charvaka thought is quite similar to modern day consumerism, the ultimate goal of which is to attract common people and to make sure that they surrender to their temptations. In the ancient Indian tradition, the ultimate goal of life was called *purushartha*. Purusha refers to a human being and artha means goal. There are four *purusharthas* in the Indian tradition. They are dharma, artha, kama, and moksha. Among them moksha is considered to be the best and supreme one. To attain this one should gather the artha or wealth in accordance with dharma.² Dharma refers to righteousness.

Charvakas are different in this approach. They do not value dharma and moksha. They only concentrate on kama and artha. Kama is pleasure. Therefore the Charvaka thought only deals with attaining materialistic pleasures. It does not consider the existence of moksha and does not believe in life after death. Its suggestion is to eat, drink, and make merry. Do whatever you desire because you will get only one life. Therefore enjoy it in every possible way. 'Live happily as long as you live, drink ghee by incurring debt', is their famous saying, which reflects their approach towards a materialistic lifestyle. Charvaka philosophy represents the desires of masses; therefore it

was quite popular. But the ultimate character of the ancient Indian philosophy does not support this view. This approach is self-centric and does not include the welfare of other beings. Life is all about sharing and caring, and nurturing the environment in which we live. The whole universe is a shared territory. Everyone here has their part to perform, that is, to give care and nourishment to other beings and that is the ultimate message Indian philosophical schools teach us. Charvaka philosophy only motivated people for self-indulgence and that is where it failed to keep its sustainability among other Indian philosophical schools. Charvakas did not consider that giving care and nourishment to others can also give one immense joy. They neglected this aspect of giving and receiving joy in return, which is a core value of the other Indian philosophical schools.

As caring for others is absent in Charvaka thought, care for the environment was also not present in their philosophical teachings. Perhaps, since the Charvakas consider direct perception as the one and only means of gaining knowledge, they did not consider environment as living and sentient. To understand some parts of environment as having life, one has to rely not only on direct perception but also on inference. Therefore if one accepts the Charvaka epistemology, one will not see or feel the presence of life and sentience in flora and fauna. The theory of avoiding pain and gaining pleasure would then be suitable only for moving living beings. The other part of environment would then be a group of some lifeless things devoid of feelings of pain. But on the other hand, this sense of sentience in other environmental beings was present in Vedic literature and philosophy. For example in the *Aranyani Sukta*³ we can see how the pain of forest is depicted when the tree is being cut. 'Here one is calling to his cow; another there hath felled a tree: at eve the dweller in the wood



Bharadvaja and Bhrgu

fancies that somebody hath screamed' (ibid.).

Though environmental degradation was not an issue at that time, we can see some other schools in India practising harmonious relationship with the environment. Plants and forests are an integral part of the environment. In ancient India there was plenty of forest cover. Deforestation was not an issue at that time, though majority of people were conscious about the sentience in the trees. In the Mahabharata, if we analyse the question-answer session between Bharadvaja and Bhrgu, we learn about plants having five senses. Bhrgu said about trees: 'They are susceptible to pleasure and pain, and grow when cut or lopped off. From these circumstances I see that trees have life. They are not inanimate.'⁴ This special dialogue belongs to the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata. If one depends only on perception through eyes, trees can seem inanimate and could be used for personal pleasure. They can be cut without feeling sorry and entire forests can be wiped out to make human residence and accessories. The great sage Parashara notes: 'Just as an injury to the heart of an animal causes

its eventual death, similarly when the root of a plant is damaged the plant dies. And its trunks, branches, leaves, flowers dry up eventually.'⁵

This kind of sympathy was the core value of Indian philosophical schools. In the Mahabharata, the Ashoka tree is described as a tree that can free humans from sorrows and sufferings. In the Mahabharata, Damayanti's grieving for her husband is described thus: 'Her eyes filled with tears when she approached that Ashoka, best of trees, which stood in full bloom, bending under the weight of its shoots ... "Ah, woe on me, here stands this beautiful tree in deep of the forest ... Rid me swiftly of my grief, beautiful Ashoka: have you chanced to see the king, free from sorrow and fear and torment? ... Make it come about, Ashoka tree, that I find without sorrow my hero ... Make it come about that I find him come to this forest! Be true to your name, Ashoka, by dispelling my sorrow!'"⁶

We can see how trees and environment were integral to our pleasure and pain. People could feel their sorrows and sufferings and also expected the environment to have the power to remove their sorrows. This emotional bonding was missing in Charvaka thought. This may be because their intention was to avoid pain in all circumstances. They might have thought that if we begin to feel for others then their pain and sufferings becomes ours. Charvakas wanted to avoid any kind of attachment that will lead to sorrow. They were unable to see that sometimes greatest joy or bliss comes from helping or feeling for other beings.

Samkhya Philosophy and Environment

Samkhya is the philosophy of realistic dualism. It is one of the most important ancient Indian philosophies. The earliest reference was found in Charaka's work (78 CE). The great sage Kapila is the founder of this school. *Samkhyakarika*

by Ishvarakrishna (4th–5th century CE) is considered to be the most important work on Samkhya. Samkhya believes that the whole universe is mainly comprised of two components: Purusha and Prakriti. As a realistic school, Samkhya considers both matter and spirit to be real. Prakriti is considered as the ultimate cause of all gross and subtle subjects. The non-self Prakriti consists of three gunas: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Sattva* reflects happiness, lightness, and brightness. *Rajas* reflects activity, motion, and restlessness; and *tamas* represents inaction and indifference.

When Prakriti comes in contact with Purusha or because of the influence of Purusha, the equilibrium state of the three gunas in Prakriti is disturbed and Prakriti is ready to produce. As gunas go through more and more changes Prakriti produces various objects of the world. This evolution results in twenty-three different categories of objects. Among all these, Mahat evolves first. Mahat or intellect helps human beings in judgement and discrimination. After that evolves the ego, which is self-sense and is concerned with self-identity. Then evolve the mind, the sense organs and motor organs, and the five elements in two forms, subtle and gross. This is how evolution happens in Samkhya thought. If we follow this theory of evolution, we can see that it does not differentiate between human beings, animals, and all the other beings of environment, because all of them are different manifestations of Prakriti. All of them are comprised of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, may be in different degrees. This Samkhya theory of evolution lands every being on the same plane. So there is no 'other'.

All are the effects of one cause, that is, Prakriti, and when they involve, they merge into Prakriti again unless another process of evolution starts. This theory of causation is called *Satkaryavada*, which refers to the existence of the effect in the cause. According to this theory the effect is real

and is present in the cause in a potential form before its manifestation. Charvaka and Nyaya–Vaisheshika philosophies do not support this theory. They believe in *Asatkaryavada*, which refers to the non-existence of effect in the cause. This view makes one see everything as different entities and this thinking, in a way, breaks the chain of relationship that one being has with other fellow beings in the environment. *Satkaryavada* explains evolution in a way that gives a sense of bonding and helps people identify themselves with the environment. *Satkaryavada* proposes that different organisms have originated from an ultimate cause that is singular and real. All the organisms are bound together by a relationship of interdependence. Nothing is an independent entity. This system of interdependence is also proposed by James Lovelock's Gaia theory.

The Gaia hypothesis proposes that all organisms and their inorganic surroundings on earth are closely integrated to form a single and self-regulating complex system, maintaining the conditions for life on the planet. He says: 'If Gaia does exist, then we may find ourselves and all other living things to be parts and partners of a vast being who in her entirety has the power to maintain our planet as a fit and comfortable habitat for life.'⁷ This theory proposes that the earth is a finely tuned super organism consisting of the entire natural world. The planet's physical, chemical, and biological processes interact with each other in order to maintain optimum conditions for life. This theory was named after the Greek goddess of the earth, Gaia. Lovelock and other supporters of the idea now call it a theory regarding it as scientific theory and not mere hypothesis, since they believe it has passed predictive tests.

Both Samkhya and Vedanta accept *Satkaryavada*, though their approach is slightly different. *Satkaryavada* is interpreted in two ways: *Prakritiparinamavada* and *Brahmavivartavada*.

Prakritiparinamavada suggests that the effect is the transformation of the cause, while *Brahma-
vivartavada* considers it to be the apparent or a distorted appearance of the cause.

Vedanta and Environment

Vedanta rejects the Samkhya ideas of Purusha and Prakriti. It claims that between them there is a huge gulf that needs to be bridged. Therefore, Vedanta affirms that spirit and matter are one. Advaita Vedanta helps to understand the essential oneness of all beings and thus it creates stronger bond among all parts of the environment. Advaitins generalise the whole universe into one. They claim that one being manifests itself into all these various forms. While Samkhya holds that the whole world is the evolution of primal nature, Advaitins affirm that the world is the apparent manifestations of Brahman due to ignorance. God is the material cause of the universe, not really but apparently. The celebrated illustration used to clarify this phenomenon is that of the rope and snake where the rope appears to be snake. So all the changes we see are apparent and caused by time, space, and causation. It is because of name and form that one object is differentiated from another. Vedanta holds that we all are one and the perception of duality is the cause of all troubles. Swami Vivekananda says in this context: 'In the lowest worm, as well as in the highest human being, the same divine nature is present ... In injuring another, I am injuring myself; in loving another, I am loving myself.'⁸ The little personalised self is the cause of all misery.

We cannot identify ourselves with the other beings because of our ignorance, also called *avidya* or *maya*. We see that both Vedanta and Samkhya systems of thought made people realise their relationship with their fellow beings. They taught not to hurt any other being in the process

of getting pleasure. In ancient India, resources were plenty and population was much less, so environmental problems were also less. But now Indians are on the verge of resource scarcity and overpopulation. The ancient Indian philosophical teachings are less prominent in the modern Indian lifestyle. The cause can be hundreds of years of slavery, foreign attacks, social stigma, and that the philosophical knowledge was not transferred from one generation to other as it was supposed to be. Colonialism has affected Indians and has changed their lifestyle and behaviour. All the things it taught Indians were not totally bad though. But people took the bad practices, bad lifestyle habits from the West because of their copycat mentality and lazy lifestyle. That only added to waste, resource degradation, deforestation, and extinction of valuable species from their natural habitat. The time has come to make positive changes in the lifestyle and habits of the average Indian by adopting a simple living guided by love and compassion for other beings. ❧

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Self-Realisation through Mathematics

Siddhartha Sen

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK Swami Vitamohananda for inviting me to the Gretz Vedanta Centre to talk on 'Self-Realisation through Mathematics.'¹ I am happy to talk on this daunting topic as it allows me to reflect on some of the core elements of Vedanta, not as a scholar or an expert, but as a human being with an interest in trying to view and understand the world through the lenses of physics, mathematics, and Vedanta. I will first reflect on Reality as described in Vedanta and then relate this Reality to the Self and Consciousness. This will allow me to explain what is meant by self-realisation. I will then sketch the nature of reality discovered by science. With these preliminaries out of the way I will move on to my main theme.

The ideas of Advaita Vedanta that I describe are based on the ideas of the *Mandukya Upanishad*. The central message of Vedanta is the simple statement that there is an eternal law of Reality underpinning all existence. This law of Reality has three parts. Reality is given the name Brahman.

The first part says that the Reality is outside space, time, and causality, and is unchanging. It is the witness of all our experiences and is represented by the symbol and sound Om. Thus things that change with time are unreal from this point of view.

The second part of the eternal law is that our Self and this Reality are the same. The final and third part of this law is that this great truth about our true nature is revealed to us every time we are in deep sleep but we do not comprehend the true meaning of this experience.

Comprehension of the true nature of the state of deep sleep is hidden from us by different sheaths of ignorance which are difficult to remove. Our ignorance is due to our ego and our desires for things that are not real.

Evil from this point of view, for instance, represents the complete dominance of the ego and the absence of any empathy or feeling of oneness with others while the complete absence of ego and complete awareness that everything in existence is one is the state of self-realisation.

This is the greatest possible unified theory imaginable. As a physicist I find this law inspiring. Vedanta is not denying the world experienced, but is stating that its essence is an unchanging Reality, which is our Self. The task set by Vedanta is to realise the presence of an unchanging Reality in the world of change.

Vedanta also tells us that although reasoning and observation are helpful for trying to grasp this truth, it can only be realised as a personal experience. This is self-realisation.

This observation tallies with our experience of understanding simple things. We might be told, for instance, about the colour red, but it is only suddenly when we realise the abstract universal nature of the word that we truly understand the concept of colour. This happens not as a result of a process of reasoning or due to the instruction but as a sudden flash of understanding. It is realisation. This is the only way understanding takes place.

This matches with our experiences. Objects that are created and destroyed in a fraction of a

second do happen in the quantum world. Such events are said to be 'virtual,' as we require real events to have some degree of permanence. Vedanta says that truly real objects should be absolutely permanent. They should be unchanging and uninfluenced by space or time. We do not know of material objects which have this property. Material objects change with time. Even the electron and proton of fundamental physics are not permanent as they can be created and destroyed in experiments.

Vedanta proceeds to describe properties of the Self. We are told that the Self, identified with the Real, manifests itself in four states of consciousness. These are—the waking state, the dreaming state, the state of deep sleep, and a fourth state that can only be experienced by a person who has attained self-realisation. Thus one road to self-realisation is to properly understand the first three states of our consciousness and then find out by reflection and meditation, how to reach the fourth state. Ways for doing this have been described by Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutra*. The immediate conclusion that can be drawn from Vedanta is that our Self is not a material entity as material entities change. And, consciousness is also non-material.

What is the Self? We know that the cells of our body die and are replaced, that the links in our brain get modified every time we have an experience at the cellular level. But through all these changes we feel that we remain the same. Provisionally we can identify this unchanging something as our Self. Thus the hardware of our body changes but there is something unchanging present in us that we all feel exists from personal experience. The available definitions of Self make sense because we already 'know' from our experience that there is something unchanging in us and feel that this Self defines who we are, even though our material body is changing all the time.

This is perhaps a good place to point out that words and definitions by themselves can never make us know or understand anything. To know and understand something properly, we must have had a personal realisation of the object of interest as we described for the concept of colour. Other examples can be given. If, for instance, we look up the word 'mathematics' in a dictionary, we might be told that it is the abstract study of patterns or that it is the study of numbers and space. But if we do not know what these words mean, we will remain ignorant. Following the dictionary trail will not help, as it will bring us back to our starting point. It is only when we have a direct experience of mathematics through counting or weighing or measuring that we can, in a flash, begin to see the abstract universal nature of the subject.

Then our journey of understanding begins. Thus getting to know something properly requires a flash of insight, which allows us to see a network of links between the new object introduced to concepts that we already know or to experiences that we have had. Trying to clarify a concept using words and abstract symbols alone is not enough.

Let us return to the discussion on the features of the non-material Self. The Self of our experience seems to be capable of influencing our actions by acting on the brain. The Self makes us conscious and allows us to have experiences. Thus if the brain is damaged in some way the Self might no longer help us to have experiences. We might not appear to be conscious or know who we are to others. This is a hardware problem. From such a point of view, a separation is made between the non-material Self and the material brain. This gives rise to a problem. How can a non-material entity, the Self, influence a material entity like our brain? The neurophysiologist, Sir John Eccles,² has given a detailed picture, using

his great knowledge of the working of the brain, to explain how this could happen. His starting observation was that not all nerve impulses that can lead to actions, get across brain junctions. There is always an apparently random step involved that decides which of the many impulses that reach a junction gets across. The impulse that gets across leads to a specific action. Thus, where a number of actions are possible, there is an element of chance involved in the choice of the specific action taken. Eccles suggests that perhaps the Self can influence this random step. A detailed picture of how this could happen, without violating the laws of physics, was proposed by him using ideas from quantum theory. The arguments given are speculative but they do represent a serious attempt to explain how a non-material entity can influence a material entity.

However from the point of Vedanta, the problem is different. There the Self is non-material as it is Real. The body and the external world as material objects on the other hand, are not Real in the sense of Vedanta as they change and are bound by the laws of space, time, and causality. They are maya. The term simply means that what we see is not the essence. Thus from the Vedanta point of view the problem is to understand how objects with material properties can emerge from an underlying non-material universal real essence, so that they obey the observed laws of matter.

Since the Self is present in all, Vedanta never talks about error, but suggests that we always progress from truth to truth. At each stage of our life we consciously or unconsciously decide what is real and true and strive for happiness and fulfilment. We might feel that a certain mode of behaviour will lead us to what we desire. At a later stage of life we may think otherwise. Each stage of our life is thus a trajectory of decisions taken and events experienced within our

personal framework of what is real and what is true. Some trajectories lead us further away from finding the central truth of Vedanta, but such a path is not due to errors but due to ignorance. Ignorance in Vedanta means ignorance of one's true nature.

There are, according to Vedanta, many different paths that lead to what is true and real and science is one such path. The approach of science to find what is true is to use imagination, logic, and numbers to draw inferences from careful observations and then to repeatedly test these inferences. However the inferences of science are always provisional. There is no certainty in science. This hallmark of science is welcomed by Vedanta as the defining trait required for rejecting the unreal and striving to find the real. It is the path of knowledge for reaching Reality.

But other approaches for understanding and for grasping what is Real are possible. Thus the great mysteries of the human spirit, human emotions, beauty, joy, and love are ignored in science. These mysteries are explored and revealed through art, poetry, conversations, music, and dance. This is the path of emotion and instinct identified in Vedanta as the path of devotion to reach Reality. There are also others who are selfless and devote their lives to help all those in need. This is a path of selfless service that also leads to Reality.

The importance of the world of ideas and concepts for human beings has long been recognised. In ancient times Plato, for instance, suggested that underpinning the Real world of objects was a world of ideas and abstractions. The objects experienced were merely shadows of this unseen Reality. Some recent philosophers, like Karl Popper,³ have also suggested the existence of a world which is an abstract world of concepts and ideas and have suggested that human beings have access to this world through

their Self. However the Self introduced by them is very different from the Self of Vedanta. For Popper and Eccles, the Self is an attribute of one person. There is thus a multiplicity of selves.

Let us gather together the different questions that have come up. They are:

1. Are there examples of entities we know that are Real, that is they are unchanging and outside space, time, and causality?

2. Do the claims of Vedanta stand up to scientific scrutiny? In particular do the claims regarding dreams and consciousness contradict scientific work on dreams?

3. How can the apparently material world be created from an underlying unchanging non-material Reality?

4. How can the study of mathematics lead to self-realisation?

The physical world in which we live is constantly changing. But underlying the changing world of inert matter scientists have discovered the presence of unchanging elements, namely, the fundamental laws of science which are outside the realm of space, time, and causality. These fundamental laws of physics, for example, govern the four observed basic forces of the inert world: the strong forces that hold the nuclei inside an atom together, the weak force of radioactivity, the electromagnetic forces that hold atoms and molecules together, and the gravitational force that holds planetary systems and galaxies together. In recent times scientists have discovered hints that suggest that underlying these four forces there maybe just one fundamental unified law. Progress in this direction has been spectacular with the predictions of the unification law of two of the four laws being confirmed by painstaking experimental observations involving thousands of people from all over the world. But a completely universally agreed upon Unified Theory of all forces is yet to be found.

The presence of unchanging elements tells us that Reality, in the sense of Vedanta, is present in fundamental physics.

After discovering the fundamental laws of physics, the human beings proceeded to use them to understand the properties of matter at the atomic scale and then step-by-step to understand the properties of more complex assemblies of atoms and molecules, aggregates of molecules, clusters of matter such as planets, stars, galaxies, and further on to understand properties of the observed inert universe. This journey of understanding inert matter has been remarkably successful. It has established that everything known, whether living or non-living, is made out of the same fundamental constituents. Thus a unification of all forms of matter in the universe has been established. The success of understanding inert matter inevitably led humankind to the next challenge, which was to understand the properties of living matter.

The quest to understand living matter has led to new insights and provided unexpected answers to new type of questions which focus on purpose. The questions answered were: how can inherited characteristics of the human beings be encoded and passed on, and, in what way is the human species linked to other forms of life. Answers obtained for these questions have established a remarkable unity among all living organisms by placing them in a common network of structures that all come from basic universal elements. The basic element of all life was established to be the DNA, which was found to have an elegant structure built out of four fundamental units. These truly astonishing findings were established after many years of painstaking experimentation interspersed by bold leaps of imagination. The stage was thus set to explore the final frontier of understanding the working of the human brain and of determining the nature

of consciousness. Thus by following the road of science we find that we are led to the grand challenging problem of our times, which is to try to understand the nature of consciousness.

How can this challenge be met? What methods should be used? One scientific response to this challenge is to try to study the way the brain works and to see if the intricate nature of the brain inevitably produces self-awareness and consciousness as emergent entities of the brain. The idea of structures emerging in a complex system is a novel insight that is well established in physics. These studies of the emergence of consciousness are varied but two broad approaches can be identified. In one approach, the material circuits and structural features of the brain were studied for spotting consciousness as feedback loops that react with self-awareness; while in the other approaches, different theoretical models of the working of the brain were proposed and analysed. In this second category, the circuit aspect of the brain was not the primary focus. A good summary of some of the theoretical approaches used is given in the book on consciousness by Vitiello⁴ where a model of the brain and consciousness is suggested using the abstract methods of quantum physics. In his approach, consciousness is not emergent but is linked to each individual by a built-in mechanism for self-reaction. However in this work and in most other approaches the suggestion from Vedanta that the nature of consciousness can be explored by the study of sleep is ignored. The fact that human beings sleep and dream is mentioned but not taken to be an essential clue for understanding the nature of consciousness. It is only recently that a serious study of dreams and sleep as a means for studying the nature of consciousness has begun.⁵ Let us expand on this idea.

Vedanta claims that during deep sleep we momentarily experience our true nature. Thus

following the lead of Vedanta it makes sense to study both the waking and sleeping states in order to understand the nature of consciousness. Furthermore Vedanta, with its grand unified picture, suggests, for instance, that all creatures should sleep and dream.

In the scientific study of sleep and dreams the existence of the dreaming, REM, and the importance of non-dreaming, non-REM, sleep has been established. However the study of deep sleep and its role are yet to be explored. Hobson, a leading researcher in this field, suggests that results obtained from studying the nature of the dreaming state imply that consciousness is rooted in the brain and can be understood in purely materialistic terms.

Let us summarise his argument. It has been established that there are broadly different states of brain activity during sleep, each characterised by the frequency and amplitude of electric brain waves detected. Usually the higher the frequency of a brain-wave, the smaller is its amplitude. A sleeping cycle has four stages and lasts about ninety minutes starting with the transition from the waking state and ending with the state of deep sleep. Thus the state of deep sleep is characterised by δ waves of low frequencies between 0.5 to 1 hertz, while α waves in the frequency range 9 to 12 hertz are present during quiet periods of waking, β waves, in the frequency range 13 to 30 hertz, appear in the waking state, θ waves, in the frequency range 4 to 8 hertz, appear at the onset of stage 1 of sleep with a transition period of spindles that increase frequency, and K complexes that increase the amplitude of brain waves, and lead on to stage 2 of sleep where rapid eye movement occurs and dreams are seen. Stage 3 sleep starts with the generation of δ waves and the percentage of these waves increases to over 50% at stage 4. Finally there are also γ waves in the range 40 to 100 hertz, which

are present in a state of acute self-awareness in subjects who are used to long periods of meditation. In this state, a person can also experience lucid dreams where there is awareness that one is dreaming. The waves with their higher frequency are conjectured to be responsible for organising informational links between different brain locations. During dreaming sleep, there is rapid eye movement and a mix of α and β waves but the motor responses of a person are switched off. The dreaming person is in a state of paralysis and cannot move. The dreaming sequences have been shown to be controlled by a particular part of the brain. This part of the brain controls the acts of dreaming and self-awareness and are conjectured to explain the origin of dreams in materialistic terms.

These results are fascinating. They tell us that the brain is active during sleep and that a precise correlation between dreaming and the firing of neurons in a specific part of the brain exists. Thus one part of the brain controls dreams generated in another part. Furthermore the process of information processing carried out in the brain requires chemical or electric signal transfers and hence has to have a materialistic footprint. These are facts that cannot be disputed. However the process of decision making by the brain is harder to understand in materialistic terms. We feel we are making conscious decisions while the material inputs cannot lead to a precise decision since, as we have pointed out before, the signals across brain junctions are governed by the rules of chance. Thus the process is not deterministic. What decides the chance step that happens? Perhaps we decide. We, in this way, might be choosing between options. All that can be said is that we are far away from understanding how decisions between options are made in materialistic terms. At present the only concrete picture of how

the Self controls the brain is that of Eccles, which we have briefly discussed earlier. Ideas for understanding how the brain can be creative have been made by Penrose who suggests that, unlike a computer, the brain has a non-algorithmic processing mechanism⁶ that we do not understand.

The scientific study of sleep and consciousness is bound to shed further light on the marvellous properties of the brain and how it functions, but it seems unlikely that such studies will rule out the Self as a non-material entity simply because certain steps in the functioning of the brain are known to be probabilistic and the fundamental theory of matter is probabilistic. Such probabilistic events and theories cannot be explained in mechanistic terms.⁷

Earlier we had sketched the progress in understanding what is Real made by the human species. We started with a focus on physical laws and moved on to basic features of biological laws which lead us to the problem of understanding dreams and consciousness, but all these paths were those of science.

However the elephant in the room that we have so far only briefly discussed is the abstract unchanging world of mathematics. The laws of science are always tentative. They can change when new evidence is produced. But the world of mathematics is unchanging. It has different continents. But each continent of ideas is unchanging. There are hints of the presence of an overarching unity in this world which would allow an idea present in one continent to be linked to an idea in another continent. The search for such a unity is currently going on.⁸

The world of mathematics is an abstract world of unchanging ideas and patterns outside of space, time, and causality: it thus satisfies Vedanta's criteria of reality. It is thus tempting to speculate that the mathematical world is part of

the Reality of Vedanta. We have already tacitly made such an assumption. We do not know the way such an abstract non-material Reality can create the space-time-causality bound material world of our experiences. We can, however, understand how an abstract set of ideas can describe the world.

We know that there is a natural hierarchy of scientific disciplines. For instance, mathematics plays an important role in physics and chemistry. Chemistry is important to understand biochemistry and so on. In this hierarchy we can see links between disciplines. All disciplines successfully investigated by science have their own set of unchanging laws, which are thus facets of Reality from the standpoint of Vedanta. None of these laws capture all of Reality.

Even mathematics, as formulated, only captures a facet of mathematical Reality in the following sense. We know, for instance, that arithmetic, described by a very precise set of rules, cannot capture all the truths of the subject by using only a finite set of rules. This startling result was established by the logician Godel in 1931.⁹ Thus to capture all the truths of mathematics we need, not a finite set of rules, but a way of allowing an infinity of structures and rules to exist. If a person was able to glimpse the total unchanging Reality underpinning the world of mathematics she or he would have attained an extraordinary understanding of mathematical Reality.

Thus mathematics is an allowed path for reaching or realising Reality. One comment needs to be made. An essential feature of mathematics is the idea of a proof. A proof places a new result in the framework of existing knowledge and thus establishes that it does not contradict what is known. However for exploring the Reality of Vedanta there is no established framework that can be used. Thus the idea of a

mathematical proof does not make sense. Hence our conclusions regarding existence and uniqueness of Reality are not presented as mathematical results but merely as helpful remarks.

Abstract ideas in a sense are easy. They do not deal with the nuts and bolts of life. They, however, do offer a framework and a vision of possibilities that can be helpful. Let me illustrate the power of abstract ideas by a few simple examples. These examples reveal unexpected links and insights that are hidden in an abstract statement and the observed world.

The first abstract idea I discuss very briefly is the statement of planar Euclidean Geometry: 'Parallel lines in the plane do not meet.' From this abstract statement it was shown, by Euclid, that the sum of the three interior angles of a triangle is 180 degrees—a conclusion that can be checked by measurement. Thus, here we have an example of an abstract unchanging element predicting something which holds in our world. A link between abstract ideas and the world of objects is possible. A second abstract idea I will look at is as follows.

The Idea of Equality

This deep idea is the cornerstone of all the sciences, engineering, and commerce, and I believe of all understanding. In physics, in the hands of great creative spirits, the idea of equality was used to formulate laws of motion which were then used to predict the future behaviour of planets and galaxies. These results established, as I said at the start, that underlying change, there was an unchanging Reality.

In the hands of the visionaries of science the idea of equality has profoundly changed the way we view the world through the equality of mass and energy which is a consequence of an unchanging underlying mixture of space and time and the creation of quantum theory where the

unchanging element introduced was the abstract constant of Planck, \hbar .

In the hands of the visionaries of mathematics the idea of equality has been used to show the deep way in which different areas of mathematics are connected. Let me give a simple example. Each number has a deep structure. Consider the number 2. We have

$$\begin{aligned}
 2 &= 2 = 1 + 1 \\
 2 &= 3 - 1 = 4 - 2 = 5 - 3 = \dots \\
 2 &= 1 + 1/2 + 1/2^2 + 1/2^3 + \dots \\
 N &= a_0 2^0 + a_1 2^1 + a_2 2^2 + \dots
 \end{aligned}$$

Thus the first expression hints that two is part of an infinite progression of numbers, second and third expressions tell us that the number two can be written in an infinite number of ways while the last expression tells us that all positive integers can be written using two and its powers. The value of N is contained in the coefficients $a_0; a_1; \dots$, which can only be either 1 or 0. Lurking in this statement is the computer, lurking in the first there is the deep idea of the partition of a number studied by the mathematicians Hardy and Ramanujan, while lurking in the third expression is the concept of the limit and calculus. But in order to make these links, great imagination is required. For example a startling vision of a conjectured linking between the mathematical world of numbers and the world of physics has been proposed by the mathematician Manin.¹⁰ The starting point of this vision is to use a well-established result of mathematics, which

tells us that there are two ways of using numbers to describe the world. One way is to use real numbers, which we constantly use to weigh and measure, and the other is to use numbers generated only by prime numbers. This number system is known as the p-adic number system. A remarkable mathematical result states that if the average—defined in a precise way—over all prime numbers is taken then the p-adic results give the same results as those obtained using real numbers. Thus there is a duality between real numbers and a certain average over all prime numbers. The vision of Manin is that this deep mathematical result might imply that perhaps all the results of physics can be formulated purely in terms of prime numbers in such a way that a process of averaging over the prime numbers will then give back the usual results. An example of this kind is the formula for the number π first written down by the mathematician Euler. It is

$$\pi^2 / 6 = [1 / (1 - 1/2^2)] * [1 / (1 - 1/3^2)] \dots [1 / (1 - 1/p^2)] \dots$$

On the right hand side we have the number π , which is related to the circumference of a circle. It is from the continent of geometry. On the right hand side we have the product of factors that only involve prime numbers such as 2, 3, 5, 7, It is from the continent of numbers. The number p present on the right hand side is a prime number. The equality links these two continents but insists that they agree only if the infinity of all primes is used in the products written on the right hand side. Leaving out a single prime number will spoil the result. Thus this example illustrates Manin's vision.



Srinivasan Ramanujan (1887–1920)

IMAGE: [HTTPS://ERICCLIPART.COM](https://ericclipart.com)

It links the world of geometry to the world of prime numbers. The examples given indicate the presence of unusual links present in mathematics and thus demonstrate the power of abstract ideas to compress information.

We next address the following problem: Mathematical Reality is abstract and non-material. How can it capture the rich tapestry of life?

The answer to this conundrum is already provided by science where the power of abstract ideas is constantly used to represent objects. The things that are Real and unchanging are not easy to grasp but the world of science has shown that such a Reality exists and is essential for understanding the observed world. Thus, for instance, the abstract laws of physics help launch a satellite by isolating the essential elements needed to make the launch a success. Similarly, the abstract quantum description of the atomic world in terms of waves of probability describes the motion and properties of atoms with amazing precision. The abstract description captures all the observed features of the atom. However fundamental physics introduces a profound change in the way nature is to be understood. It is suggested that chance is present in nature even at the most fundamental level. The universe is not a deterministic clock.

The description of nature given in physics does not require atoms. These are inputs based on human observation. Similarly in the biological world the discovery of the abstract structure of DNA provided an abstract picture of the process of heredity. But for DNA replication to happen many other ingredients are needed. Again these are found by observation.

Thus abstract Reality allows many possibilities but it never tells us what these possibilities are or how they show up in our world. But the idea of randomness and chance that appears in fundamental physics is an essential feature of

nature revealed by numerous observations. This insight suggests that the enigmas of chance decide our destiny. On the other hand it also suggests the intriguing possibility, following the ideas of Eccles, that perhaps the Self can influence these random events and, as Eccles showed, thus influence the brain. This idea can be generalised to suggest that perhaps the important random events that shape our lives are freely chosen by our Self, identified with the Real, and thus we decide our destiny.

Let us return to consequences that follow by identifying significant unchanging timeless patterns with the Reality of Vedanta.

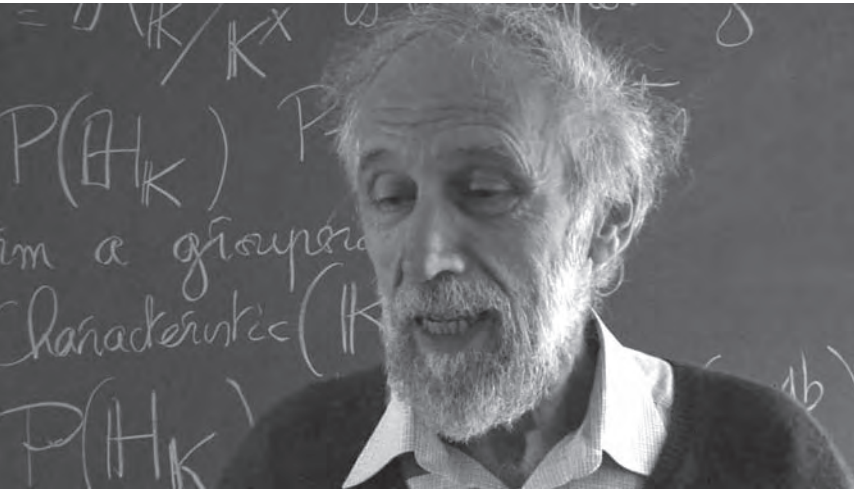
1. First, from our assumption that the unchanging timeless world of mathematical ideas is part of the Reality of Vedanta, it follows that mathematical structures and patterns can be used to understand parts of Reality that underpin our world. Furthermore such real structures of the world must follow rational unchanging rules.

2. Thus from Vedanta it is expected that there will be unchanging laws underlying the world as experienced.

3. It also follows that for all experiences that have an underlying real core an abstract universal description must exist simply because Reality is unchanging and outside of space, time, and causality. Such a description might require the discovery of new continents of mathematics.

Thus Vedanta suggests the possibility of science and suggests that mathematics, the study of abstract patterns, will play an essential role in the exploration of Reality which is reacted in both the external and the internal world as experienced. It also suggests that a unification of ideas of any given discipline and between disciplines at a fundamental level must be present.

It should be stressed that the abstract world of mathematics can only be part of the Reality



Alexander Grothendieck (1928–2014)

described in Vedanta. The extraordinary statement of Vedanta is that this Reality, in its totality, can be experienced by a true seeker of knowledge. Our simple musings do not claim to shed light on this great mystery but they do suggest that mathematics is a possible way to reach Vedantic Reality and thus for self-realisation.

I would like to end with an example of a mathematician who lived and worked in France and who meditated and lived as a hermit for many years to discover his Self. The mathematician was Alexander Grothendieck¹¹ who died on 13 November 2014 at the age of eighty-six.¹² Grothendieck was a towering figure in the world of mathematics, who revolutionised the nature of mathematical discourse by demonstrating that great advances in understanding would follow if one could isolate, with exquisite precision, the abstract essence of a problem. Once such a step was taken, he felt, the resolution of a problem would follow without recourse to any trickery or the use of complicated manipulations. For his contributions to mathematics, Grothendieck was awarded the Field's Medal. However, at the age of forty-two, he moved away from mathematics and focused on problems facing mankind. He wrote to a friend in August 1979: 'Since

the beginning of June, I have withdrawn to a solitary hermitage in Vaucluse, where nobody knows me.'¹³ Subsequently Grothendieck lived in different small French villages spending the last decades of his life, as a recluse, in the village of Lasserre, close to the southern town of Saint-Girons. Grothendieck wrote *La Clef des Songes* of 315 pages and *Notes on La Clef des Songes* of 619 pages between 1988 and 1989. In these poetic works¹⁴


Grothendieck describes his journey to understand the nature of spirituality, creativity, and its source through meditation. Grothendieck identified the source of creativity as the Dreamer, his code name for God. He felt that a distinguishing feature of spirituality is the ability to have a feeling for the beauty of all things of life. Grothendieck often appeared, at this stage of his life, to have delusions and to behave in ways that were not normal. He shunned human company, fasted, and seemed to be struggling with an inner demon; but even in this period he continued to record his insights gleaned from meditation. He wrote tens of thousands of words which remain unpublished and have yet to be carefully studied.

Grothendieck's views are startlingly Vedantic.¹⁵ In his view, dreams come to us from some outside source as gifts sent by the Dreamer to tell us about our true self. The identification of the Dreamer with God was made by Grothendieck as a result of two personal encounters, one in 1976 and another in 1982. Reacting to these encounters, Grothendieck concludes that only such a direct personal experience can convince a person about the existence of the Dreamer. Simply quoting someone else's experiences will not do, nor is a rational proof of the existence of the Dreamer possible. This is an extraordinary

statement from a great creative mathematician who worked tirelessly, and very successfully, to prove deep mathematical truths all his life.

Through meditation Grothendieck came to the conclusion that each one of us is entrusted with the mission to discover our true self with the hope of leading others, by example, to do the same. The unleashing of creativity that will follow from such self-realisation can, in his view, solve the problems facing humanity. Thus, as in his mathematical work, Grothendieck tried to isolate the essential road of salvation for humanity and came to the conclusion that the solution lay in self-knowledge.

The authenticity of Grothendieck's voice cannot be questioned. His background was non-religious. Both his parents, whom he greatly admired, were anarchists who valued freedom and believed that religion was no more than a meaningless set of ancient but reassuring rites. But the voice of God reached Grothendieck. This voice, which he first heard at the age of sixteen, changed him utterly. It unleashed his creativity. The voice was extremely quiet, a whisper almost impossible to hear in a world of, as Grothendieck says, shouting, declaring, and proclaiming. It is appropriate that I end my musings with this optimistic vision of the future of humanity from a seeker of Truth.

I would like to thank Jean-Pierre Gerbaulet for his interest and encouragement. 

Notes and References

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13. 'Who is Alexander Grothendieck?', 939.
14. See A Grothendieck, *La Clef des Songes* (1987) and *Notes on Le Clef des Songes* (1988). Roy Lisker's English translation of Grothendieck's *Récoltes et Semailles* is available on the website of *Ferment Magazine* <<http://www.fermentmagazine.org/rands/recoltes1.html>> accessed 16 July 2016.
15. Grothendieck identified himself as an heir to a list of eighteen human beings, 'Mutants', who saw the spiritual potential of mankind. Sri Ramakrishna is on this list. See 'Who is Alexander Grothendieck?', 941.

Mandukya Upanishad

Swami Ranganathananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

THE ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE keeps us alive; any other pressure will kill us—high or low. Certain fish, they live at a certain pressure; bring it up, they will die. They need that pressure. We need this sense pressure. In this spectrum of VIBGYOR, we are living. Below earth and in light we cannot live. So that is our present world, very abstracted little world. And we say this is real, this is real, we conduct our affairs there, we kill, we cheat—we do everything there, all in this little world, all the time immense areas of reality lying untouched. That is why our science comes into the picture. Philosophy comes into the picture. Who has ever taken Atman into account in normal talk? Business, industry, everywhere, where is the place for the Atman? Nowhere. Only things. We are handling things, things, things, things, and we take them for real. Otherwise handling will have no meaning. If a businessman handles money and says this is unreal, he won't do it. It is real. He himself is unreal but that is real. Things are more real than the man.

It is common sense to be afraid of the unknown, but we must go beyond common sense. Common sense is very ordinary children's mind. For worldly life common sense is needed. For making money, enjoying life, for all these—common sense is needed. But for the knowledge of truth, you pierce through common sense. As I told you, like the earth is flat, that is common sense. Even geometry, we make geometry, but geometry is a false thing. There is no real

geometry. A, b, c—three points, length, breadth, and height—all these are false. Because it is a spherical world, but there is a straight line.

The attachment to this particular world seen by the five senses—all through common sense—must go. Attachment is the word. We are attached to it. It may be unreal but I am attached to it. That must go; I will be attached to only what is real. That is a wonderful state of mind. The scientist must have it. A Vedantin must have it. I am prepared to wait; I want the truth. I don't want this fancy. That is the idea. This geometry is a very interesting subject. How we study with great interest! Points a, b, c: this is long, this is long, this two like this—and all that. And the whole thing is false. Spherical world must have a spherical geometry. Originally they didn't understand that. All the propositions are false.

'As the rope, whose nature is not really known, is imagined in the dark to be a snake, a water-line etc., so also is the *Ātman* imagined (in various ways).'⁴⁴ This Atman we imagine as a little self, as the objects that you see, all these things. But, the Atman is in its own nature. We don't know what it is. 'What is the cause of the *Jīva*-idea?' (ibid.). The limited individual self in me—what is the cause of that? Illustration: '*Ātman* has been variously imagined as *Jīva*, *Prāṇa* and so forth because It is not known in its own nature, *i.e.*, pure essence of knowledge itself, the non-dual *Ātman*, quite distinct from such phenomenal characteristics indicated by the relation of cause and effect etc., which are productive of misery. This

is the unmistakable verdict of all the Upaniṣads' (ibid.), says Shankara.

'When the real nature of the rope is ascertained all the illusions about it disappear and there arises the conviction that it is the one (unchanged) rope and nothing else; even so is the nature of the conviction regarding the *Ātman*. ... The *Ātman* is imagined as *Prāṇa* and other endless objects. This is due to *Māyā* (ignorance) of the luminous (*Ātman* itself) by which It is (as it were) deluded' (109). The Atman is imagined in various forms? What are they? As Prana, Atman is bio-energy. Prana is energy and various endless objects. This is due to maya, of the luminous Atman itself by which it is deluded. The Atman is deluded in you and me that is the language. The Atman is deluded in you and me, who mistake all these things as real. Sri Ramakrishna used exactly that expression—caught up in the five elements, the Atman deludes himself. In this body the Atman deludes himself, I am limited; I am this, I am that. That is why this is a hypnotic state. You must be dehypnotised from it. Like the lion deludes that he is the sheep; really he is a lion himself in the true sense.

If it is definitely ascertained that the Atman is verily one, the one infinite Atman, in you, in me, in all. Vedanta is going to establish that. One infinite Atman in all, we imagine that it is separate in you, separate in me. 'How could it be imagined as the endless objects like *Prāṇa* etc., having the characteristics of the phenomenal experience? It is thus explained: This is due to the *Māyā* (ignorance) inhering in the luminous *Ātman*. As the illusion conjured up by the juggler makes the very clear sky appear covered with trees blooming with flowers and leaves, so does this luminous *Ātman* becomes deluded, as it were, by his own *Māyā*. "My *Māyā* cannot be easily got over" declares the *Gītā*' (109–10.). 'Mama maya duratyaya, my maya is difficult to

cross', Sri Krishna tells in the Gita.⁴⁵ God himself subjects himself to the maya. That is you and I. I am reasonable, I want to get out of it, and when you have become free you say, Oh! The whole thing was like a joke. What was a tragedy becomes a comedy when you realise that you are free. When you experience life it is a tragedy; when you know the truth of it, it becomes a comedy. There is a saying in English: life is a tragedy to those who live and a comedy to those who observe. When you live through, it is all tragedy.

'Those that know only *Prāṇa*, call It (*Ātman*) *Prāṇa*, those that know *Bhūtas* call It *Bhūtas*, those knowing *Guṇas* call It *Guṇas*, those knowing *Tattvas*, call It *Tattvas*' (110). Those that know only Prana call it Prana. Atman is Prana. Atman is mere energy, some people will say. Even in science today you will say it is quantum field energy that is the Atman, they will say. Or they call it *bhutas* or primary elements; gunas are the various qualities, *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*, and *tattvas*, all the twenty-four categories which create this universe. These are all from various philosophers. They are quoted here. *Tattvas*—the Shaivas enumerate three *tattvas*: Atman, *avidya*, and Shiva. Three *tattvas* are there.

'Those acquainted with the quarters (*Pādas*) call It quarters; those with objects, the objects; those with *Lokas*, the *Lokas*; those with *Devas*, the *Devas*' (111). This is how one Atman is imagined in thousand ways. It is this, it is this, it is this—all in different perspectives of your position. Those are Pauranikas.

Those knowing the Vedas call It the Vedas, those acquainted with the sacrifices, call It the sacrifices (Yajña); those conversant with the enjoyer, designate It as the enjoyer and those with the object of enjoyment, call It such. ... The Knowers of the subtle designate It as the subtle, the Knowers of the gross call It the gross. Those that are familiar with a Personality (having form)

call It a person, and those that do not believe in anything having form call It a void (111–2).

In Buddhism you call it a void. The Atman is a void.

‘The idea that the Ultimate Reality is an absolute void is also an illusion, as a void also should have a knower, and so cannot be the substratum of the positive fact of the empirical experience. ... The Knowers of time call It time; the Knowers of space (ether) call It space (ether). Those versed in disputation call It the problem in dispute and the Knowers of the worlds call It the worlds’ (113).

Then others call it time, time is the whole reality in this world. These are all from various schools of philosophy—how the one reality is appearing as different forms.

When you say the world is a void, the reality is a void, how do you know it? You, the subject, know the object as a void and therefore you are there, as the eternal self. The knower is there to know that a thing is void. That is the idea. The ultimate category cannot be a void. That is the logic of it. The ultimate category is a yes and not a no.

Any concept—void of course, is a concept and I am the perceiver of the concept. See, any object must have a subject to cognise it. Void is an object and the subject to cognise it is the Atman.

Yes, that is the correct way. It is indescribable is perfectly alright. But it is a zero, it is void, it is nothing—all that is wrong. The last category of thought is a yes and not a no. That is the language in Vedanta. If you say God exists, that is alright. If you say God does not exist, who says that? You, you are God. That we forget. To say God does not exist is to make an assertion, positive affirmation and the Self who affirms it is always there; otherwise no affirmation is possible. So affirmations and negations are possible because there is a Self. Take the Self away, none of this is possible. Keep quiet, silence. If Atman is silence, there is no harm. Atman is this; Atman

is that, all that are various imaginations about the Atman. And finally there is nothing. There is another imagination; the perceived imagination can never be negated.

It is like Descartes’ famous principle. In European thought, modern philosophy started with Descartes. There is a famous book on method, *Discourse on Method* by Descartes. I think in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. Let me begin with doubting everything, he said. Then he begins there, doubting this world, doubting this object, doubting the sun, doubting this, doubting that, and went on doubting everything. I shall doubt everything. Then he sat and thought, but then I am there to doubt—that I cannot doubt. Then everything collapses, that is how he comes there. Doubter cannot be doubted. This is exactly what Shankara says. He who is the negater, he is the Self, which perceives the negation. The Atman is the very Self of the negater, one who negates everything, his very Self is the Atman. Can you follow that simple logic? That Descartes said, doubter cannot be doubted. Isn’t it? Then, who is there to doubt? Doubter cannot be doubted, he said that. Then he started from there, again constructing a philosophy after all these wonderful experiments. Of course, he divided the world into two—subject and object. And that is the beginning of Cartesian dualism, which is inflicting so much harm on Western thought, according to so many writers. Aristotle’s realism, Cartesian dualism are two rigid things in Western thought.

Descartes said: ‘*Cogito, ergo sum*; I think, therefore I exist.’ He said that famous statement in French. But anyway, it comes very near to the Vedantic way of telling. The final negation is an impossibility. When you say there is nobody in this room, you are correct, there is nobody in this room. What about you? You are making a statement; you are there. Can you ever avoid

that, when you make a statement that there is nobody in the room. But you miss yourself in all calculation. That is going to come here.

Now, whenever you make a statement like that what is the implication? That you are there and you didn't take into account that you are there when you made the statement. That is all; you are that, you are that, Vedanta says. *Tat Tvam Asi* means that. The missing tenth, you are that missing tenth. That is the story Shankara gives here. Do you know that story? Ten people were crossing a river doing business in the town, going to the village. The river was swollen; they swam. They felt a suspicion that one of them was drowned and they started weeping, wailing: 'Oh, one of our comrades has been killed in the floods.' A man was passing. He asked: 'What is the matter with you?' 'Oh! Ten we were; one is washed away, we are sorry for the loss of our friend. We are now nine only.' 'How do you know?' 'We calculated, we counted ourselves, we are only nine.' He suspected that they had not counted properly. 'Come on, stand, you count one, two, and the last man counted ten. 'What has happened? You are ten.' Each one omitted counting himself. 'And you are that missing tenth,' that man said. That missing tenth you are, you are, you are, to everyone. That is exactly the Atman. You are that missing tenth. When you don't count yourself you are only nine. And weep and wail and go on beating the head—all this foolishness because you don't know you are always there. 'You are the missing tenth' means that.

'The Cognizers of the mind call It the mind; of the *Buddhi* (intellect) the *Buddhi*; of the *Citta* (mind-stuff), the *Citta*; and the Knowers of *Dharma* (righteousness) and *Adharma* (unrighteousness) call It the one or the other' (ibid.). So various ideas—mind, *chitta*, dharma, this, that—so many things people have so categories.

'Some say that the Reality consists of

twenty-five categories [that is the Sankhyas], others twenty-six, while there are others who conceive It as consisting of thirty-one categories and lastly people are not wanting who think such categories to be infinite' (114). So many categories are there, say physics, in the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. There are ninety-two elements, they said. Then, they went on reducing them, reducing them, then only three remains, electromagnetism, gravitation, and one more item, three items remain now—that is all. All the ninety-two have been reduced. 'The mutual contradiction among these different schools proves the fallacious character of their theories. The difference of opinion is due to the ignorance of the nature of Reality' (ibid.). Then only all these differences come.

'Those who know only to please others call It (Reality) such pleasure; those who are cognizant of the *Āśramas* call It the *Āśramas*; the grammarians call It the male, female or the neuter, and others know It as the *Para* and *Apara*' (ibid.). Those who know only pleasure, only to please others call it such pleasure; grammarians call it the male, female principle or neuter, others call it para and apara. These are all merely details of what you posit—it is this, it is this, it is this. Speculative philosophy—all the time the Atman is behind the infinite self, perceiving all these, watching all these. We miss it all the time.

'The Knowers of creation call It creation [Srishti]; the Knowers of dissolution describe It as dissolution and the believers in subsistence believe It to be subsistence. Really speaking, all these ideas are always imagined in *Ātman*' (115). All these are so many flickering in the Atman.

'He (the inquirer) cognizes only that idea that is presented to him. It (*Ātman*) assumes the form (of what is cognized) and thus protects (the inquirer). Possessed by that (idea) he realises it (as the sole essence [reality])' (116). This

is what we do: my religion, Allah, is the correct thing. Alright, you hold on; if it does good to you. Or Jehovah, yes hold on, so many ideas we have. They all do not know the Atman behind all these. Those who know they do not come to conflict with others. That is the idea. It is the difference between *matam* and *tattva*. I have got a very sacred idea. I hold it to myself. You live according to it, does you good, but don't quarrel with others, they have got their sacred ideas, that is called *matam* means opinion, the other is *tattvam*, the truth. Truth is more than opinion. So lay aside opinion and come to what is truth behind all these. Vedanta tries to do this. That is why it created more harmony among various sects and schools.

'What more is to be gained (by this kind of endless discussion)? Whatever idea or interpretation of such things as *Prāna* etc., narrated above or omitted, is shown to the inquirer by the teacher or other trustworthy persons. He realises that as the sole essence (*Ātman*), i.e. he understands that as, "I am that or that is mine" (ibid.), says Shankara.

'This *Ātman*, though non-separate from all these, appears, as it were, separate. [Prana, this, that—the Atman is not separate from them but appears to be separate.] One who knows this truly imagines (interprets) (the meaning of the Vedas) without hesitation' (117). Those who know the truth that the Atman alone has become all this they can interpret books in any way they like because they will always come to the truth only. And charity, compassion, understanding comes thereby. You know the central thing. I know what is gold and then I know all that is made of gold. There is nothing to worry there about. Those who only want one particular ornament, mind is concentrated on that particular thing, they quarrel with others. Those who have a comprehensive knowledge they don't

quarrel. That is the knowledge, Atman belongs to that. None but the knower of Atman is able to know truly the meaning of the Vedas, meaning of all the scriptures or even of science. Everything is the Atman.

'*Ētaresho-aprithagbhavaih prithageveti lakshitah*', the Atman which is non separate from all these, is considered to be separate, as this, this, this, this, but hold on for this is your own notion. That is what it is said, hold on to your notions, but don't project it, saying that you are wrong. This must be taken. The knower of the Atman will never do so.

'As are dreams and illusions or a castle in the air seen in the sky, so is the universe viewed by the wise in the Vedanta' (118). Considering the Atman, even in an atom you look at it, what is an electron? What is a proton? The essential mass of the whole atom is the proton. Thousand eight hundred forty times heavy is the proton compared to the electron. But we deal with the electron all the time. Mass of the proton is entirely neglected. Now we are able to understand that the proton is the essential core of the whole atom.

Shankara says:

'The unreality of duality has been demonstrated by reason. The same also can be deduced from the evidence of Vedānta Scriptures. Therefore it is stated: Dream objects and illusion, though unreal when their true nature is considered, are thought, in spite of their unreality, as real by the ignorant. As an imaginary city in the sky, [look at the cloud it looks like a big city] filled with shops full of vendable articles, houses, palaces and villages frequented by men and women, though appearing real to us, is seen to vanish suddenly as dream and illusion, which are known to be unreal (though they appear to be real)— so also is perceived this entire duality of the universe to be unreal. Where is this taught? This is thus taught in the Vedānta scriptures: "There is no multiplicity here" (ibid.).

This is a famous statement in the Upanishad. ‘*Neha nanasti kinchana*; there is no multiplicity here.’ We are all conjured up. Thus, today’s science can support it.

You are attached to the world. So, you say this is this, this is this, the scientists look through, this one is nothing, absolutely emptiness—the world is mere emptiness. Matter is so little in this universe. Take for example an atom, the core, the whole thing is emptiness. So much infinite space and a little bit of particle, within the atom itself. Just take the world, intervening space is so enormous, and matter here and there, just very little, that is the knowledge of the world and all these matter, what is that? A configuration of space and time. That is a very interesting language: all matter in this world are nothing but configuration of space and time, and that is why curvature of space time, Einstein introduced this concept. What is matter? Curvature of space and time. Wherever there is matter, space curves there. That’s all the nature of matter, curvature of space-time. The whole thing is against common sense but that is science today. Do not bring common sense into this picture.

Two fine quotations I will cite. In his Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh, Charles Sherrington says: ‘Mind, for anything perception can compass, goes therefore in our spatial world more ghostly than a ghost.’⁴⁶ A neurologist is writing this: ‘Invisible, intangible, it is a thing not even of outline; it is not a “thing”. It remains without sensual confirmation, and it remains without it for ever’ (ibid.). Mind cannot be verified by sensory experience and for all time. A ghostly something, then what is matter? Is it real? Come to Edinburgh, again Gifford Lectures by Eddington; that was Sherrington, this is Eddington, great giants: ‘In the world of physics we watch a shadowgraph.’⁴⁷ Shadow as in dream, the sentence of the Upanishad comes here. Waking objects and

dream objects both are shadowgraph. Dream objects are shadow but he didn’t want to accept the waking, but waking also is a shadowgraph. ‘We watch a shadowgraph performance of the drama of familiar life. The shadow of my elbow rests on the shadow table as the shadow ink flows over the shadow paper’ (ibid.). This is all *Mandukya Karika*. Who says this? Not Gaudapada, but Eddington. The frank realisation that physical science is concerned with the world of shadows is one of the most significant of recent advances. You have to swallow this. This is called the truth; the other is called opinion, they market opinion. In market, bazaar, you won’t have this truth. In a quiet thinking only this truth will come. That is the idea, opinion verses truth—big subject. If it is opinion, we also join, yes, the world is real, we also say, you are perfectly correct. But when you investigate the truth, you find, discover, that the whole thing is mere shadow. So that sentence he said that as dream objects are unreal, waking objects are also unreal. And today’s science cannot escape from that conclusion.

Mystery of matter, in his introduction to Gifford Lectures. Then, another article in a science journal, Sieman’s science journal, 1970 issue. You want to know the seer, the observer, the self.

Scarcely have we discovered the cosmos and are behind the moon, when there awaits us a new universe, namely, the full inside of nature, the kingdom of the ‘soul’ as it was previously called, the dimension of depth that ‘in the inside there is also a universe’ as Goethe said, actually a multiverse, the perspective of our modern world which nowhere shows *the* world, but worlds, situations, anthropologies, fragments, aspects in upheaval. Everything in this grandiose, hectic, and also moving panorama of the ending second millennium points to the conclusion that we are in the middle of a second enlightenment.⁴⁸

That is the solution. With regard to the world,

we have high enlightenment and we have reduced ourselves to zero in that knowledge. Man has been devalued in our civilisation. Things are important, not man. That is civilisation. Find out! Even in a room there is more baggage than human beings can move there. That was not so in the olden days. A house was for men and not for furniture. Today it is meant for furniture, not for you. So, man has been devalued. He sells himself for five dollars. He murders a man for one dollar. What does this show? He has reduced himself to that level. This is the nature of the world. Now, a new enlightenment is going to come. We shall realise our own true nature. Infinite, what is this compared to that? What is this real? This is the real of all the real. Now, Vedanta uses a wonderful expression that will satisfy you. The world is real. That is the language of the Upanishad and the Atman is the real of the real. '*Prana vai satyam tesham esha satyam*; The vital force is truth, and It is the Truth of that.'⁴⁹ This Prana, energy is true and the Atman is the truth of that truth. Truth of truth. Not truth of error but truth of truth. This is how they presented this subject. Capra quoted that in his book. Now comes a terrible statement. The next verse is very terrible, it will give us a lot of headache!

'Fear rises verily from duality', 'That duality does never exist', 'When all this has become *Atman* then who can see whom and by what?' In these and other passages, the wise men, i.e., those who see the real nature of things, declare (the unreal nature of the universe). The *Smṛiti* of Vyasa also supports this view in these words: 'This duality of the universe, perceived by the wise like a hole seen in darkness in the ground, is unstable like the bubbles that appear in rain-water, always undergoing destruction, ever devoid of bliss, and ceasing to exist, after dissolution' (119).

Fear rises verily from duality. Whenever you see something separate from you, you have got a

sense of fear. When you feel you are one with it there is no fear. Once you become friendly, fear goes. Of the strangers you are afraid. Once you become friendly fear goes. Duality causes fear. That duality does never exist. When all this has become Atman, then who can see whom and by what? The Smṛiti of Vyasa also supports this view in these words: this duality of the universe, perceived by the wise like a hole seen in darkness in the ground, is unstable like the bubbles that appear in rain water, always undergoing destruction, ever devoid of bliss, and ceasing to exist, after dissolution. Bubbles—only this time when I was coming, they asked me 'do you want soda?' I don't want all these; they wanted to give me some Coke and all that, I said, I don't like. But soda? Yes, yes, give me a glass of soda. And, I was watching bubbles coming up. I was simply fascinated. If you go deep into the nature of the world it is just like that. Bubble—froth and bubble.

'*Nalini-dala-gata-jalamatitaralam, tadvat-jivitam atishaya chapalam*; The water drop resting on a lotus petal has a very uncertain existence; so also life is ever unstable.'⁵⁰ Take a lotus leaf, put some water on it. You will find a little bubble of water in one. Just like a pearl, shaking, shaking, and never touches the leaf, just going. Life is like that, says Shankara. All these may create pessimism. No, truth never creates pessimism. It is not a swinging from optimism to pessimism. When England was rich, she was optimistic, today she has become pessimistic. But Vedanta is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. Know the truth and live according to the truth. If it is true, I shall live according to it. That is Vedanta.

'There is [therefore] no dissolution, no birth, none in bondage, none aspiring for wisdom, no seeker of liberation and none liberated. This is the absolute truth.'⁵¹ It is very difficult to digest. So many scholars have found it indigestible. This is a highly quoted verse. What is the truth? The

Atman is—that is the truth. The quantum energy is, the field is, the rest is all imagination. But it is difficult to digest truth. Truth cannot be easily digested.

It is exactly so in Zen also. See, in all these higher philosophies, you get these ideas. In *Ashtavakra Gita* you find one sentence there. That you are practising meditation is a bondage.⁵² What is there to meditate? You are the Atman. Fools only meditate, it says. What a dangerous doctrine! Truth is like a corrosive substance, it corrodes. Corrodes what? Corrosive material it will corrode. What cannot be corroded cannot be corroded. That is the truth. Very corrosive substance it is. So that you sit in meditation is your bondage, number one, another sentence comes there: until you forget all that you have learnt from your gurus—be he Brahma, Shiva, or Vishnu, you will never get peace of mind. It is a dangerous doctrine isn't it?

'*Haro yat upadeshta te*' (16.11). Let your guru be Hari, Hara, or Brahma, until you forget all that they taught, you will never get peace of mind. That is strong stuff for weak stomachs! But this is just the truth, but then we have to divert it to our level. That is there plenty. This is the supreme Truth. If you can digest it, it is well and good, otherwise dilute it. When you feed babies with milk, what do you do? You dilute it. If you cannot digest fresh milk, you will dilute it, there is no harm. Those who can stand it, let them stand it.

And some of the philosophers, who interpret this verse, find it difficult and say: The philosophy that says that an unreal jiva strives for unreal salvation is itself an unreal philosophy. Not knowing what exactly is the statement that the Atman has no need for meditation. The Atman has no need to strive and we are that Atman. Only thing is we don't know. If we don't know, we shall follow some of these methods—that you will see later. All these are taught to those,

who do not understand it, so that they slowly understand it through various easy methods. Just like you start modern geometry and there you will say the whole thing is false. Higher mathematics will say all this is false. But don't say that at the beginning, then you don't start anything at all. Today we exactly do all these things. We start with a proposition and in the end, the whole thing is false. In Panini's grammar, he begins: let this be this. In the last sutra, he says, therefore all that is said is false, this is this. Therefore, people say assuming this to be true like this it will come. Like that you will find higher thinking is like that. The world is round is a truth but we started with the world is flat; in the end we will say it is all false. So at the right time the teaching should come. Then the child is not bewildered. In the beginning, if you give this, the child will be bewildered and today's mathematics is exactly like that. First we had Euclidian, then Romanian—in today's science you will find all these.

This verse sums up the meaning of the chapter. [This whole universe is just the Atman alone, there is no coming, there is no going, and there is no causality, there is nothing. Take away the human spectacle and see, everything is the Atman. The Atman has no bondage, he has no liberation but what does it do?] When duality is perceived to be illusory and *Atman* alone is known as the sole reality, then it is clearly established that all our experiences, ordinary or religious (Vedic), verily pertain to the domain of ignorance. [When you don't know the Atman as it is and all these sacrifices, ceremonies, politics—all these continue]. Then one perceives that there is no dissolution *i.e.*, destruction (from the standpoint of reality): no birth or creation *i.e.*, coming into existence; no one in bondage *i.e.*, no worldly being, no pupilage *i.e.*, no one adopting means for the attainment of liberation [as a student], no seeker after liberation, and no one free from bondage (as bondage does not exist). The Ultimate Truth is that the stage of bondage

etc., cannot exist in the absence of creation and destruction. How can it be said that there is neither creation nor destruction? It is thus replied: there is no duality (at any time).⁵³

Yesterday, today, tomorrow it is all the Atman. Swami Atulananda's book is entitled *The Atman Alone Abides*. That little book, *The Atman Alone Abides*—Atulanandaji is a Dutchman, from Holland.

The absence of duality is indicated by such scriptural passages as 'When duality *appears* to exist ...', 'One who appears to see multiplicity ...', 'All this is verily *Ātman*', '*Ātman* is one and without a second', 'All that exists is verily the *Ātman*' etc. Birth or death can be predicated only of that which exists and never of what does not exist, such as the horns of a hare etc. That which is non-dual (*Advaita*) can never be said to be born or destroyed. [What is there to reduce it or to destroy it? The Atman alone is.] That it should be non-dual and at the same time subject to birth and death, is a contradiction in terms. It has already been said that our dual experience characterized by (the activities of) *Prāṇa* etc., is a mere illusion having *Ātman* for its substratum ... duality being non-different from mental (subjective) imagination (cannot have a beginning or an end). For, duality is not perceived when one's mental activities are controlled (as in *Samādhi*) or in deep sleep. [There is no duality.] Therefore it is established that duality is a mere illusion of the mind. Hence it is well said that the Ultimate Reality is the absence of destruction etc., on account of the non-existence of duality (which exists only in the imagination of the mind) (*ibid.*).

This is a famous verse of this chapter.

'Scriptures serve a negative purpose ... [they help] to remove all attributes which are ideations of our mind ... generally associated with the *Ātman*. ... This (the *Ātman*) is imagined both as unreal objects that are perceived as the non-duality. The objects (*Bhāvas*) are imagined in

the non-duality itself. Therefore, non-duality (alone) is the (highest) bliss' (125).

I can only quote our Einstein. He said that particle and field both cannot be true, for the field alone is true. He had to say that the field alone is true. That is our search for truth. But convenience, pleasure, comforts—all that is separate.

The highest teaching of Vedānta is that Brahman alone is real. What are known as *Bhāvas* or multiple phenomena are nothing but Brahman. As the snake is identical with the rope from the standpoint of knowledge ... when one perceives the snake as other than the rope, he is afraid. This fear is based upon ignorance. Similarly, when one finds the objects are separate from *Ātman* he feels attached to or disgusted with them and suffers accordingly. But the highest bliss is realized when one finds everything as Brahman. From the standpoint of Truth, *prapañca* or the phenomenal world or even the idea of perceiving them does not exist as separate from Brahman (127–8).

(To be continued)

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52. See *Ashtavakra Samhita*, 15.20.
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Vedanta Answers

Swami Smaranananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

[Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, has been asked various questions regarding various aspects of spiritual life by the young and old alike, over a period of time. This is a collection of such questions and his answers to them—*Editor*.]

QUESTION: Do you think one can get wisdom or strength by reading books only from a particular tradition?

Answer: I do not say that you can collect all the necessary wisdom from one tradition. You will have to fix your goal in life and then read the necessary books for further guidance. More important than reading various books is to reflect upon what you have read and understand things.

Question: How to avoid distractions in self-study?

Answer: Obstructions come in all fields. Detect them and eliminate them.

Question: What does self-study mean for those who cannot read or write?

Answer: Hearing suitable books is the substitute for those who cannot read or write.

Question: Sometimes when I wake up in the morning, the mind is not fresh and it feels burdensome. What to do become fresh?

Answer: It is common—the mind takes some time to become fresh after sleep. To quicken the process, you may walk for a few minutes or take a cup of tea.

Question: How is strength different from fearlessness? Can truthfulness give us both strength and fearlessness?

Answer: Without strength one cannot be fearless. To dwell in truth both are necessary.

Question: Some people get carried away by vices in the company of immoral people. How should they get over this kind of situation? Is fear of failure right or wrong? On the one hand, it can push one to work hard; on the other it can be counterproductive and harmful. How can one do action without thinking about the results, as propounded by the Gita?

Answer: (1) One should keep discrimination active so as to save oneself from all sorts of vices. (2) Fear of anything is not helpful. Swami Vivekananda believes that failures are stepping stones to success. But the goal should be clear, healthy, and morally justifiable. (3) People act in the hope of attaining some desirable result. One should not be attached to them, for all these are temporary.

Question: If Atman is immutable, then how do we inherit fear in rebirth?

Answer: Atman is not the body or the mind. One does not want to be born again to suffer in the world of relative happiness. One has to realise that I am the Atman, not subject to birth and death.

Question: You mentioned about avoiding the bad things through a story. But the world contains too many bad things, how can we avoid them and get going through our life without being disturbed?

Answer: One should keep one's sense of discrimination alive and before doing anything you should avoid bad things, which makes you weak.

Question: There is a fear of evaluation attached with public speaking. How to overcome it?

Answer: Don't bother about public evaluation of your speech. Prepare yourself well and make ideas clear in your own mind, so that you can answer any questions that may be put to you.

Question: I have watched a TV program on meditation. I observed some people jumping up during meditation. I could not understand what is that state.

Answer: Nor do I know why anyone should jump up while meditating!

Question: We can gain control over internal nature through meditation. But how do we gain control over external nature?

Answer: Meditation can help both ways—internal and external.

Question: For the past fifteen days I am trying to meditate very hard, but my mind always wanders and I am not getting focus. And sometimes I go to sleep. Please give me a solution.

Answer: These are all common symptoms. Fifteen days is too short a time to assess the results of meditation.

Question: Is it possible to remain in a state of meditation for all the time? You say that meditation is a state of observation of mind, thoughtless state of mind, and at the same time, you say that one should meditate by concentrating on some object. How to do this? You also say that everybody is meditating on worldly things like money. How are they doing that? What is the exact meaning of living consciously?

Answer: It is possible to remain in a state of meditation all the time only in *Nirvikalpa samadhi*.

Question: I am not able to believe in God and divinity, can I meditate?

Answer: You can meditate on anything, but meditation on ordinary objects will produce ordinary results, for instance, meditation on a car.

Question: Is it necessary to analyse afterwards, the thoughts that arise during meditation?

Answer: Try to analyse the thoughts bubbling up at the time of meditation, then and there.

Question: I am doing meditation regularly, but sometime I cannot meditate properly. It disturbs me. How can I avoid this?

Answer: Disturbances are bound to come. Ignore them and try to think positive and pure thoughts.

Question: I feel slightly dizzy or sleepy at times.

Answer: These are natural. Get up and walk a few steps or take a cup of hot tea.

Question: How can we affect our inner core by a stream of thoughts? We do sometimes develop an unhealthy introversion. And it does become wrong. How can we develop harmony among different groups through a good holy company? How can we cultivate good habits essential for character building? Sometimes, it is difficult to maintain continuity.

Answer: (1) '*Vitarka-badhane prati-paksha bhavanam*'; To obstruct thoughts which are inimical to Yoga, contrary thoughts should be brought.² It means that you will have to bring in good thoughts to drive away bad thoughts. Too many thoughts will distract the mind. After dwelling on a subject, try to fix the mind on one thought. If you think harmonious thoughts, you can develop harmony with others. (2) What do you do to become a great player or sportsperson? Practice. Here, too, practice is the key to character building.

Question: Is it possible to think about the mental status of a person who enjoys both holy and bad company?

Answer: The question is not clear. How can a person find pleasure in bad company if one is devoted to holy company?

(To be continued)

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TRADITIONAL TALES

Pilgrimage or Guru?

PADMAPADA WAS one of the main disciples of Acharya Shankara. Once, Padmapada desired to visit many places of pilgrimage and bathe in many holy rivers. Hence, he sought permission from his guru, Shankara.

To that Acharya Shankara said: ‘My dear disciple! Instead of wasting time wandering hither and thither, one can attain the same merit of pilgrimage by staying with one’s guru and serving him. By worshipping the guru, one attains the same merit as derived from worshipping images of gods. The water that washes the guru’s feet is same as the waters of numerous holy rivers.

‘There are two kinds of monks: The first kind have realised the ultimate Reality and are engaged in austerities. The second kind desire to progress in spiritual life and do their spiritual practices with fervour. To attain God, one has to practise one-pointed meditation without any distraction.

‘Just think of it: how many difficulties a pilgrim has to go through! Can one have spiritual fervour, having become tired due to walking a long distance, and when misery and tiredness overpowers you? A place to stay; water; food; ways to get out of bodily troubles; protecting one’s possessions; facilities for bathing, doing japa, and meditating and an appropriate travel companion—thoughts of all these things distract the mind of the pilgrim. A diseased or a tired pilgrim is left behind by the travel companions.

‘Therefore, free from such anxieties, it is better to serve one’s guru and follow the path of knowledge according to his instructions, staying in one place. Pleased by the disciple’s service, the guru blesses the disciple, which leads to

his self-realisation. The disciple is freed of maya and crosses the transmigratory cycle of repeated births and deaths, and becomes one with God. Hence, of what avail is wandering here and there? Know that guru is the embodiment of God.’

At these words of Acharya Shankara, Padmapada humbly expressed his desire, not denying his guru’s words: ‘O Lord! It is good to accept the guru’s words without question. However, please allow me to say something. Though I know fully well that the company of one’s guru is better than the pilgrimage of many holy places, my mind is not content with not going on a pilgrimage. Whatever difficulties you speak of are common to all who undertake any pilgrimage. However, my Lord, has anyone attained self-realisation living in comfort and luxury? How can devotion and knowledge increase if one stays comfortably in the same place with the idea that the body should not suffer?

‘As far as the basic amenities are concerned, if one deserves it, one would get food and other necessities even in a forest. Else, one would suffer irrespective of where one lives. One need not fall ill only when on a pilgrimage. One can become diseased, even while staying in the same place. Similarly, irrespective of whether a person stays comfortably in the same place or keeps moving about, at the appropriate hour, the god of death would snatch away one’s life. Hence, I think that living in comfort, suffering due to illness, or death occurs according to one’s own actions. Further, even lawmakers like Manu have granted exemptions like: “No sin would accrue if one is unable to perform one’s regular duties due to constraints caused by place and time.” A true devotee learns

to do spiritual practices irrespective of the place of stay. I fully believe that such a devotee's mind is unwaveringly fixed on the Atman.

'Bathing in holy rivers gives peace of mind. The experiences of travelling to many places broaden one's mind. Meeting with ascetics and monks staying in various places helps one tackle the obstacles in spiritual life. When pilgrimage has so many benefits, who would lose an opportunity to go on one? Wise sages, monks, and good people are our true relatives. By mixing with such holy persons, one progresses in the search for truth.

'Further, it is possible for a true disciple to constantly meditate on one's guru and be in his proximity, even though physically at a great distance from the guru. But, if a disciple cannot avail of the opportunity through faith and devotion, one remains far from the guru, though physically present near him.

'And so, my master, I seek your permission to go on this pilgrimage, which has the potential to benefit me in many ways. I also pray to you to kindly guide me how to behave, what to do, and what not to do, when on the pilgrimage.'

Joyed on hearing these enthusiastic words of his favourite disciple, Padmapada, Acharya Shankara told encouragingly: 'O child! I told you to stay with me only to check your firmness. You want to go on a pilgrimage with complete faith and devotion. You have my full blessings. When one sets on a journey to places of pilgrim, temples, or holy cities, there may be many paths to reach the destination. Among them the most used is the safest. Secret or lesser-known paths are used by people like thieves, robbers, and evil persons who worship demons by offering sacrifices to them. Avoid all such paths that can be dangerous. Go only by that path by which many travel without any troubles.


'Your intellect would become clearer if you seek monks, sages, and scholars wherever you go, and discuss with them good things and have

Vedantic discussion. You would know of rare things by having such discussions. This knowledge would make you enthusiastic, alleviate your suffering, and make you fearless.

'Don't forget to meet any monk, sage, or scholar, who might be staying near your place of stay. Salute them and seek their blessings. A person, who does not give others the respect they deserve, has a disturbed life.

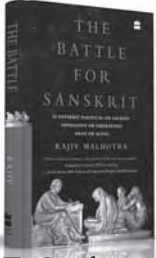
'There is a problem even with having meaningful conversations with good people. The more one gets joy and fulfilment in their company, the more one feels sad when parting with them. Where in this world is a place or thing with not even a slight blemish?

'Do not stay in any place for many days; that would become a cause of bondage. Also, it would delay your schedule of reaching different places. Decide upon the places to visit well in advance and plan your journey accordingly. If you delay, some unexpected obstacle would crop up and would stop you from reaching your destination. Many people may accompany you in the guise of travellers, wearing good dress and behaving politely. Beware of them and interact with them with complete alertness. Else, they might rob you of anything they may lay their hands on, like your books and clothes. Don't believe strangers. Don't mix with evil people. Don't indulge in unnecessary talks and quarrels with anybody. Be pure and honest in all your dealings. Move about as one in the bliss of Atman.' With these words, Acharya Shankara bid goodbye to Padmapada on his journey.

This conversation helps us understand clearly guru's greatness, the benefit of pilgrimage, and the things a pilgrim should follow. They are so apt for our trouble-free pilgrimages! This conversation between Acharya Shankara and Padmapada reminds that between Lord Yama and Nachiketa in the *Katha Upanishad*. 

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



The Battle For Sanskrit

Rajiv Malhotra

HarperCollins Publishers, A-75, Sector 57, Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201 301.
www.harpercollins.co.in. 2016. xviii + 468 pp. HB. ₹ 699. ISBN 9789351775386.

Is Sanskrit a dead language or still vibrant and a capable medium for all discourses: sacred and secular? This question has been agitating the minds of scholars and laypersons alike for quite some time. The answer to this question has deep relevance and significance to contemporary India and is of great importance to the world at large. The answer lies in doing a critical and objective analysis based on the origin, evolution, and development of Sanskrit. In fact such an examination is essential for any language. A thorough reading of the book under review should bring a hope for the future of humankind now in the grip of peril, through India's messages essentially conceived, sustained, and delivered through the medium of Sanskrit.

Rajiv Malhotra in his erudite and exhaustive book, *The Battle For Sanskrit: Is Sanskrit Political Or Sacred, Oppressive Or Liberating, Dead Or Alive?* has done just this kind of a scholarly study. His methodology and analysis may be termed modern in its approach but Malhotra shows his exemplary understanding of linguistics, history, and tradition. Very briefly, Rajiv Malhotra, a physics and computer science graduate, worked as an information technology executive in the US and later as a management consultant and launched his own ventures in twenty countries. He took early retirement in mid-90s at the age of forty-four and established Infinity Foundation, a non-profit organisation based in Princeton, New Jersey, USA.

Before we go into taking a good look at the book, we may briefly recapitulate the background behind the book. It is important to do so. A study of India and its historical and socio-cultural past have attracted compelling attention of scholars

and academicians of all persuasions from all over the world. This Indian heritage, in its multiple dimensions and perspectives has evolved from Vedic times that goes back to five millennia in time. The progression and evolution of knowledge systems that evolved from the Vedas, in their cosmic and temporal dimensions have indeed been many and have covered practically all areas of human knowledge in both the phenomenal and noumenal dimensions including the epistemological and literary aspects. These are extraordinary achievements for the human race and constitute the seminal contribution of India in every sense to the growth of world civilisations and culture. Until the first few decades of the second millennium CE, India had been the major centre of attraction for all aspiring students from various parts of the world and learning centres like Nalanda have held prime positions as centres of learning. Historians and visitors from various parts of the world, especially the Far East and the Middle East, came to learn. The chronicles of their findings and several such records in the earlier millennia occupy significant and objective documents of history. Most importantly Indian thought systems, ideas, and messages were adopted by many other civilisations for their enlightenment and education. For example Indian concepts of mathematics, astronomy, medicine, surgery, and so on served as foundations of modern scientific growth. Indian metaphysical ideas embedded in Vedanta today seem the basis of many exhilarating new inquiries by modern science especially in the areas of neurology and physics.

The enormity of Indian contribution is mind-boggling. Vedas are believed to be vibrations in space, originally realised intuitively by rishis, who had reached great yogic heights and for more than a millennium continued to be transmitted orally in a long tradition of teacher and disciple. Several recensions, attributed to various rishis, in all the four Vedas were preserved in the line of rishis and

survived for long. However the recensions that survive now are only a small fraction, the depletion caused by several adverse interventions. The concept of yajnas, Vedic rituals—not found in other faiths; Upanishads, the philosophical quintessence of the Vedas, auxiliaries of the Vedas, and various systems of philosophy, dealing with exhaustive delineation of hermeneutics embedded in the Vedas, structured understanding of various knowledge systems that deal with logic, philosophy, astronomy, yoga—a penetrative study of the inner human being, science, and metaphysics arose as an expansion and evolution of Vedas. India also saw the rise of various systems that proposed thinking varied from the Vedas like Buddhism and Jainism. All these deal with an inquiry into the nature of reality, external and internal. As this expansion took place, came Indian contributions to mathematics, technology, and science, texts dealing with administration, economics, fair and just administration, and rules for efficient social order. Many of these spread throughout the world and contributed to immense refinements in the methodologies of the West. India has also extended a harmonious welcome and was home to many faiths that were persecuted in the rest of the world.

One major area of difference between India and the West is the approach to understanding the nature of reality and there are fundamental differences between Western conceptions and Eastern conceptions and India always held a pre-eminent position in the East. Many of these differences lay in civilisational, religious, and cultural domains. The Indian understanding is anchored firmly and unequivocally in the Vedas and India always comprehended that the Vedas are without a beginning. This brings in the concept of eternity, in terms of time and space, the ideas that are seriously engaging the attention of modern science. The Western idea, in an epistemological and ontological sense has been derived from the Aristotelian idea, roughly stated as a law of cause; rather causes, and effect. The idea of religion, in the Western sense is history-centric and oriented in terms of revelation. Science and scientific ideas were inexorably bound, till at least the last decades of the nineteenth century, within the scope and structure of these ideas. The essential differences between West and India

lies in the conception of reality and the Indian position is centred in the understanding that the reality of the universe is rooted in dharma or the cosmic order with its very nature as Satya and Rita, the cosmic order. The Western idea is based on a linear concept of history whereas Indian concept is that it is cyclical. These bring in extraordinary differences in understanding.

The most critical means and vehicle that has carried all this progression of thought and action from the Vedic period till this day is Sanskrit, perhaps the most evolved language and linguistic system known to human beings. It was the vehicle of the spoken and written language, continued as a repository of knowledge systems and was versatile enough to facilitate communication in the common parlance and in everyday life too. Sanskrit was and has always been the critical binding force that has held India together.

This continuous stream of thought process, knowledge creation, and civilisational excellence continued unabated till about the twelfth century CE. Though there were several external aggressions until then, these never disturbed the flow and integrity of India. Whatever systems differed from the Vedic framework was given their due place of respect academically and socially. Thereafter Indian stream faced some turbulence. Though this is not the place to discuss this change in detailed and historical terms, it is essential to record briefly to serve as a background for this discussion. The Indian way of life saw some perturbations from the thirteenth century CE when the Mughals came and occupied many parts of North India. Though historically it is yet uncertain how much they disrupted Indian culture and Sanskrit, considerable portion of India went on with its course of tradition and culture. However the real distraction and disturbance came with the British taking over the political and administrative control of the land by displacing the Mughals. Foundations of destructive influence were laid by Sir William Jones (1746–94) and his Asiatic society helped by some research led by scholars like Max Mueller who, though learned in Sanskrit, were actually laying the foundations of European orientalism, whose primary agenda was to thrust the European elitism with an evangelical agenda to dub India as a land of primitives who needed to

be guided by European elites for the good of primitives as Westerners deemed. No one laid this down more empathically than Thomas Babington Macaulay, with his February 1835 minutes on education submitted to the British Parliament that actually sought to convert Indians into a race of clerks. Macaulay dubbed Indian education as primitive and Indians needed to be educated through civilised European learning. India was dubbed as a primitive place and any brightness was a result of Aryan invasion from outside. This was a critical phase of misrepresentation of India and its past by colonialists.

Macaulay declared:

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. ... From the sixth year of schooling onwards, instruction should be in European learning, with English as the medium of instruction. This would create a class of anglicized Indians who would serve as cultural intermediaries between the British and the Indians; the creation of such a class was necessary before any reform of vernacular education. I feel that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population (<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html> accessed 17 July 2016).

What in effect Macaulay did was to lay the basis for decline of Sanskrit. He starved the government endowments and funds for Sanskrit education, which was a sacred tradition of rulers of India and Indian society. Sanskrit was primarily targeted for elimination by Macaulay and his likes and contemporaries, as they recognised that it was the most powerful force and highly developed linguistic medium that sustained the integrity of India and also had the breadth of vision and depth of creativity to adopt, adapt, and enrich regional languages and this connecting web integrated India, which was a harmonious and natural union of different regional specialities, cultural preferences, and a vast, rich, and varied folklore.

It must be placed on record that after independence, the Government of India set up a Sanskrit commission in 1956–7, which laid down many useful guidelines for the restoration of Sanskrit. The Central Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development had on 23 December 2013 issued a circular announcing the creation of the Second Sanskrit Commission. The thirteen-member committee was given one year tenure and asked to submit its report by the end of 2014. This second commission could never start its work.

Rajiv Malhotra lays down this position with meticulous detail based on exhaustive research over more than two decades. It must also be recorded that for the last more than twenty-five years after he took voluntary retirement from his executive profession in the US, he has examined whole gamuts of texts, commentaries, historical accounts, and socio-cultural patterns of India, from various perspectives in order to understand the causes for the decline of this great culture whose origins go back to more than five millennia ago.

The present book locates various causes for the apparent decline of Sanskrit and suggests remedies. In fact, to have a deeper appreciation of this book it is necessary to very briefly recapitulate the history of India, with a focus of its cultural and spiritual heritage from the Vedic times till modern post-Independent India. This obviously gives a picture of the total fabric in all respects including the economic and socio-political structures at various times. This traces the trials and tribulations that this organic entity called India

underwent and how it coped with them and sustained itself. These have been very briefly outlined in the preceding paras. In fact this course of history has been elaborately and deeply researched by Malhotra in four of his books published earlier.

In *Invading the Sacred Space*, of which he was the general editor, Malhotra talks how sacredness and sacred dimension constitute the heart of India and external efforts sought to denigrate this dimension. In his book *Breaking India: Western Interventions in Dravidian and Dalit Fault Lines*, co-authored with Aravindan Neelakandan, Malhotra analyses how depredations due to various invasions, especially the colonial invasion, tried to dismantle and disfigure the sacred dimension of India by exploiting fault lines based on misinterpreted and mischievous interpretations of caste and regional divisions. Malhotra describes how absurd racial theories were used to condemn India's sacredness. *Being Different* is an intense study of India's identity among world cultures, and *Indra's Net*—a metaphor that Malhotra takes from the Atharva Veda, *shakrasya jala*, to delineate how the concept of Indian dharma is a collective web of various dharma features that form a total and mutually complementary and reflective network of interrelated individual features. This book is particularly striking for its exhilarating insight into several ideas now being investigated by modern science in the fields of physics, quantum mechanics, quantum entanglement, neurology, and so on that are echoes of Vedantic ideas. In several ways the primary focus in *Indra's Net* is an exhaustive and fascinating presentation of Swami Vivekananda's defence of Hinduism, his creative interpretations of dharma, particularly Swamiji's powerful presence in the West where he carried the message of Vedanta, that came for the first time as a revelation to the Western mind in the nineteenth century and also served as a means for opening their minds.

Having laid this background, we may briefly examine *The Battle for Sanskrit*, which examines the totality of India and whose central personality is constituted by sacredness and dharma. Different systems of learning interacted with each other, discoursed and debated, and put forth the opponents' position—technically called the *purva-paksha* to establish the right position. All this was

done with equanimity and integrity in all epochs through the medium of Sanskrit. The insights, the capacity of interpretation, the understanding of the philological and linguistic nuances of Sanskrit shown by Malhotra through his research would bring credit even to the best of Sanskrit scholars who have spent their whole life in learning and teaching Sanskrit. His method of analysis is modern, in keeping with the contemporary methodologies of analysis, and yet he never deviates from the traditional discourse in either his interpretations or inferences and is always open to the traditional Indian methodology of interrogation and debate. His capacity for articulation would bring credit to even the best of modern journalists.

Malhotra covers his exhaustive discourse in eleven chapters and gives copious notes, references, citations, and bibliography. He presents the academic position of an array of Western scholars trained and educated in European universities and took to Sanskrit studies from the nineteenth century and still pursue such studies. Presently American academic centres which have created faculties of Sanskrit studies have taken over. They are all, as Malhotra says, coloured by a Western focus that is not able to comprehend the Indian integrated approach based on sacredness coupled with a correct understanding of the origin and evolution of Sanskrit. Out of these scholars Malhotra interrogates a very representative scholar, Sheldon Pollock, who is very representative of the Western approach, although learned in Sanskrit. Malhotra essentially examines how the intensive effort of all of them is to study Sanskrit, misappropriate highly significant and powerful ideas from the whole corpus of Sanskrit, and digest them into a Western framework, but all the time relegating Indian tradition and Sanskrit culture as lacking in intellectual substance and vigour. In the following few paragraphs, the essential issues and criteria laid down by Malhotra are synoptically stated by taking them from representative chapters. These are elaborately and with extensive justifications discussed by Malhotra with extensive bibliographic references.

In his chapter 'European Orientalism', Malhotra traces the course of British history in India and its interventions to bring schisms into the fault lines based on caste, religions, and regions

by inappropriate interpretations and applications of scriptural references to these aspects and how the political intentions for rule and domination were camouflaged in terms of introduction of English to substitute Sanskrit for the betterment of ruled people and how new generations of subservient subjects were created to serve the purpose of subjugating a great language and culture that was an integral part of it. One of his insightful examinations relates to the genres of scriptures and poetics; scriptures constituting texts of knowledge systems across a range of disciplines—medicine, mathematics, philosophy, chemistry, architecture, farming, and so on. Poetics, as he classifies generically, include literary works and artistic texts. Citing the so-called modern Western, often termed secularist, interpretations, he traces how scriptures are misinterpreted as lacking in creative freedom as they are derived from Vedas which are deemed as primitive.

Another aspect is the true development of language from the oral medium, with great meaning of sounds and vibrations serving as keys to higher states of consciousness and gradually leading to the written medium and thereby resulting in the evolution of grammar. The Western interpretation dismisses this approach. Then there is the relationship between vernaculars, their development and growth, and Sanskrit. Malhotra critiques the Western interpretation that broadly the vernaculars lack common origin with Sanskrit. This is strongly contested by Malhotra with such forceful technical argument that one would feel that he is exploring new dimensions of linguistics. Perhaps it is rather alarming that Western Indologists project that Sanskrit and Vedas have such in-built structures and ideas of social hierarchy and oppression that they were imported to Europe to support their racist prejudices and that German Indologists later adopted it to create the Nazi supremacy race. The whole point of Malhotra is that Western Indological positions related to Sanskrit are so distorted and weird that they beat all norms of rationality and sensibility. Malhotra strongly demolishes these perverse positions and his reasoning is so illustrative and establishes the strength of India's *purva-paksha* tradition. A position that is even more perverse is the Western

Indologists' argument that the Ramayana represented an ideal model of atrocities against women, and *rakshasas*, who were the mythological representations of today's social equivalents that are not the brahmin-kshatriya combine; obviously, Malhotra says they mean the Dalits or generally shudras. This militates against the traditional view that the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are sacred texts and that the Mahabharata is an illumined commentary on the philosophy of history as defined by Vyasa, *itihasa pradipa*.

In another chapter Malhotra narrates how European orientalism shifted to America and its prestigious universities like Harvard, Columbia, and so on. Malhotra talks of the Orientalists' myth making in creating what he calls 'atrocious literature' by exaggerating every event of social attrition, however small, as an evidence of atrocity by upper class brahmin-kshatriya combine against Dalits and equivalents.

Malhotra exhaustively analyses how Western scholarship, having borrowed seminal ideas from Sanskrit, utilised them for their own literary and practical utility, misinterpreting what he calls 'non-translatable' Sanskrit words; for instance 'Atman' is translated as soul, which is incorrect. The whole effort is to finally relegate Sanskrit as a source of oppression. This perhaps is the most serious issue to be countered by traditional scholars.

In his chapter 'The Obsession with Secularizing Sanskrit', Malhotra explains how the American orientalist led by Pollock lay down a rigorous methodology to denigrate the traditional Indian understanding of the idea of transcendence, are against Vedic rituals, sideline the oral tradition, position Sanskrit grammar as toxic, and denigrate the Sanskrit scriptures to uphold Sanskrit poetics, especially because it is a convenient tool for them to secularise. The technical and literary arguments of Malhotra in this context are very fascinating. He says that the net attempt of American Indologists is to politicise Indian literature particularly by removing sacredness from *rasa*, aesthetics and *kavya*, poetics. They also politicise the history of Sanskrit and the vernaculars.

A weird argument of American orientalist, as Malhotra puts it, is that Sanskrit, in terms of the developed structure that we know, was evolved in

the post-Buddhist era. Malhotra cites several distinguished Indian scholars to effectively contest the Sanskrit versus vernaculars issue and the politicisation theory of American orientalists who mislead that Sanskrit was and continues to be positioned in conflict with vernaculars, and that Sanskrit is retarding the progress of vernaculars.

What is the threat posed to Sanskrit and thereby more seriously to India and its Sanatana Dharma? Malhotra lays these down succinctly by defining the sacred dimension of Sanskrit and its irrevocable and inalienable integral connection to meditation mantras, yajna mantras, discourse in metaphysical dimension, grammar of the civilisation, discourses in physical sciences, mathematics, medicine, linguistics, Sanskrit as a living language for cultural production, and ordinary communication, metalanguage for Indian vernaculars. In effect, the existence of Sanskrit, which is the fountainhead of Indian existence for millennia, is threatened.

Malhotra, having exhaustively examined the status of Sanskrit, meticulously and with the precision of a scientist that he is, and by using modern methodologies of analysis and articulation, lays down the course for correction. I am only summarising some of these in a succinct way.

a. Sanskrit's revival should not be modelled after dead classical languages like Latin, but rather like Mandarin, Persian, and Arabic—languages which, though ancient, are still actively used today.

b. An extremely interesting and rather revealing idea posed by Malhotra relates to teaching of Sanskrit by tracing the origin of Sanskrit through intuitive learning by rishis, learnt, preserved, and passed on for more than a millennia through oral traditions. Malhotra recommends that this process is even more relevant today and recommends the methodology adopted by organisations like Samskrita Bharati by teaching through ordinary conversation and reading. The analogy cited by Malhotra is the learning by a child through the mother tongue. His position is that the British system, primarily introduced by Macaulay through teaching English, introduced the Western system of teaching grammar first and language later. This, Malhotra says, is a

topsy-turvy process and against the very nature of the learning process of languages.

c. Malhotra lays down that Indians and the rest of the world should be made aware of 'non-translatable' Sanskrit words, which are prone to misrepresentation, if not perversion, by the Western scholars and suggests the compilation of a book on these non-translatables.

d. Another important suggestion is imparting education of the scriptures of the past which are encyclopaedias and databases containing intellectual work and education on how these are embedded in Sanskrit. The significant gain would be attaining further progress in fields of knowledge like physical and natural sciences, mathematics, architecture, medicine, mantras, and so on. These should be put in modern context and, tested where possible, by empirical and rational means, and updated.

e. Malhotra suggests the urgency of contesting and countering political or liberal philology, a misdirection by so-called secularists combined with neo-left ideologies that also camouflage religious bigotry.

These are some of the processes and in fact Malhotra has already laid the groundwork and developed a methodology for some of these resurrection processes in his book *Being Different*.

The political language and tools used by Western orientalists need to be countered by the same tools and techniques to resurrect and restore Sanskrit, *the life force of India* and Malhotra lays down a broad plan of action.

This volume is a important contribution to the restoration of Sanskrit for the good of India and its future. *The Battle for Sanskrit* not only states the problems but positively recommends solutions that are within the reach of the academia, scholars of all genres, political establishments, and those in decision making levels in administration. This book is not bigoted or intolerant and in fact aims at placing India, Sanskrit, and Sanatana Dharma in its unique position among world culture and learning and to claim due respect and recognition for *Being Different*. All that the book demands is *shradha* from its practitioners and protagonists alike.

N S Chakravarthy

Former Additional Secretary, Government of India.

MANANA

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***The Experience of God:
Being, Consciousness, Bliss***

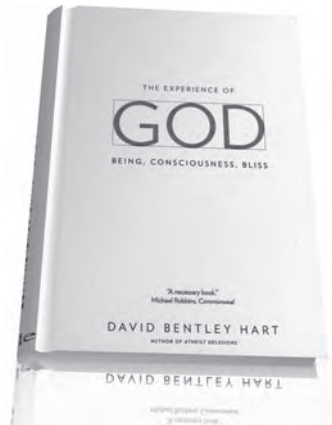
David Bentley Hart

Yale University Press, 2014. xi + 189 pp. ₹ 795. HB. ISBN 9781107042803.

This is either an extremely ambitious or an extremely unambitious book. I tend to think it is the latter, but I can imagine how someone might see it quite otherwise. My intention is simply to offer a definition of the word 'God,' or of its equivalents in other tongues, and to do so in fairly slavish obedience to the classical definitions of the divine found in the theological and philosophical schools of most of the major religious traditions. My reason for wanting to do this is that I have come to the conclusion that, while there has been a great deal of public debate about belief in God in recent years (much of it a little petulant, much of it positively ferocious), the concept of God around which the arguments have run their seemingly interminable courses has remained strangely obscure the whole time. The more scrutiny one accords these debates, moreover, the more evident it becomes that often the contending parties are not even talking about the same thing; and I would go as far as to say that on most occasions none of them is talking about God in any coherent sense at all. It is not obvious to me, therefore, that their differences really amount to a meaningful disagreement, as one cannot really have a disagreement without some prior agreement as to what the basic issue of contention is. Perhaps this is not really all that surprising a situation. The fiercest disputes are often prompted by

misapprehensions, and some of the most appalling battles in history have been fought by mistake. But I am enough of a romantic to believe that, if something is worth being rude about, it is worth understanding as well.


This book, then, will be primarily a kind of lexicographical exercise, not a work of apologetics, though that is a distinction that cannot be perfectly maintained throughout. Honestly, though, my chief purpose is not to advise atheists on what I think they should believe; I want merely to make sure that they have a clear concept of what it is they claim not to believe. In that sense, I should hope the more amiable sort of atheist might take this book as a well-intended gift. I am not even centrally concerned with traditional 'proofs' of the reality of God, except insofar as they help to explain how the word 'God' functions in the intellectual traditions of the developed religions (by which I mean faiths that include sophisticated and self-critical philosophical and contemplative schools). I shall touch on the essential logic of those proofs where necessary, but shall not devote more attention than necessary to the larger arguments surrounding them. There are many texts that do that already (a few of which are listed at the end of this book), and there is no great need for yet another. By the same token, this will not be a book about theology either, or even about any



single religion. The current fashion in belligerent atheism usually involves flinging condemnations around with a kind of gallant extravagance, more or less in the direction of all faiths at once, with little interest in precise aim; I would not want to be any less generous in response.

I know, of course, that there are many persons who object in principle to any fraternization between religious vocabularies, for various reasons—*anxiety for creedal purity, fear that any acknowledgement of commonalities with other faiths might lead souls astray from the ‘one true path’, intellectual scruples regarding the contradictory claims made by different traditions, fear of a colonialist domestication of ‘the other,’ a firm conviction that no religion can be true unless all others are clearly false, and so on*—but those sorts of concerns leave me icily unmoved. For one thing, all the major theistic traditions claim that humanity as a whole has a knowledge of God, in some form or another, and that a perfect ignorance of God is impossible for any people (as Paul, for example, affirms in the letter to the Romans). For another, one can insist on absolutely inviolable demarcations between religions at every level only at the price of painfully unrefined accounts of what each tradition teaches. Religions ought never to be treated as though each were a single discrete proposition intended to provide a single exclusive answer to a single exhaustive question. It goes without saying that one generally should not try to dissolve disparate creeds into one another, much less into some vague, syncretistic, doctrinally vacuous ‘spirituality.’ It should also go without saying, however, that large religious traditions are complex things: sometimes they express themselves in the dream-languages of myth and sacred art, at other times in the solemn circumlocutions of liturgy and praise, at others in the serenity of contemplative prayer—or in ethical or sapiential

precepts, or in inflexible dogmas, or in exactly precise and rigorous philosophical systems. In all of these modes they may be making more or less proximate approaches to some dimension of truth; inevitably, however, they must employ many symbols that cannot fully explain the truth in itself, but can only point toward it. It may be that one faith is truer than any other, or contains that ultimate truth to which all faiths aspire in their various ways; but that still would hardly reduce all other religions to mere falsehood. More to the point, no one really acquainted with the metaphysical and spiritual claims of the major theistic faiths can fail to notice that on a host of fundamental philosophical issues, and especially on the issue of how divine transcendence should be understood, the areas of accord are quite vast.

The last point I want to make here is that this book is to a great degree a rather personal approach to the question of God. I do not mean that it is subjective and confessional; rather, I mean that it takes the structure of personal experience—not mine particularly, but anyone’s—not only as an authentic way of approaching the mystery of the divine but as powerful evidence of the reality of God. In a sense, the perspective from which I write might vaguely be described as ‘Platonic.’ I start from the conviction that many of the most important things we know are things we know before we can speak them; indeed, we know them—though with very little in the way of concepts to make them intelligible to us—even as children, and see them with the greatest immediacy when we look at them with the eyes of innocence. But, as they are hard to say, and as they are often so immediate to us that we cannot stand back from them objectively, we tend to put them out of mind as we grow older, and make ourselves oblivious to them, and try to silence the voice of knowledge that speaks within our own experiences of the world. 

REPORTS

News of Branch Centres

On 6 February 2016, Mr Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji, visited Vivekananda Technical Centre run by **Ramakrishna Mission, Fiji**. On 19 March, Swami Vivekananda College of the centre co-organised a leadership orientation programme for students of 9 secondary schools of Nadi in which 241 students and 37 teachers participated.

The Finance Minister, Mr Abul Mal Abdul Muhit, Home Minister, Mr Asaduzzaman Khan, and State Minister for Women and Children's Affairs, Meher Afroz Chumki, of the Government of Bangladesh and several other dignitaries spoke in the meetings organised by **Dhaka** centre as a part of its five-day-long Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration from 7 to 11 March.

Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha, Chief of the Air Staff, Indian Air Force, visited **Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Jessore** (Bangladesh) on 23 February.

Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita

Ramakrishna Math, Chennai held a *hari-katha*, discourse intermingled with songs, on Sister Nivedita during Vivekananda Navaratri celebrations on 9 February at Vivekananda House. A special photo exhibition on Nivedita was also arranged.

Ramakrishna Mission Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre, Kolkata held two lectures on 22 February and 18 March, which were attended altogether by 450 people.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi Morabadi conducted five block-level and one district-level youth conventions from 10 February to 5 March. In all, 1,013 youths participated

in the conventions. The centre also held a programme on women empowerment on 8 March, International Women's Day, in which about 350 women from 101 villages took part.

Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign)

The following centres conducted cleanliness drives in their respective areas and raised public awareness about cleanliness:

Students and staff of **Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai** polytechnic cleaned a government hospital in Chennai on 27 February.

Students and teachers of the school of **Ramakrishna Mission, Indore** cleaned a public road in the city on 21 March.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Kamarpukur carried out its fourth cleanliness drive on 27 March in which several monks, employees, and volunteers cleaned a few streets in and around Kamarpukur village.

Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur as a part of its yearlong Swami Akhandananda Swachchhata Prakalpa, held three programmes in March in which 80 people cleaned a slum in Nagpur.

Values Education and Youth-related Programmes Conducted by Centres in India

Ramakrishna Mission, Delhi centre conducted (i) a workshop for school principals on 16 March, which was attended by 186 persons, mainly principals, and (ii) a two-day values education workshop for school teachers on 29 and 30 March which was attended by 128 teachers.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Gurap conducted two programmes on values education

on 25 and 26 March which were attended by 380 persons, comprising mainly students, on each day.

Ramakrishna Math, Haripad held 9 values education camps in February-March in which 1,044 students took part.

Ramakrishna Mission, Jammu conducted a values education programme on 6 March which was attended by about 200 people.

Kamarpukur centre held seminars on values education on 15 and 26 March in which altogether 800 delegates participated.

Ramakrishna Mission, Khetri conducted the following programmes from 20 January to 20 February: (i) 21 values education workshops in schools and colleges of Khetri and nearby areas in which 2,324 students and 69 teachers participated, and (ii) 5 sessions of personal counselling in which 47 students were counselled by experts.

Ramakrishna Math, Pune held a seminar on personality development on 26 February in which 165 nursing students took part.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Visakhapatnam held a competition on Swami Vivekananda's quotations from 16 January to 6 February in which 18,400 students of 196 schools in 3 districts of Andhra Pradesh participated.

Relief

Drought Relief · Maharashtra and Karnataka: Insufficient rainfall and searing heat wave had caused a drought-like situation in some parts of Maharashtra and Karnataka. In response to this situation, two of our centres conducted relief operations: (a) **Belagavi (Belgaum)** centre distributed about 28 lakh litres of drinking water among 77,200 people of 16 villages in Athani and Bailhongal taluks of Belagavi district from 10 to 27 April. (b) **Pune** centre distributed about 11 lakh litres of drinking water among 9,000 people of 3 villages in Khatav taluk of Satara district from 8 to 25 April.

Cyclone and Flood Relief · Fiji: Continuing its relief work among the people affected by Cyclone Winston and subsequent floods, Fiji centre

distributed 355 kg rice, 1,775 kg flour, 355 kg pulses, 1,775 packets of noodles, 355 tins of spaghetti, 355 tins of tomatoes, 355 tins of baked beans, 355 litres of edible oil, 355 kg salt, and 710 kg sugar among 355 families in various settlements of Nadi from 5 to 11 April. The centre also distributed 900 packets of agricultural seeds, about 2,000 cartons of assorted garments, 800 buckets, 100 rolls of fishing line, and 125 sets of school uniforms among affected people in Rakiraki, Tavua, Taveuni, Nadi, and Ba areas. Medical relief was provided to 714 patients from 22 March to 25 April.

Fire Relief · Assam: On 1 April, Guwahati centre distributed 130 saris, 130 dhotis, 130 T-shirts, 130 ladies garments, 130 blankets, 130 bed-sheets, 65 kg detergent powder, 260 tubes of toothpaste, 520 pouches of hair oil, 260 plates, 260 tumblers, 260 bowls, and 130 jugs among 130 families affected by an accidental fire at Bishnupur locality in Guwahati.

Earthquake Relief and Rehabilitation · Nepal: Continuing its relief work among the families affected by the devastating earthquake in April 2015, Kathmandu centre distributed 229 blankets and 3,732 utensil sets (each set containing 2 cooking pots, 5 plates, 5 mugs, 5 spoons, and a ladle) among 4,020 families in Lalitpur, Kavre, and Kathmandu districts from 27 March to 24 April, and 900 bamboos and 420 corrugated iron sheets among 40 families in Shankharapur Municipality area on 12 April to help them build their houses.

Distress Relief · The following centres distributed various items to needy people: (a) **Bamunmura:** 414 shirts and 419 pants from 4 to 8 April. (b) **Deoghar:** 503 shirts, 1,055 pants, and 479 T-shirts from 16 to 31 March. (c) **Khetri:** 601 shirts and 297 pants from 8 to 23 April. (d) **Malda:** 4,350 kg rice, 435 kg dal (lentils), 290 kg sugar, 72 litres of edible oil, and 290 kg salt from 24 February to 21 March. (e) **Mysuru:** 997 shirts, 992 pants, and 1,197 T-shirts from 16 February to 28 March. (f) **Narotam Nagar:** 418 shirts, 431 pants, 185 T-shirts, and 1,510 ladies garments from 21 March to 9 April. (g) **Ootacamund:** 509 shirts, 509 pants, and 509 T-shirts from 27 November to 12 April. (h) **Puri Mission:** 1,999 shirts, 1,996 pants, and 2,002 T-shirts from 16 March to 16 April.



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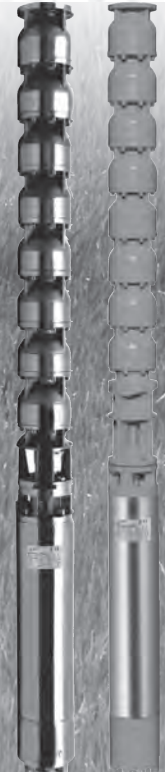
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Vivekananda Netralaya



Diagnostic Unit



Recovery Unit

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We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.

Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

— Swami Vivekananda



Each soul is potentially divine.
The goal is to manifest this
Divinity within.

Strength is life, weakness is
death.

Fear nothing, stop at nothing.
You will be like lions. We must
rouse India and the whole
world.

Never say, 'No', never say, 'I
cannot', for you are infinite.

—*Swami Vivekananda*



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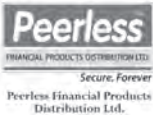
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