

The Ultimate Reality and Meaning of Non-duality:

Satya Syngal - Spiritual Education Heritage Network, 458 Kingsford Place, Waterloo, Ontario.N2T 1k9

Introduction:

'Real' in our common usage is defined as 'something having existence or actuality as a thing or state'; not an imaginary event' or 'not artificial or counterfeit' and reality is, therefore, 'the fact, state or quality of being real or genuine'. A thing, place, quality, attribute or event is considered real when there is tangibility in the object. All this tangibility is bound by time, space and causality.

Definition in the last part of the Vedas (*Vedanta*, also called *Upanishads*, the ancient Indian scriptures) is: Reality is that exists eternally without any change. It existed in the past, it exists in the present and it would continue to exist in the future. There is only one Ultimate Reality which in the Upanishads is called *Brahman*. Central thesis of this philosophy is summed up in one of Sankracharya's verses. (Sankracharya is known to be the principal advocate of *Advaita Vedanta*). The verse reads: "*Brahma Satyam jagat mithya; Jiva Brahmaiva napara*". (Ref 1. Pg. 31). This means that *Brahman*, the Ultimate Reality, alone is real (*sat*); this world is *mithya* and the individual soul (Atma) is not different from Brahman. The term *mithya* is a unique category used in *Advaita Vedanta*. It means an entity that is neither real/existent (*sat*) nor unreal/non-existent (*asat*); it comes under a third category which is inexplicable

Ultimate Reality is non-dual (*advaita*), does not belong to any species, does no action, has no attributes and has no relation to anything else (there is no other thing). It is eternal, does not change and has no beginning or end. Furthermore, the Ultimate Reality is not perceptible by any of the sense organs.

We are in duality in our transactional realm. The concept of non-dual Ultimate Reality is extremely subtle. Comprehending this concept is, therefore, extremely challenging. It can only be defined in absolute terms from the co-ordinates of the Ultimate Reality itself or after one has reached that plane by transcending the transactional plane.

I, as a human being, (called *Jiva* in *Vedanta*), experience the universe (world) and I experience the world as real even though it is constantly changing. This is relative reality (transactional reality) which is comparable to the dream reality. Dream world appears as real as long as one is in dream but it dissolves on waking up. Likewise during my waking state I am covered by ignorance (*avidya*) and only when I overcome this ignorance by gaining knowledge (*jnana*) I get a glimpse of this ultimate reality. Visualization of Ultimate Reality in our transactional plane and transcending this plane is made possible by the study of the scriptures using methods that are discussed in this article.

Scriptures point towards Ultimate Reality by initially assigning attributes to It which are progressively dropped. Transcending the transactional plane of Reality requires consistent and repeated practice of studying the scriptures over a sufficiently long period of time under the guidance of a teacher who is both knowledgeable of Reality and is expressive. I, the *jiva*, need to possess or acquire certain qualifications which would help me to refine my intellect. Comprehension of the concepts of Reality takes place in the intellect that has been refined by practicing these disciplines (*sadhanas*).

Levels of Reality:

One of the significant concepts of Vedanta is the different orders/levels of reality so that my intellect could get an understanding of the term 'reality' in the context in which it is used. There are three realms that can be considered:

1. Ultimate Reality or *Paramarathic satyam*: Intrinsic knowledge of the Ultimate Reality (Brahman or Self) can be acquired when one is in the realm or level of Ultimate Reality. At this level Ultimate reality has no features, attributes, qualities etc. Since it is the One without a second It cannot be talked about; it can only be intellectually comprehended. Since there is only Ultimate

- Reality, the world is mithya. The world is only names and forms subsisting on the substratum of the Ultimate Reality. At this level Ultimate Reality has no name or form.
2. Relative/transactional reality or *vyavaharic satyam*; this is the level where I, as a human being (jiva) transact with the world outside. At this level world appears to be real and there is duality without which no transaction including the study of Ultimate Reality is possible. All names and forms are assigned to Ultimate reality at this level. At this level Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, is called *Saguna Brahman* (*Brahman* with attributes) and *Nirguna Brahman* (*Brahman* without attributes)
 3. Dream reality or *pratibhasic satyam*: This is the reality that I perceive during dreams. The dream world is real as long as I am in dream state. This world and its reality disappear as soon as I wake up.

Ultimate Reality:

Intrinsic knowledge of Brahman can be gained from the perspective of Brahman alone (*paramarathic* plane) because Brahman has no name and form. In my transactional plane (*vyavaharic* plane) where I am ignorant of the Ultimate Reality I can only try to understand It by assigning It certain names, attributes or definitions. After gaining comprehension and Knowledge (*jnana*) of the Ultimate Reality by transcending the *vyavaharic* plane all names forms and attributes get dropped.

Nature of Brahman; Names and attributes:

In the Upanishads, Brahman (meaning the greatest) is the name given to the Ultimate Reality. Brahman is also named *Atma*, *Self*, *Turiya*, *Akshara*, *Om* etc. depending upon the context.

Features and attributes associated with *Brahman* (*turiya*) in *Mandukya Upanishad* (ref.02-V 07) are:

It is not perceivable by any sense-organs, not related to anything, incomprehensible by the mind, uninferable, unthinkable and undescrivable; It is essentially of the nature of Self alone, negating all phenomenon; It is peaceful and non-dual.
 It is both transcendental and immanent.
 It is not an object that can be perceived by the eyes; the more general meaning is that it cannot be perceived by any sense organs.
 It is not accessible.
 It cannot be grasped by the organs of action.
 It does not give an inferential clue as to which instrument of inference is applicable.
 It is inconceivable; as a result, we conclude that whatever can be conceived is not Ultimate Reality.
 It cannot be given verbal expression as to what it is.
 It is beyond all transactions. It is non-empirical. It is absolute and is beyond all space and time.
 Whatever is experienced is not Ultimate reality.

Definitions:

How can Brahman be described by words in view of the above nature of Brahman? Upanishads declare “Brahman is that from where the words come back along with the mind.” At the same time Brahman is to be known and is knowable. Being knowable it should be communicable.

Despite the non-describable nature of Brahman, Upanishads use two definitions so that the intellect can commence to get an idea of the nature of this Reality. First definition, most commonly used, is ‘*Sat-Chit-Ananda*’ or (existence, consciousness and bliss) - (Ref 3 V 64). The second definition from Taittiriya Upanishad (ref 4- II-1-3) is *Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam*’ (limitless existence-Knowledge-Infinite consciousness principle). Both these definitions convey the same essence and are applied to examine Self at the micro (*vyashti*) level and Brahman at the macro (*smashti*) level.

Existence (*Sat or satyam*):

Existence is that which is eternal and which includes everything in the universe.

The most lucid statement about existence is contained in Chandogya Upanishad (ref 5 Verse VI.2.1) This is: "In the beginning this universe was Existence or Being (*Sat*); alone, one, only, without a second".

You, I and He are recognized as existent beings. When referred to as 'I am', 'You are', and 'He (She, It) is' existence of I, you and he etc. is implied. A thing in creation that does not have existence is an incorrect idea because the thing that does not exist has no existence. Nature of existence is defined by five points:

- a) Existence is not a part, product or property of the body;
- b) It is an independent entity and is not affected by the conditions of the body;
- c) It is not limited by the boundaries of the body and extends beyond it;
- d) It survives and continues to exist after the death of the body; and
- e) The medium of the body is essential for its manifestation.

In view of the above definition of existence, one can conclude that the nature of 'Self' is also Existence because 'Self' is common to all beings. This essential nature is ever evident in the three states of human experience as waking, dreaming, and sleeping.

What is my non-essential nature? It is the medium through which I express: The medium is different in different stages of life of the physical body e.g. baby, adolescent, adult etc., are some of the examples. Note in these cases, "I" has not changed but only the medium has changed. "I am" continues between birth and death. During sleep or after death there is no medium for expression even though existence is still there. The conclusion is that "I am" is eternal whether a medium is available for transaction or not. Impermanence of medium should not be equated to impermanence of "I am".

Existence pervades all sentient and insentient beings.

In the second definition why is Brahman called *Satyam*? That which can never be negated or dismissed or changed is called *Satyam*. It is invisible and all-pervading; it is eternal without any limit and continues to exist even after the death of the body. *Satyam* implies Reality that continues to exist in the present, past and future.

Let us consider an example to illustrate the idea. Imagine a room full of many objects which have to be cleaned and have to be removed from the room for this purpose. A supervisor says that the removal task has been completed and there is nothing in the room. What does he mean by nothing? He means that he has removed everything that is removable. The person forgets to mention that what is left in the empty room is formless space that is occupying it. In this case 'nothing' is equal to non-removable space. This is the intangible entity that is usually glossed over. Similarly, in Vedanta, 'nothing' means unremovable Existence; in parlance reality of this context it means space. In vedanta space is compared to Brahman to indicate Its all pervasiveness.

Everything in the universe that is objectifiable can be totally dissolved and negated because the temporary existence of everything is dependent upon me the observer. On the other hand that which is not available as an object or entity (I, the subject) can never be dropped or renounced. I can never renounce myself. It is illogical. So Self is free from all negation and is ever existent.

Consciousness:

Like Existence, Consciousness (as conceived in Vedanta) pervades all sentient and inert entities in the universe. It is eternal and has not limited by space, time and objects. Vedanta refers to this Consciousness as pure Consciousness. What we refer to as consciousness in common usage is reflected consciousness.

Consciousness is also termed as awareness and is an ever experienced fact. It has the same five features as existence. Most Upanishads characterize Brahman as the ever experienced consciousness. Other objects of the universe are experienced only at certain moments and not constantly. When I see my hand, I have the experience of light and the hand. Even when I see two things, hand and light, I only focus on one thing at a time. Similarly, when I see an object, I experience the object and consciousness even though I pay attention to only the object by ignoring consciousness by intellectually separating consciousness from the physical objects.

Awareness (reflected Consciousness) of objects is divided into 5 segments. Each segment is accessible to only one sense organ. Ear is the instrument for the world of sound—it is nonexistent for the deaf. Similarly, world of touch is accessible to skin, form is accessible to eyes, taste to tongue and smell to nose.

Consciousness comes into contact with sense objects through these 5 sense organs. The deciding factors for experiencing the objects are sense organ; the organ that is being operated by shutting off the remaining sense organs and mind in the form of specific thought. Senses organ along with thought decides which object should come into contact with consciousness. Let's say that we are looking at a mirror with a spot. We look at the mirror (ignoring the spot) if we are doing face make up but we look at the spot if we are cleaning the mirror. Contact of consciousness with an object brings about experience of the object. For instance, Consciousness plus table, gives the table experience. Experience is the name of consciousness when it comes into contact with the object. It is another name for consciousness indicating a relational status. Thus, there are several relational names with the objects of the universe. There is only one consciousness seemingly appearing as many experiences; thus, plurality is an erroneous conclusion. Relational names refer to one and only one consciousness. Changes are only in objects. Intellectually, remove the objects from experiences; we will be left with one and the same consciousness, which is the nature of Brahman.

Upanishads postulate that pure Consciousness at the micro level (for jiva) gets reflected in the intellect. The reflected consciousness is what is termed as ego (*chidabhasa*). The same definition is equally applicable at the macro level where the totality of the beings is involved. At the macro level Consciousness is reflected in the power of Brahman (*Maya*). Brahman when associated with maya is called *Iswara* or *Paramatama* (or God) discussed later.

We all know that we are conscious beings unlike table or chair which are inert. In other words the humans are sentient beings and are endowed with the faculty of reflected consciousness which comes in indirect contact with objects of the universe which gives us the knowledge of the world.

Jnanam in the second definition is the knowledge of the fact that Brahman is 'I', myself, the witness Consciousness which is never an object of experience. When I say 'I am' along with the body-mind complex (i.e. I am so and so) then 'I am' is the Jiva. If I exclude the body-mind complex, not as a physical process, but by intellectual discrimination, 'I am' is called Self or Brahman. We don't require a new experience of Brahman. What we lack is the ability to exclude the body-mind complex from the ever experienced consciousness. It is only the thought that has to be changed.

When I look at an object a thought goes out through the eyes and envelops the object. Since thought is also inert and is associated with reflected consciousness (*chidabhasa*), the object also receives this transference of reflected consciousness which envelops the object and the experience of the object takes place. The conclusion, on the basis of this example, is that all experiences are possible because of Consciousness.

There is nothing like Brahman or Self being experienced at a particular time. Consider an example to illustrate the idea. Milk is not sweet before sugar is added to it. Sugar does not need a relationship to be sweet; it is intrinsically sweet and lends its property to milk. Becoming sweet for milk is a process but for sugar to become sweet does not need a process. Similarly, 'Self' knowledge or experience of me does not need a process because I am Self. It has to be emphasized that though Self is not an object of experience, it can never be negated; it is ever experienced as 'I am' and 'I am'.

Upanishads compare Brahman with some commonly understood entities to make the concept of Brahman understandable at our transactional plane. Brahman is compared to space, life energy (Prana), sun-light etc., even though they are not Brahman. Comparison is made for intellectual cognition which gets negated after the comprehension of Brahman is firmly established in the intellect.

Ananda or anantam: (Bliss or infinite):

The third intrinsic feature of Brahman is Bliss or infinite. When we study day-to-day life, we observe one principle that is unfailingly at work: This principle is that we feel blissful with whatever we like or love. The list of likes and dislikes differ from one person to another. Also, the moment the object stops being a source of bliss (ananda), we strike it off our list of likes. Mental rejection takes place.

Extending the above principle, we observe that there is one common item that is invariant in the list of likes of every individual. Not even God (defined later) would qualify for this unalterable item. Rather, I, the first person singular, the hero of my auto-biography, take the coveted place by remaining in my list of likes. The fact is: I am never disliked by me at any time and in any place.

Love for others is conditional and self love is unconditional. Love for others is not for their sake, but it is for the sake of Self because they have direct or indirect connection with me. Love for them serves my self-interest and happiness and as such is conditional. This love is not for their sake. I love myself for myself and I love others also for my sake. Self love is the only real source of love and hence the only source of real bliss (*Ananda*). Love of others and *Ananda* from that love is only 'seeming' *Ananda*.

The third feature in the second definition is *anantam* or limitlessness. There are three types of limitations: space-wise limitation when an object is located in one place it is not available elsewhere; time-wise limitation caused by localization of time or body's existence between birth and death; and object-wise limitation and property-wise limitation when we say that the object is a tree we are indirectly saying that it is not anything else. Man is limited by man-ness. This will exist as long as there is the second object, or duality.

Self or Brahman does not have the above limitations. It is all-pervading in the form of existence-consciousness (sat-chit), It does not have space-wise limitations. It transcends the limitation of time because it is infinite; and there is no second object to limit Brahman to Brahman. Brahman alone exists in the form of all other objects. There is no object other than Brahman. The metaphor used is gold and various ornaments. Gold is the only substance; you do not count the ornaments with the gold; same applies to the waves which are nothing but water, or pots which are nothing but earth. Brahman has got three-fold limitlessness.

We feel unhappy when we feel limited or we lack something. This thought of limitation is caused by ignorance. When we feel full or complete we feel happy. Since Brahman or Atma is limitless, its intrinsic nature is Bliss (*Ananda*).

The final conclusion therefore is that I am Brahman and Brahman only. My essential nature is that of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss (sat, chit, and ananda).

Indirect Definition:

According to the indirect definition, if Brahman is the cause (*karnam*) of the world then the world is the effect (*karyam*). So the world and Brahman have cause-effect relationship. Cause is one; effects are many.

Brahman-Atma oneness:

The basic aim of Vedanta is to lead one to the conclusion that there is no duality in the universe. Non-duality (*advaitum*) is the Ultimate Reality. Vedanta has a number of aphorisms (*mahavakyas*) that conclude that Brahman and Atma (Self) have oneness and there is no duality. Following four aphorisms (ref 8 pg.329) are the most significant that sum up the concepts of Ultimate Reality and oneness:

Pragnanam Brahma; Consciousness is Brahman. (Ref 6 V III.1.1)

Tat Twam Asi: That thou art. (Ref 5 V 6.8-6.16)

Ayam Atma Brahma; This Self is Brahman (Ref 2, V 1.2)

Aham brahama asmi; I am Brahman. (Ref 7 V 2..3.5)

First aphorism is a statement of definition and makes a general declaration that Consciousness is Brahman. Consciousness in an individual is the same Consciousness underlying the whole universe. That, all pervading Consciousness, is the Ultimate Reality. Consciousness in an individual is like space in a pot while the all pervading Consciousness is like total space. Even when you call space differently you cannot segregate space-in-the-pot from total space. Similarly you may give Consciousness different names with respect to different embodiments but Consciousness remains one homogeneous all-pervading Reality.

The second aphorism is a statement of advice and is universal declaration to all human beings. “That” refers to the Ultimate Reality and “Thou” to the core of your personality – the supreme Self that pervades the five layers of matter in you. The aphorism explains to you that it is your own Self that pervades everywhere as Reality. Reality is not anything different from your essential being. Water of the ocean evaporates, forms clouds and when water vapor is saturated in the clouds there is rainfall. Rain water collects in the valleys of the mountains and flows down as rivers. Rivers assume their distinct individualities and then merge in the ocean or lakes. Nevertheless they are water and water alone. Water in the rivers and water in the ocean is one and the same. Similarly beings claim individualities of their own. But Consciousness in every being is the same as the all-pervading Consciousness. Your Self is infinite Reality. That Reality thou art.

Third aphorism is a statement of experience. Ayam Atma means ‘this Self’. ‘This Self’ refers to Atman which activates your body-mind-intellect. Brahman activates the entire universe. The activating principle in the individual and the universe is the same. So Atma is Brahman. Atma is related to Brahman as spark is to conflagration. Spark is fire. Both are element fire. Likewise the aphorism pronounces, “This Atma is Brahman”. This aphorism is a formula for an aspirant to practice and discover the oneness of Atman and Brahman.

The fourth aphorism is a statement of experience. This is the ultimate pronouncement of the man of Self-realization. The Self-realized man affirms, “I am Brahman”. Prior to Realization of ‘Self’, the first person singular pronoun “I” means ‘I’ the waker, dreamer, or deep-sleeper. You believe yourself to be a particular person in the waking state of consciousness. As you leave the waking state of consciousness and enter the dream state you believe yourself to be a totally different person. Again when you move to the deep-sleep you assume a third personality as deep-sleeper. The irony of it is that you use “I” in all three cases. “I” pervades the three states assuming three altogether different personalities. In truth “I” is my real Self. In these three states my Self is conditioned by my gross, subtle and causal bodies. It is not in its purest form. When I transcend the limitations of my gross, subtle and causal bodies, I expose my Self; the nascent “I”. That pure unconditioned “I” is Brahman. I am Brahman. I am the all pervading reality.

Steps for comprehending Ultimate Reality:

Comprehension of Ultimate Reality requires elaborate intellectual preparation. Fourfold qualification (discussed later) and an ethical way of living are the necessary prerequisites for achieving this understanding. One has to refine one’s intellect through a variety of disciplines which include *karma yoga* (action), *upasana yoga* (worship and prayer), *bhakti yoga* (devotion) etc. All these practices are progressive steps for preparation. These disciplines are necessary preparatory steps but do not bestow knowledge of the Self or Ultimate Reality. It is only *jnana yoga* (knowledge) that will lead to knowledge of the Self.

After acquiring qualifications a three-step process is used for gaining *jnana* or knowledge of Self:

Sravanna:

Sravana is the consistent and systematic study of the scriptures for a length of time under the guidance of a competent teacher (*guru*). The role of the teacher is paramount to the understanding of the scriptural message because the subject of Ultimate Reality is so subtle that a teacher who has already realized himself and is endowed with good communication skills can make this impossible task possible. This teaching aims primarily to remove one's ignorance about oneself. The individual (*jiva*) identifies himself with various personality layers (body-mind-complex), with three states of experience etc. All the Upanishads repeatedly reinforce that Atma is consciousness and that Atma and Brahman are the same entity (the mahavakyas). In our ignorance of our real Self, Atma is concealed by the five layers; concealment being done in a figurative sense. We have lost sight of Atma because our attention is being distracted by the layers. This observation also suggests another reason for *jiva*'s involvement in the world (*samsara*). Absolute reality is being missed while attention is being distracted by *mithya* (unreal) world which is non-atma or *anatma*. Separating Atma from these layers is a cognitive problem, and it is also called a spiritual problem. The intellectual problem is related to the ignorance about the Self.

Mannana:

Mannana is the second stage of the process by which all doubts arising from the teaching are eliminated. Doubts of the lay persons can be eliminated by education but doubts created by other philosophers require logical arguments. Vedanta bases all its conclusions on the scriptures but resolves them through rigorous logic. In this stage one is asked to raise doubts and study doubts of others and understand Reality. *Mannana* is the elimination of logical fallacies that are attributed by others who do not understand Vedanta. Such doubts have to be removed because doubtful knowledge is as good as ignorance and it cannot be put to use.

Niddidhyasana:

After going through the two stages one enters this third stage which makes the assimilation of the knowledge possible. It is contended that clear, proper and doubtless knowledge that is obtained on the basis of *sravanna* and *mannana* will definitely give knowledge of the Self (*moksha*). Knowers of Atma are free from sorrow and sense of insecurity. But seekers do encounter difficulty in attaining *moksha* even after going through the stages of *sravanam* and *mananam*. They don't reap the benefits and instead continue to experience all the problems of dealings with the world (*samsara*). The common impediments are that one seems to think that one has developed an intellectual understanding of Brahman but not its experience; the answer to that question is that there is no event called Brahman experience because Brahman is ever experienced as the conscious principle. There is no time when consciousness is not experienced. There is no lack of Brahman experience. Brahman has to be understood as pure all the time; with or without the bodies.

The problem of lack of assimilation is due to not having completed all the requirements for the entitlement of gaining knowledge fully. *Niddidhyasana* is the process of focused meditation to assimilate the knowledge. Knowledge is gained only by *sravanna*, confirmed by *manana*; *niddidhyasana* enables one to reach the stage of abidance in this knowledge. Meditation as conventionally understood in the stage of yoga is prior to gaining knowledge; *niddidhyasan* is the meditation after gaining knowledge.

Jiva-Jagat-Iswara (man-world-God):

A study of each participant of the triad of man-world-god is required to appreciate *jiva*'s place in the universe and to understand the influence and interaction of the other two on him.

There are several world religions and systems of philosophy. The goal of all these is to give *moksha* (defined later) to the individual. However, their fundamental principles differ according to their philosophical foundations. Despite these differences, there are three principles that are common to all—*jiva*, the human being is the hero of the philosophy; *jagat*, the world is the villain—invariably, the complaint is about someone else, not about *jiva*; and *Iswara* (god), the cause of creation is one member of the division. The *sadhanas* (practices) for achieving the goal of *moksha* continue—but note that all *sadhanas* presuppose division and, in fact, preserve division. *Jiva* continues to be a *jiva* despite *sadhana*.

The perception of duality will not end; but after gaining knowledge there will be an understanding that the real substance is divisionless. So the process begins with *dvaitam* (duality) and ends with *advaitam* (non-duality).

In order to arrive at this knowledge we have to inquire into the three: *jiva*, *jagat*, and *Isvara*. The mode of inquiry does not matter. World is never *mithya* for *ahamkara* (ego). It is only from the co-ordinates of *Brahman*, world is *mithya*.

***Jiva* (human being):**

Goals:

Maslow's hierarchy of human needs depicts a pyramid consisting of five levels: the lower levels are associated with Physiological needs, while the top levels are associated with psychological needs. Lower needs must be met first. Once these are met, seeking to satisfy psychological needs drives personal growth. Near the end of his life Maslow revealed that there was a level on the hierarchy that was above the five-level pyramid. This level was called by him as self-transcendence.

Vedas classify human pursuits in four broad and all inclusive goals. Human goals lead to ends that are distinct from the ends sought after by animals and plants; there are certain common features between the needs of the humans on one hand, and plants and animals on the other. Common goals are: eating, sleeping, fear of the external world, feelings of insecurity and propagation of the species etc. Humans possess some unique faculties: these are intellect, planning and projection powers for the future, reasoning power, self-awareness and self consciousness. Humans can indulge in comparative judgment. Animals are governed by instincts only whereas man because of his unique projecting power continues to explore meaning of life beyond the basic needs.

The first goal of human beings is security (*artha*). This is the security that comes from money, food, clothing, shelter, health etc. It is just sheer physical survival. There is virtually no end to the amount of security one can aspire for unless one imposes voluntary constraints on his needs. Security for survival includes present, future, old age etc; it also includes security of things and people providing us security

The second goal is enjoyment (*kama*) which is all forms of comfort, luxury, entertainment, pleasures etc provided by the worldly things, people or places. I want to have fun and be happy.

The third goal (*dharma*) is ethical living which is an invisible form of wealth. *Dharma* means doing one's duty (*Swadharma*). It includes the feelings of good fortune and good luck. This goal is achievable through means such as good deeds (*punyam*) and contributes to our well being in life.

The above three goals are achieved as a result of deliberate planning.

The fourth goal is freedom (*moksha*). *Moksha*, primarily, means freedom from ignorance of our real nature. This term is also used for freedom from the bondage caused by obsession of objects, things, people or situations in the world.. Even after being very successful with the first three goals and achieving a vast amount of things, permanent happiness remains elusive. Things, that one lacks, bind one by their absence and things, that one has, bind one by being burden, strain and tension.

In the pursuit of discovering Ultimate Reality, the first three goals are secondary. The fourth goal is the primary one.

***Jiva-jagat* : Man-world:**

Every human being (*Jiva*) is faced with both fortunate and unfortunate circumstances during the course of one's life. Difficulties cannot be avoided despite our best efforts to combat them and despite our having achieved the first three goals to a large measure. There is utmost need of self-confidence to face adverse

situations. Because of lack of confidence induced by situational problems, one normally seeks help from the world outside. When we solicit confidence and support from outside, to our utter disappointment, what we invariably get is irritating lectures on the mistakes we have made. It is frustrating to listen to a learned analysis of our mistakes while we are groping to find solutions to them. We desperately look for someone who would tell us that we have resources within reach to tide over the difficulty. Such advice would instantly boost our confidence. The desultory lectures, on the other hand, only induce a sense of guilt in us and ebb away our confidence to face the adverse situations. They induce a sense of utter helplessness. In sum, we often find ourselves in situations where unknown people, understandably, do not care about us, and known people are available only for lecturing us about our problems. We have to find a way out of this quandary. Such situations make us seek ways to become free from dependence on the world.

On being disappointed with the world, jiva is impelled to turn to religion and our scriptures to learn about confidence- building measures that will stand us in good stead when we are faced with difficult situations. We learn that our worldly problems of lack of self confidence are created as a result of Ignorance (Avidya) of our own Real Nature.

In the first part of the Vedas (*Veda purva*), we are asked to seek help from the Lord or God (*Iswara*). One views oneself as a servant of the Lord, the master, and one completely surrenders unto Him. The seeker gets the feeling that the Lord is with him and, consequently, he is no longer left to his own devices. The conviction that the Lord will help him will boost his confidence. Interestingly, it is not the actual help from the Lord, but the thought that he is under the protective shield of the Lord to help him, that is the main component of the confidence building measure. Buoyed by this confidence based on the possibility of help from the Lord, and not necessarily by the actual help itself, one will venture to discover one's own inner resources to face the vexing problems of life. One's sense of devotion to the Lord will gradually help one to make the transition from world dependence to God dependence. Every religion has its own methodology of channeling the process of this transformation. Perception of God in any form and the differences arising from these perceptions do not matter for cultivating God dependence for building confidence in oneself.

Even after this transformation, the world is still there, affecting the individual. One thus goes from a format of duality (*jiva-jagat*) to a triangular format of life; man-world-God (*Jiva-Jagat-Iswara*) format. Practically all religions of the universe propagate this approach. Each religion adopts its own version of God. Varieties of rituals and prayers are used to achieve the grace of the Lord, the form of the God depends on the one selected by an individual.

Jiva's personality:

'I' represent jiva. I am the one who is doing the inquiry. I am the most important member of the triad (*jiva-jagat-Iswara*). This is my ego speaking.

I am an amalgam of three bodies; gross, subtle and causal.

Gross body is made of gross matter consisting of five gross elements: space, air, fire, water, and earth. The components of this body are innumerable and are studied through the anatomy of the body. The function of the gross body is to provide temporary residence to *Jiva's* real Self and is used for doing all actions (*karmas*). Actions result in earned merit or demerit (*punyam* and *papam karmas*). As long as there is *karma* there is the body. Nature of the gross body is constantly changing resulting in modifications. There are six stages of modifications starting with potential existence in the womb and culminating in the death of the body. These changes are perceptible to everyone during the life span ranging from one day to 120 years.

Subtle body is made of five subtle elements. These are subtle space, subtle air etc. It has 19 components: five sense organs of knowledge—vision corresponding to eyes, sound corresponding to ears, smell corresponding to nose, taste corresponding to tongue, and touch corresponding to skin. These organs provide inputs for the 5 subtle powers of perception. The next five components are the 5 organs of action (output or responding instruments) called *karam indriyas*. These are the organs of verbal response, hand, feet, organ of evacuation and organ of procreation. The next five components are 5 types of vital life energy systems (*pranas*): *prana* (respiratory system), *apana* (evacuatory system), *vyana* (circulatory

system), *samana* (conversion into nutrients), and *udana* (reversal at the time of death). Finally, there are 4 internal organs (*anthakarna*). These internal organs are: mind (emotional faculty), intellect (rational faculty); chit (memory or record of experiences) and *ahamkara* or ego (faculty of self-reference—reflective faculty). (These four internal organs are in fact four different functional names of one organ generally referred to as mind). The subtle body does all forms of transactions: input, output etc. It is also subject to change. It has a much longer life than the gross body. It is believed that it passes on to the next birth in endless succession until the final dissolution (*pralaya*). Subtle body cannot be recognized by others. We cannot read thought processes of others.

The material for the **causal body** is causal matter which is the subtlest form of matter. This body is invisible and is in unmanifest form. It is made up of impressions caused by actions (*vasanas*). The components are gross and subtle bodies in potential form before they were created. (It is like butter in milk in potential form). It functions only when it manifests and when destroyed it goes back to its unmanifest condition. Its nature is to last until one is liberated from ignorance. It is not evident even to the person to whom it refers to.

All the three bodies are inert but become sentient by the presence of Consciousness in them. Original Consciousness (abbr. OC) enters the intellect in the *anthakarna*; Intellect acts as a mirror or reflecting medium (RM) for Consciousness creating a reflection or reflected consciousness (RC). Reflected consciousness when associated with reflecting medium is named Ego (*ahamkara*). This combination of RC and RM is also called Jiva. In all our transactions we use this combination as the word 'I'. Obviously OC is always present with them otherwise RC cannot exist.

Intellect (in the subtle body) is the primary reflecting medium for the original consciousness, because causal body is in potential form and is not available for transaction. Gross body is also not the reflecting medium because if it was, nobody would ever die; it varies from birth to birth and is not a permanent part of jiva; only subtle body is a part of jiva.

Ahamkara and *mamakara* (feelings of 'I' and mine) represented by the usage of the word I or mine is the misconception that I have about my real nature. This misconception where my real Self (consciousness) is superimposed by any or all the three bodies and I associate myself with the body-mind complex is called *adhyasa* or *adhyaropa*. It is by *jnana yoga* that one eliminates this *adhyasa* to realize one's real nature. The two stages are called *adhyaropa-apavada*. I could analyze my body as having five personality layers (*kosas*). Progressing from the grossest to the subtlest these layers are named as: Anatomical (*annamaya*), life principle (*pranamaya*), mental (*manomaya*), intellectual (*Jnanamaya*) and bliss (*anandamaya*). I (*jiva*) identify myself with either or all the five sheaths. I also assume myself to have designations, titles, positions, qualifications etc.

I, the Jiva, experience the world from three different states of experience: waking, dreaming and sleeping and identify myself as *viswa* (waker), *taijasa* (dreamer) or sleeper (*prajna*). I identify myself with one or all the three states. In fact my real Self is neither of these states. My real Self (*Turiya*) pervades all the three states.

The World or Jagat –Iswara (god):

Next we must analyze the creation of the universe. Vedanta does not subscribe to the theory of sudden creation of the universe at a specific point in time (such as big band theory). Vedantic view is that of evolution or manifestation. Creation is believed to be a process of manifestation, sustenance and dissolution in an endless cycle. **Prakriti:** (ref. 8; Ch. 1; V 15-18) is the fundamental/basic or seed form of matter and is more subtle than energy. It is considered integral to Brahman as His inherent power (Shakti). It has three characteristics (*gunas*). These are named *satwa*, *rajsa* and *tamsa* (corresponding to pure, active and inert respectively). These *gunas* are mutually coupled and are present in everything in the universe. Their proportions in any object in the universe vary. *Prakriti* can thus be divided in three categories depending upon the predominance of a particular *guna*.

Prakriti has twofold power. One is the creative power (*vikshepa sakti*), which was used by *Iswara* (god) for creating the universe (*Iswara* discussed in the next section). The second power is the concealing power (*avarana sakti*), which does no harm to *Iswara*. It affects the *jiva*. *Prakriti* does not conceal *jiva*'s nature but it does confuse the *jiva* by deluding him about his nature.

First category of prakriti has the predominance of satwa (*satwa pradhana prakriti*) and is called **maya (illusion)**. When Brahman combines Himself with maya at the macro level He is named *Iswara* (god). In other words maya becomes the reflecting medium for Consciousness (Brahman), the reflected consciousness is called *Iswara* (god). *Avidya* and *maya* are used interchangeable in much of vedantic literature.

The second category has the predominance of rajsa (*rajsa pradhana prakriti*). This prakriti is called **ignorance (avidya)** which acts as the reflecting medium for consciousness at the micro level (*vyashti*). This reflected consciousness is *jiva* at the individual level.

Maya remains under the control of *iswara* and causes *iswara* no problems. *Iswara* continues to be omniscient. On the other hand *avidya* plays havoc with the *jiva* by constantly stifling the effect of *satwa* even though unable to make *jiva* bereft of it. *Avidya* dominates *jiva* and this dominance *jiva* gets only partial knowledge about himself.

The third category is predominantly *tamsa* (*tamsa pradhana prakriti*). In vedanta it retains the name of *prakriti* without inventing a new name. This *prakriti* is the cause of creation of the tangible universe including the *jiva*. The *prakriti*, even though dominated by *tamsa*, also possesses the other two *gunas* because of mutual coupling.

Vedantic view of Creation:

Prakriti produces the five basic elements starting with space or ether (*akasa*). This is followed by the creation of air (*vayu*), water (*jala*), fire (*agni*) and earth (*bhumi*) sequentially. These elements are in subtle form and each of them has the same three *gunas*. *Satwa* part of these elements produces the *anthakarnam* (inner organs) and *jnana indriyas* (sense organs of knowledge). The *rajsa* part of these five elements produces the *karma indriyas* (organs of action) and *pranas* (vital energy principles) to complete all elements of the subtle body. The *tamsa* part of the five subtle elements produces the five gross elements by a grossification process which then produce the gross physical body.

Brahman when He associates with *Maya* becomes *Iswara* who then creates the universe. *Brahman* does not create the world, *Iswara* does. *Maya* (*prakriti*) is the material cause of the universe because *maya* is primordial material. *Maya* does not exist separately from Brahman. He is the possessor of *maya shakti*. The combination of *Brahman* and *maya* as one entity is called *Iswara* (god). Brahman and his *maya sakti* combination is analogous to the combination of man and his speaking power as one entity. Man does not talk; his speaking power talks. But the speaking power does not exist independent of the man.

God (*Iswara*) was impelled to create the world by the totality of all the *karmas* of all the *jivas*. This impulsion generated a selfless desire in His mind to create the world for the benefit of the *jivas*. Vedanta views this creation as a perpetual cycle because creation, sustenance and destruction go on endlessly and so do *karmas* of *jivas*.

World was existent before manifestation in dormant form and was non-separate from Brahman. The unfolding or expansion of the universe is nothing but assignment of manifold names and forms. Substance (consciousness) is eternal and is never created. Consciousness, as such, is the ever-experiencing subject. The objects are for *jiva*'s experience. Even though *Iswara* is one, there are many *jivas*.

Iswara creates the *jiva* and *jagat* and provides for their sustenance and dissolution and distributing fruits of their actions. He is not bound by what he does. He enjoys the drama. Creative power is used by *Iswara* originally when *avarana sakti* is not active. When we are in dream, we do not know that it is a dream; we

only know it on waking up. After creation, this power of concealment starts deluding the *jiva* resulting in ignorance.

The objective world which is the creation of *Iswara* is not the cause of *jiva*'s problem as one would expect. *Jiva* creates his own jagat by associating with the objects of the world. This duality created by *jiva* himself that is the cause of his problem. A change in perspective is necessary to rectify the situation. The objects of experience cannot and need not be changed, but the way I look at them has to be changed.

In sum, there are two types of duality; first, due to *Iswara*'s creation, and second due to *jiva*'s creation. The first results in the creation of the universe and the second results in *jiva* creating his own universe through his mental actions. Both *Iswara* and *Jiva* are creators of the world. *Iswara* watches the drama while *jiva* experiences the joys and sorrows of the world through his own creation.

The instruments for creation are thoughts. *Iswara*'s thoughts arise in his cosmic mind called *maya*. The thoughts of the *jiva* arise in the individual mind. *Karmas* are produced by thoughts.

God (*Iswara*):

We often question the existence of God (*Iswara*) as did some of the realized souls like mother Teresa. God's existence has to be accepted based on what is stated in the scriptures. Our search for God starts with the determination of the nature of God (*Iswara*) which is Transactional Reality (*Vyavaharic Satyam*). In Vedanta God is called *saguna Brahman* (*Brahman* with attributes).

In my search for Ultimate Reality I start with God that has a name, a form or a variety of attributes. God may not be visible but I create names and forms for my version of God to enable me to get an intellectual comprehension of my God. I say that He is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. These attributes give God a level of superiority much higher than I, the *jiva*. God in most religions, as in Vedanta, is characterized as the creator (cause) of the universe. God is understood in three different stages depending upon the level of my maturity as a seeker.

I am initially made to believe in one form of personal God (*ekarupa iswara*) that **created** the world while sitting somewhere remote, similar to a carpenter in his workshop making a table. Carpenter is the intelligent cause and the wood is the material cause. Similarly, in Vedanta, it is stated that initially there existed *Brahman*; one, only and without a second (Ref 5.VI.II.1). Unlike a carpenter, *Brahman* is believed to be both the intelligent and material cause of the universe. He created the world out of Himself using his *maya shakti*. An analogy of spider creating a web out of itself is used. The concept in most religions is that God, the creator, is residing in heaven. Such a God or His perceptual form becomes the personal God for the initiate. The seeker uses his God as a master who would help him in time of need. Everyone has his own distinct God who is different from my God. **There is only one god.**

As my maturity improves, scriptures lead me to the concept that God (*Iswara*) Himself has **become** the universe in multi-forms (*aneka-rupa iswara*), because the universe is pervaded by one Lord. This leads to the worship of the Lord in any form because God has not only created the world, but God Himself has become the world. To make assimilation of this concept of God possible God is compared to space, life energy, sun-light, moon etc. In fact it is declared that all the glories of the universe are nothing but the glories of the Lord (Ref 9 ch. 8-11). In other words one can worship any entity or object in the universe as a form of God. **'There is only God'.**

After having assimilated the concept of the two stages, I come to the third stage where I begin to understand that God did not become God but God **appears** as the universe without undergoing any change and is without any form (*arupa iswara*). Abiding in this knowledge establishes the non-dual nature of God. The whole universe is viewed as dependent on God. World continues to change, God does not change. This is the transactional Reality (*Vyavaharic Satyam*).

First two concepts of God are covered in the first portion of the Vedas (*Veda purva*) which deals with all types of ritual and practices and various forms of prayers to God and other deities. The third stage of

understanding comes from the knowledge required to reach an understanding of Ultimate Reality. This knowledge is covered in the last part of the Vedas called *Vedanta* or *Upanishads*.

From the earlier discussion of jiva we found that what was central to the nature of help from the Lord was not the help itself but the thought that we were ensured the offer of help. In the third stage, we go one step further and tell ourselves that we do not require any external help. We discover that we have all the strength and resources within ourselves. As a consequence, we don't even depend on any offer of help. Thus, we proceed from God dependence to Self-dependence. (It is important to note that the reference to Self here is to our higher nature (Original consciousness) and not to reflected consciousness or our body-mind complex.) We entertain the powerful thought that we are the sources of our own strength. We should have the awareness that the entire world is dependent on God. God is an independent entity. Problems of the world are not caused by the events that are troubling us but by the event-centric thought in our own minds. The event itself is referred to as the general cause and the specific cause is the thought about the event. It is important to separate the external events from their associated internal thought patterns. Finally, one has to be convinced that one is independent and has the strength to face situations in life. This is philosophically true, and the underlying conviction is also carried to the psychological. This awareness takes away the sense of loneliness.

Ultimate Reality-Non-duality:

In the foregoing discussion we have alluded to three levels of reality viz. *pratibhasic*, *vyavaharic* and *paramarathic*. *Pratibhasic* reality. *Vyavaharic* or transactional is the reality which is the relative reality that we experience during our waking state of experience. *Paramarathic* or Ultimate Reality is the Reality as viewed from the plane of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality itself. Vedanta leads one through successive stages of understanding. One is initially introduced to Brahman with a variety of attributes (isvara or saguna Brahman). Later on various definitions and attributes of *nirguna Brahman* or Ultimate Reality are discussed. This would appear to be contradictory. Vedanta uses the logic of initially putting the seeker on the right path by defining Ultimate Reality that is comprehensible by the intellect and thereafter successively negating each of the definitions or the attributes by the method of 'neti, neti' (not this, not this). Whatever is left after negating everything is the Ultimate reality. Using the word 'neti' twice is to eliminate all the attributes or designations (sat-chit ananda etc.) as well as to remove any similarities (space, sun, prana etc.).

When I use the statement 'I am this', I have to intellectually eliminate 'this' from the sentence and retain only 'I am'. This I am is the ultimate reality. Despite using this negative method of arriving at Brahman intellectually, one is encouraged to continue *niddidhyasana* to come to the conviction that 'I am Brahman'. Constant practice would make one reach the state of this Absolute Knowledge (*jnana nishtha*).

Brahman will continue to remain as the un-negatable consciousness. Negater consciousness is unnegatable. It will always remain as the sub-stratum. Whatever is negatable is not my real nature. The real 'I' is what is left after negating everything. Question arises that if Brahman alone remains, how come that I do not see Him. Scriptures say that you will not see that because that is you yourself, your real nature. Non-experience does not mean non-existence. If Brahman is unobjectifiable, it is not that it is absent; the subject cannot be seen by the subject.

Vedanta does not point to Brahman, the witness, positively because we will be committing a blunder for looking around for the witness of negation. You will never find Him, because you are Him. Once a human being comprehends Brahman, all Its designations disappear. Some may say that 'nothing' is left. Vedanta says that that 'nothing' is Brahman. Buddhism believes that the only thing that is Real is sunnyam (nothingness). Vedanta, on the other hand, continues to affirm that Brahman is ever existing sat-chit-ananda, which is also the nature of our Real self. There is no duality. The only substance that there is, is Brahman. In our vyavaharic plane we can describe Brahman by remaining silent.

We superimpose the attributes of our individual body-mind complexes on this aham experience. With these attributes, the aham experience becomes jiva. After vedantic study, the seeker sheds the superposed

attributes at an intellectual level. What is left behind is I AM. Attributeless 'I AM' is Brahman. The whole world is illumined and experienced by the light of *Brahman* which is also called Atma. Consciousness cannot be objectified, being the subject.

Qualifications Required for self inquiry:

Human ignorance is caused by misperception of who we really are. Self inquiry leads one to understand the cause of this misperception. Successful understanding of the Self can be attained if the seeker has the four-fold qualifications.. These qualifications are discrimination (*viveka*), dispassion (*vairagya*), Intense desire (*mumukshavam*) and six-fold discipline (*Shatka sampati*).

Discrimination does not have any negative connotation as in gender, race, religion, caste etc. Rather, it means having a judgment or discernment between eternal and non-eternal (*nitya* and *anitya*) or what is permanent and what is transitory. World exists within time and space. All objects of the world are within this framework and therefore are subject to the onslaught of time exemplified by birth and death. The objects of the world are perishable by nature and are in a continuous flux and change. Consequently, there is no permanent relationship from which one can get lasting security and support. The right judgment, therefore, is not to rely on the world for ensuring lasting security. However, the world can give us a lot of things: opportunities for growth, service, entertainment, education etc. For lasting support, we have to turn to Brahman (Self) which alone can give us permanent security. Discrimination is that mental faculty which can distinguish the ephemeral from the eternal.

The second qualification is **dispassion**. The normal behavior is to cling to the world for security and support. The gradual weaning away from this support is called dispassion. This is a state of mind that is born out of discrimination where we constantly remind ourselves of what the real support is.

The third qualification is Intense **desire**. It is a craving for freedom from the problems caused by world dependence. Relying on the unreliable is the cause of frustration. Desire in this sense is the strong urge to be free from world dependence.

The fourth and last qualification is the **six-fold inner discipline**: These six disciplines are: 1) *Shamaha* meaning tranquility and mastery of mind; 2) *Damaha* meaning tranquility and mastery over sense organs; 3) *uparamaha* meaning rejection of external activities—withdrawal to find quality time; 4) *Titiksha*: meaning mental toughness to face challenges in life—inner strength; 5) *shraddha*: meaning faith in scriptures and in the teacher—does not connote blind faith but cultivating an open-minded approach so that we give the benefit of doubt till we understand; develop humility and freedom from intellectual arrogance and, finally 6) *Samadhanam* meaning capacity to focus on the goal and maintaining concentration.

All the above four qualifications are prerequisites for pursuing the path of Self inquiry and to understand Ultimate Reality. *Vedas* prescribe various methods to purify the mind and to develop the qualification. The first three qualifications are acquired through the *Karma Yoga* discipline. The fourth qualification is acquired through *Upasana Yoga* (both disciplines are covered in the first part of *Vedas (veda purva)*). Once these preparations are done one gets entitled to go to *jnana yoga* for getting knowledge of the self.

It is important to remember that leading an ethical life is one more important requirement in addition to the practice of *Karma and Upasana yoga*. In Pitangali's *Ashtanga yoga* (ref 10) ten ethical values are described. These include five don'ts and five do's. In the first group, the values included are a) avoidance of violence: physical, verbal, and mental; b) avoiding all avoidable lies; c) avoidance of stealing; d) avoiding inappropriate sexual relations in thought, word and deed; and e) avoiding amassing or having simple living. The five positive values in the second group are: 1) purity - both external and internal; 2) positive contentment with whatever is acquired through legitimate means; 3) self denial as in fasting, observing silence etc., 4) scriptural study and keeping good company; and 5) surrender to the Lord as in *Karma Yoga*.

Role of God's grace (*Iswara kripa*) is emphasized in gaining spiritual growth. Man's free will, effort and devotion are paramount to finding solution to the problem of human dependence on both the world and God. Both effort and grace go hand in hand.

One's devotion or love for God is divided in three grades. First grade is with the motive of material gain. The second type of devotion is also motive based but the motive is for the benefit of spiritual growth. In the third stage there is no motive. In this stage the devotee needs neither material nor spiritual gains.

The liberated person (*jnani*):

A liberated person (*jnani*) is natural and spontaneous because of his knowledge of Self. The traits of such a person can be described from two standpoints: from the vantage point of the mind, and from the point of view of the *Atma*. From the mind angle, the important trait of a *jnani* is equanimity. A *jnani* also faces disturbances caused by the world (*samsara*) like a non-liberated person. Equanimity of a *jnani*'s mind is displayed by three visible facets which are 1) frequency of disturbance, 2) intensity of disturbance, and 3) recovery period after emotional disturbance. A *jnani*'s mind has very low levels for all three traits. Additionally he has confidence, courage, and cheerfulness. These criteria do not apply to the *Atma* since it is free from attributes.

Mind of the seeker is a place of constant power struggle between Reflected and original consciousness (*ahamkara* or ego or RC and witness or OC). *Ahamkara* or ego does not connote pride as in common parlance; it means 'I'ness and 'me'ness. Oc, the Witness is, of course, ever free. A lay person's life is guided by *ahamkara* only and he does not feel any power struggle within. He would not even know about Witness I. It is only after being exposed to the scriptures OC comes to the foreground.

The duties of life are based on the roles that are being played: husband, father, son, mother, daughter, friend, professor, politician etc. all such duties are in the realm of *ahamkara* (RC). But the attitudes towards people and events and the responses to our thoughts and actions are based either on *ahamkara* or witness. When they are based on *ahamkara*, life becomes a struggle. However, when viewed from the vantage of witness, life will look like a sport. The struggle of a seeker is determined by which alternative he chooses in this power struggle between *ahamkara* and witness. Scriptures talk of model minds in order to help seekers to emulate them. The idea of projecting the ideals exemplified in these model minds is not to expect perfection from those who emulate them, but to encourage them to get as close to the ideal as possible. A *jnani* reacts to the world from the view point of the witness even though he is fully involved in all worldly transactions.

Conclusion:

This article gives an outline of the Vedantic teachings for understanding Ultimate Reality. Human search for a meaning in life is necessitated by the desire to be happy or blissful. One realizes that dependence on the world which is *mithya* (neither real nor unreal) does not lead to freedom from the worldly problems. Scriptures point one towards God who initially becomes our Lord and master and we go to seek help from Him. We learn that even with this master-slave relationship, we need to understand our Real nature and the nature of that Reality which is eternal. Vedanta literature defines Ultimate Reality as Brahman with a designation of *sat-chit-ananda* (existence-consciousness-bliss). It then affirms that our own real Self is also of the nature of the Ultimate Reality and that Brahman and our Self are the same thus leading to the conclusion that there is no duality in the universe. The same Brahman in the form of existence-consciousness-bliss pervades every human being.

Human problems are caused by our lack of understanding of our real nature. Partial ignorance due to which we associate our nature with our body-mind complex or other relations, titles or attributes causes all the illusion and misery. We think we are our ego and not the *Atma* that we are. Once, through the process of learning this concept, we realize our true nature we develop the assurance we need to be self sufficient and fulfilled. All limitedness due to this ignorance vanishes. We arrive at the conclusion that everyone and everything in the universe have the same definitions and have eternal oneness. The process of learning is through intellectual assimilation.

Ultimate and non-dual Reality is realized through a process of negation of all the associated attributes. What is left after all negation is the Ultimate Reality which can be spoken of by silence alone.

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