

OCCASIONAL PUBLICATION 55

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Advaita Vedanta

by

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Advaita Vedanta*

यो ब्रह्माणं विदधाति पूर्व यो वै वेदांश्च प्रहिणोति तस्मै ।
तं ह देवमात्मबुद्धिप्रकाशम् मुमुक्षुर्वे शरणमहम् प्रपद्ये ॥

*Om yo Brahmanam Vidadhati purvam
Yo Vai Vedanshcha prahinoti tasmai
Tam ha devatmaatmabuddhihprakasham
Mumukshurvai Sharanamaham Prapadye.*

‘He who in the beginning created Brahma and delivered the Vedas to Him, in that Deva (the Shining, Divine Being) do I, the seeker of liberation, take refuge.’

ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ॥

**Om asatoma sadgamaya, Tamasoma jyotir gamaya
Mrityorma amritam gamaya**

‘Om, lead me from the unreal to the Real; lead me from darkness [of ignorance] to Light [of Divine Knowledge], lead me from death to Immortality.’

* Edited text of a talk delivered by Swami Atmapriyananda on 13 June 2013 at the India International Centre, New Delhi as part of the series of lectures on Indian Philosophy organised by the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

My education and training have been in physics, and I became a monk because from an early age I was drawn irresistibly to the extraordinary ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. I opted for philosophy because I believe that that is the way of life for a physicist, as well as that of a monk. Many people have asked me why, after having done so much highly abstract theoretical physics like particle theory did I turn to philosophy and why I became a monk. The answer which comes naturally to me is that such a happening is not in spite of my background and training in physics, but it is because of it; because if you go to the higher realms of physics, you naturally get trained in looking at the world differently and you realise that this world of matter is not exactly as it appears to you. The readers of the famous book by Arthur Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World*, might remember how he begins by saying that he is writing out his book on two kinds of tables: one, the physical table of matter and the other, the 'scientific' table. The 'scientific' table is not the conventional material table perceived by the senses in the daily life of so-called reality. So physics dovetails into metaphysics in a sense, and a true physicist just cannot look at the world any more as a concrete object out there.

I am not particularly referring only to the principles of quantum physics and so on, but even from a common sense point of view, if you look at the world outside and if you enter into the understanding of the composition of the world of matter, then physics will tell you that it is something so mysterious that you cannot really know or define matter. This is something that physics does not yet know: what exactly is matter, what indeed is a particle. One definition given by Professor Eddington, to which I made a reference at the very start, was that 'Matter is something which is known by Mr. X', but then physics would not accept it as a definition. 'Knowableness by Mr. X' is not a sufficient or acceptable definition of matter from the point of view of physics, but as human beings interacting with the world of matter, it is immediately obvious that without a knower Mr. X, and knowableness by Mr. X as an essential attribute, matter itself has no meaning or relevance. If there is no knower to know the world of matter, and knowableness by the knower is not considered an essential attribute of matter, of what use or relevance is all that matter existing 'out there'? So this is

a fundamental question physics has been struggling with, 'what is matter?' its nature and composition, its attributes, etc., and interestingly physics does not as yet know the answer to this very simple and very fundamental question! And physics rejoices that there is no answer to this question yet, because if questions are solved, then life ceases!

Thus, there is a perpetual question which you keep asking and continuing to find tentative answers to, keep moving along and exploring further and further. That has been the procedure in the Indian philosophical tradition, particularly in Vedanta. There is the famous story in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, for example, in which the guru, the teacher, was the father. In the ancient days, the greatest gurus used to be the parents themselves. The guru, the father, told his son to explore into Brahman. The son asked, 'What is Brahman? How do you define Brahman? What is it that you are asking me to seek?' *Adheehi bhagao brahmeti*—that is the statement. 'Please tell me what is Brahman?'

The Guru replied:

*Yato vaa imaani bhootaani jaayante yena jaataani jeevanti,
Yat prayatyabhisamvishanti, Tadvijnaasasva tadbrahmeti*

'That from which all the beings arise [initially], in which all the beings rest [in the state of manifestation] and into which all the beings merge [finally], that is Brahman, seek That. That is Brahman.'

Then he went to seek Brahman. How, through what means?

Tapasaa brahma vijnaasasva, tapo brahmeti

Know, realise, Brahman through *tapas*. What is *tapas*? A wonderful definition, quoted often by the great commentator (*bhashyakara*) Shankara, is as follows: *Manascha indriyanam cha haikagryam paramam tapah*: 'The concentration of the mind and the focussing of the senses [inward] is Supreme *tapas*.' That is the bedrock of the entire Vedantic tradition: you learn anything through *tapas*, concentration of the mind, profound inward focus. *Tapas* is the most important

practice in Vedanta as well as all of Indian tradition. You need *tapas*, you need austerity, you need to control and focus your senses on the object of your quest. The mind is constantly outgoing, the senses are outgoing, they need to be restrained and brought inward in the course of your higher inner quest. *Tapasa brahma vijijnasasva*, 'realise the Supreme Truth, Brahman, through *tapas*' and he adds there, very significantly, *tapo brahmeti*. *Tapas* itself is Brahman. This is also a very interesting idea—the means to realising the Supreme Knowledge, the means to the Goal, is itself the Goal! 'The first step is the last step' as J. Krishnamurti would say in modern times. 'Make the means and end the same' as Swami Vivekananda taught. There are no 'steps' leading to the final Goal, the very steps are the Goal, each step the immediate Goal, leading to the ultimate Goal. As the *Mahavakya*, the Great Saying, of the Upanishad would exhort: '*Tat twam asi*, you just are That [Reality].' The human mind asks childishly: 'Then what?' The answer is: 'there is no *then*. Time comes to a stop. The mind is destroyed, *manonasha* as Vedanta would call it. Space and time vanish. The world of relativity ceases. *What* is, is—Absolute Existence, Absolute Awareness, Absolute Bliss. There is no comma, there are no dots. You are That.'

Tapasa brahma vijijnasasva, tapo brahmeti—my child, realise Brahman through *tapas*, *tapas* is verily Brahman.

Then this lad went and started doing *tapas*. Controlling his senses and concentrating on something, he knew not what, but all that he knew was that he has to find That from which all beings arise and in which all beings rest and into which all beings go. He performed intense *tapas*, and at the end of that meditation, he came back and said: 'Sir, I have now found out what is Brahman' What is that? It is all matter and matter and matter everywhere. You see matter everywhere.

Annam brahmeti vyajanaat, annaadyeva khalvamaani bhootani jaayante
Annena jaataani jeevanti, annam prayantyaabhisamvishanti
Tad vijnaaya punareva varunam pitaramupasasaara
Adheehi bhagao brahmeti

He came back to the father and said, 'I have found Brahman to be only a sea of matter.' Then the father smiled, but did not say yes or no. That is the Indian

tradition. You don't say, 'Ah, you have found out something, good, I will give you a prize for it.' Nor he did say, 'you fellow you haven't found That.' He only smiled and said, 'Good, go ahead.' You will know Brahman by *tapas*, which itself is Brahman: *Tapasaa brahma vijnaasasva, tapo brahmeti*.

What the father meant was: 'You have found out just one layer of Brahman, now go and meditate again.' The young aspirant then understood that there is something which the father is hinting at. Perhaps there are higher layers of Brahman. Let me go and meditate. He went back and meditated, performing intense *tapas*. Then he discovered a higher layer of Brahman which is life energy, *prana*. Everything vibrating with *prana* is animated. The world is not simply matter. There is hunger for food, thirst for water. There is something, some vital energy, which is animating the entire universe. This universe is full of animated beings. This animation, called *prana*, it is one of the greatest discoveries in Vedanta; it is the bridge between Consciousness which we call *Chaitanya* and matter which is called *Jada*.

In the Western worldview, life and Consciousness are mixed up and mean the same thing. But in the Indian tradition, life and Consciousness are two distinct entities. Life is a manifestation of Consciousness just as even *Jada*, pure matter, is also a manifestation of Consciousness at a very low level. The link between this pure *Jada* which is matter and Consciousness which is *Chaitanya* is the *prana*—this was the main subject of research by Acharya Jagadis Chandra Bose. His greatest contribution was the discovery that this *prana* animates even the plants and apparently lifeless matter.

The eager seeker thus discovered the next layer of Brahman as *prana*:

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*Prano brahmeti vyajanaat, Pranaadhyeva khalvamaani bhootaani jaayante
Praanam prayantyabhisamvishanti, Tad vijnaaya, punareva varunam pitaramupasasaara
Adheehi bhagao brahmeti*

The lad came back to his guru, his father, and said, 'I have now found out that *prana* is Brahman.' The father once again sent him back to *tapas*, to meditation, without saying anything positive or negative. That, as we said earlier, is the Indian technique of discovery: scientific investigation. Nothing presumed, nothing taken for granted, nothing pre-supposed, there is no bias, no pre-conceived notion, but pure investigation with suspension of judgement, with eagerness to arrive at Truth as It actually is: *yatha bhuta darshanam*, as it is called in Vedanta. The father again sent him back saying: 'Go and meditate and find out what is Brahman.' He never gave him the final answer, but continuously prodded him on to further and further research through enquiry in a spirit of scientific investigation or *tapas*, indicating to him that he was moving to higher levels of discovery, thus giving him a fillip, a simple nod and a smile acknowledging that he had gone to a level of discovery which was beyond what he discovered earlier.

Tapasaa brahma vijnaasasva, tapo brahmeti

This method of scientific investigation requires a lot of patience as it involves repeated practice of *tapas*. His eagerness to seek was so genuine that the lad again went back. The joy of discovery is something unique. Today, everyone has realised that the joy of discovery in education sustains the whole of the educational process. If a student or an enquirer does not feel the joy of discovery, the joy of enquiry spurred on by curiosity and urge to research, then education is dead. In education, we are therefore now emphasising research, innovation and enquiry more than ever. So this boy, who was rejoicing in his inner exploration, was excited about repeatedly returning to *tapas*.

Sa tapo atapyata sa tapastaptvaa—he meditated, performed *tapas*, and as a result of the intensity of his *tapas*, he realised that there is another dimension of Brahman beyond *prana*. He found that the whole universe is nothing but waves of thought. Though appearing concrete solid matter, it is in reality thought. What

you call *Jada* or matter is only a concretisation, through *prana*, of a thought which arises in the mind. The whole world is realised at this stage as waves of thought. It is called the *bhaava rupa jagat*, the universe of feelings, sensations, emotions and thoughts. It is a subtle vibration, *spandana*, as a thought-world, a world of ideas. Then he came back to tell his father of his discovery of the Supreme Reality, Brahman, as *manomaya*, a sea of ideas and thoughts:

*Mano brahmeti vyajanaat, Manasohyeva khalvamaani bhootaani jaayante
Manasaa jaataani jeevanti, Manah prayantyaabhisamvishanti
Tad vijnaaya punareva varunam pitaramupasasaara, Adheehi bhagao brahmeti*

Through this repeated enquiry, through subtler and more intense *tapas*, he realised that he was uncovering deeper and deeper layers of Brahman's *swarupa* or real nature. His father, as before, said: 'Good, you have come so far, now go back and meditate again.' The boy went back to perform *tapas* more intensely and discovered a deeper dimension than even the mind. He saw that beyond the *sankalpa-vikalpatmaka manas*, the mind oscillating between the thesis and the antithesis, between 'to be' and 'not to be', there is a determinative, intuitive faculty called *vijnana*. This word is very common in Buddhism. *Vijnana* is a faculty of the higher mind or intuition that is determinative. In Vedanta it is called *nischyatmika buddhi*. This *buddhi* is not the intellect, but a deeper faculty which may be called intuition, transcending the intellect. This faculty opens up spontaneously when the intellectual faculty, the mental faculty, is transcended. It does not awake at the end of a dialectical process of analysis of the pros and cons leading to a decision, but is thrown up when analysis stops and the mind is stilled—no waves, no conflicting thoughts, no oscillations occur in the mind. This is the intuitive faculty called *vijnana*, which is called *sattwiki buddi* (pure intelligence) in the *Gita*. *Yoga Sutra* calls it *prajna*, it is also known as *medha*. It is the *dhi* that is spoken of in the famous *Gayatri mantra* which is a prayer to the Supreme Being symbolised by the Effulgent Sun for the awakening of *dhi*: *Dhiyoyonah prachodyat*.

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Vedantic wisdom in ancient Indian tradition has explored the psyche of man, the mind of man, the inner world of thoughts and consciousness so profoundly, that it describes every bit of the inner world with supreme subtlety. Sanskrit is perhaps the richest language capable of describing the inner world and its subtleties in such an impeccable fashion. Of course, Sanskrit is a poor vehicle for describing the outer world of matter that the physical sciences describe so carefully with the help of German and English. But English is so poor for describing the subtleties of the inner world. We have to struggle for words to describe the inner world in English. Swami Vivekananda struggled for words when he first interpreted Vedanta in English, perhaps for the first time in world history, to a Western audience uninitiated in Vedantic nuances. For example, there is only a single word in English, namely, 'mind' to describe the inner organ of thinking. But if you talk about 'mind' to an Indian student, he would ask you: By mind do you mean the *antahkarna*, or do you mean the *chitta*, or the *buddhi*, or the *manas*? By *buddhi* do you mean *dhi*, or *prajna*, or *medha* or *shraddha*? So many subtle nuances for a single concept in the inner world of consciousness!

Swami Vivekananda said: 'If I ever had a chance to begin my education over again and if I had any say in the matter, I would not teach anything at all! I would only teach the power of concentration, the technique by which subtle understanding may come to the student.' In ancient India, the children were empowered by the teacher, the guru, through the *Gayatri mantra* to awaken the *dhi*, the intuitive wisdom, and with such an awakened, purified and concentrated mind, they could absorb any amount of knowledge with ease and joy. That was the ancient Indian Vedic tradition, this awakening of the *dhi* with the power of the *Gayatri mantra*. This empowerment was open to both boys and girls—there was no gender bias or discrimination in this. Even girls were invested with the sacred thread and the *Upanayana* ceremony was common to both boys and girls. Somewhere down the line, and no known reason, we lost this wonderful tradition of girls being empowered through the *Gayatri mantra*. The very occurrence of these powerful terms, *shraddha*, *medha*, *buddhi*, *dhi*, *prajna*, repeatedly at that, is a pointer to the spiritual richness and the sublimity of the Vedic culture and civilisation. Most interestingly, all these words, without exception, are in feminine gender. The Devi, Goddess of Wisdom,

Saraswati, who is also often referred to by these words, is also a female deity! This indicates how reverentially the Vedic civilisation looked upon the female principle as the source of wisdom, intuition and enlightened understanding. Medha is regarded as a Devi, Goddess of Wisdom, who admits you to the world of intuition called the *Hiranyagarbha loka*, which is the macrocosmic (*samasti*) aspect of the *vijnanamaya atman*. The *medha-suktam*, a famous Vedic hymn, describes how Medha Devi guides the spiritual aspirant to higher worlds of intuitive spiritual understanding and wisdom.

Now, to continue the story of Aruni and Bhrigu of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*—the imparting of spiritual wisdom by the father, the guru, to his son, the disciple. So the disciple has reached a level of understanding of the Atman called *vijnanamaya atman*, and on moving from here into the macrocosmic aspect of this *vijnanamaya*, he enters the vast expanse of the world of *Hiranyagarbha* (called *Mahat* in the Sankhya philosophy), the Cosmic Intelligence, the *Saguna Brahman*, often called *Brahmaloka* or *Satyaloka*. It is the last and the final station among the manifested worlds—the subtlest, the purest, the most *sattwik* (*shuddha sattwa*), a technical term used in Vedanta to describe this state of Consciousness. The spiritual truths at the higher levels cannot be grasped by the senses or by the unawakened mind, but may be intuited, directly and immediately (*sakshat, aparokshat*), by a purified, subtle, concentrated, penetrating and illumined mind—*drishyate tvagrayaya buddhya sukshmaya sukshmadarshibhih*, as the *Kathopanishad* puts it: this Atman, the Supreme Reality, is seen by the concentrated, purified, subtle and awakened, by those who are constantly and habitually wont to dwell in subtle realms of Awareness. Here is where the ordinary mind jumps out of itself, as it were, transcends itself, and lands into a realm where higher intuition, *prajna, vijnana, dhi, medha* take over. It is a world of Light, what the Christian mystics call the ‘Uncreated Light’, what Vedanta calls the *jyotisham jyoti*, the Light of Lights. The Upanishads abound in so many beautiful, poetic verses like the following:

Na tatra suryo bhati, na chandra tarakam, no ma vidyuto bhanti, kuto'yam agnih,

Tameva bhantam anubhati sarvam, tasya bhasa sarvamidam vibhati.

One gets habituated to cultivating lofty ideas by the habit of contemplation and higher meditation. The Indian tradition of Vedanta says that the more you cultivate the habit of thinking noble thoughts, dwelling constantly upon high ideas, thinking about them, meditating upon them, the more the newer vistas of spiritual vision that open up. This lofty thinking would possess you in such a way that you would find yourself just incapable of any mean, low, debasing thought—even unconsciously, even in a dream!

‘There the sun does not shine, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor lightning, what to speak of this fire! That [Supreme Self, the Atman] shining, everything else shines after It, all else shines by the light of that the Supreme Light’ (*Kathopanishad* and *Mundakopanishad*).

Tacchubhram jyotisham jyotih, tadyadatma vido viduh

‘That is the Pure One, the Light of Lights, That is realised by those who know the Atman’ (*Mundakopanishad*).

That the Supreme Truth cannot be known by the senses and the mind has been emphasised by Vedanta as well as by Western philosophical thought. But Vedanta asked the question: ‘If It cannot be known by the mind or the senses, is It absolutely unknowable?’ Here lies the difference between Western philosophical thought and Vedanta. Vedanta asserts, emphatically and clearly, that this Supreme Reality, Atman, is unknown (to the senses and the mind), but not unknowable. How then can it be known? As mentioned earlier, it can be known, realised, by a pure mind, by an illumined intellect. As the *Kathopanishad* says, this Atman can be realised, seen, by a purified, intensified, concentrated, illumined, penetrating higher intelligence—*drishyate tvagraiyaya buddhya sukshmaya sukshmadarshibhih*; *Drishyate*, is seen, *agryaya buddhya*, by *buddhi*, by *dhi*, by *prajna*, that is sharpened, purified, one-pointed, illumined, *sukshmaya* subtle, penetrating, focussed. Who are the persons capable of such a vision? Those who habitually, naturally, spontaneously dwell in subtle realms, persons of rarefied illumined understanding.

One gets habituated to cultivating lofty ideas by the habit of contemplation and higher meditation. The Indian tradition of Vedanta says that the more you cultivate the habit of thinking noble thoughts, dwelling constantly upon high ideas, thinking about them, meditating upon them, the more the newer vistas of spiritual vision that open up. This lofty thinking would possess you in such a way

that you would find yourself just incapable of any mean, low, debasing thought—even unconsciously, even in a dream! There is a famous statement in Vedanta which says: *aa supteh amriteh kaalam, nayet Vedanta chintaya*, meaning, ‘as long as you have not lost yourself in deep sleep, as long as you have not dropped down dead—that is, till your last breath—fill your mind with Vedantic ideas, with high thoughts, with elevating noble thoughts’. Your mind would then be so powerfully saturated with these high Vedantic thoughts that it becomes a deep-rooted habit that no small, mean, debasing thought can ever find a place in your elevated consciousness. What a blessing is such a mind, what an asset is such a mind to human life and consciousness! This has been described in Vedanta as the invasion of *medha*—*medha devi* as it were possessed the mind and threw a search light of higher wisdom that dispelled all the darkness of ignorance, all meanness and smallness from the mind. The *medha suktam* says:

O Medha Devi, before you came into my consciousness, I was delighting in useless talk, in gossip mongering, in debasing conversation. Now that You have come into my life, I have been possessed by You, blessed with Your presence, invaded by your Divinity, my old habit of thinking low thoughts, this gossip mongering, bickering, back-biting, talking ill of the other people, discussing useless matters about people, has gone. I would henceforth think big, cultivate holy thoughts, discuss Brahman, the Vast Infinite Reality, with my heroic children and grandchildren, with my spiritually elevated disciples and grand-disciples.

There is a saying in English: ‘Great, elevated persons discuss ideas. Mediocre, ordinary persons discuss events. Low, mean-minded persons discuss people.’ Vedanta therefore exhorts you to make a habit of filling your mind and consciousness with thoughts which are elevating. Anything else is a sheer waste of time and energy; it drains so much of our psychic energy, leaving us with very little energy for higher pursuits. When you faithfully follow this Vedantic exhortation, you find that gradually a time comes when any thought other than the one that is elevated, purified, ennobled, would appear unbearable for you. If any low or mean thought crossed your mind even unconsciously, your entire psyche would react violently and throw this thought away from your field of

consciousness. These are palpable results consequent upon the awakening of *medha* or *prajna*. It was as if you put a spam filter and anything that was spam would go into the trash box! You put a firewall, and anything undesirable would simply be cast away, not allowed in the field of your consciousness! You then programme the system to auto-clear the trash box, scan and auto-correct the bad sectors. Programming for the spam filter, firewall, auto-clearance of the trash box, auto-correction, is called Vedanta *Sadhana*, spiritual practice. It is not at all difficult; just a few years of conscious and awakened effort and once you have placed this filter, this firewall, what joy, what elevation you find. Whenever we are tempted to discuss people, engage in a saucy conversation about who did what and who ought to have done what, or ought not to have done what, to find out the mistakes of people and then make an encyclopaedia and a dictionary of them, reject the very thought, firmly tell your mind that no such debasing exercise would be allowed. Fill your mind with elevating, noble, Vedantic thoughts. As Swami Vivekananda said, 'Let the lion of Vedanta roar, foxes will flee to their holes'. So the *rishi* says in the *medha suktam*: *tvaya jushtha jushamana duruktan brihad vadoma vidathe suvirah*, meaning,

O Medha Devi, before You came to me, I was delighting in all kinds of useless talk, I used to rejoice in gossip and worthless speech, but after You have come into my life, after You have blessed me, after You have invaded my being, I [have been so much transformed that] I will henceforth only discuss sublime truths, great ideas, elevating noble themes, divine godly spiritual truths in the company of my children, grandchildren, with my disciples and grand disciples [so that this divine spiritual speech shall become a habit with me]. This is the first step in spiritual progress, this awakening of the higher consciousness, this opening of the *vijnanamaya atman* through the door of *medha, dhi*. This is the blessing, this awakening of the *dhi* that the *Gayatri mantra* bestows on the aspirant.

Now, to follow the story of our young aspirant Bhrihu. So this boy came back and said, 'Sir, I have now realised Brahman as *vijnanamaya*':

*Vijnanam Brahmetivyajanat, vijnaanadhyeva khalvimani bhootani jayante,
vijnanenaiva jatani jivanti, vijnanam prayantyaabhivashantiti, tad vijnaaya,
punareva varunam pitaramupasasaara,
Adheehi bhagao brahmeti*

The father was delighted at this progress in uncovering layer after layer of Brahman, coming almost to the end of his *sadhana*. He again sent him back to perform *tapas*: *Tapasaa brahma vijnaasasva, tapo Brahmeti*.

With infinite patience and deep faith in the guru's words, the disciple again went for a further dose of *tapas*. What a remarkable way of guiding and training the disciple! Not giving him any definite answer, but gently guiding him, empowering him to discover the Truth for himself, to joyfully go through the spiritual journey of uncovering the layers of Brahman.

This is the Vedantic method of teaching in the Upanishads. You need infinite patience, infinite perseverance, infinite purity, as Swami Vivekananda said, to be able to succeed on the spiritual path. And the most important is *tapas*, contemplation, meditation, inwardness, looking within with an eager longing to discover the inner Immortal Treasure. Even to ask a question of the guru, one needed years of *tapas*, so that the answer, when given by the guru, ignites the heart of the disciple, sets it aglow with divine fire. In the *Chandogya Upanishad* there is a famous story of Indra, the great king of the Devas, who went to Prajapati, called Brahma or *Hiranyagarbha*, and requested permission to ask a question. Brahma smiled and said, 'My son, you need to perform *tapas* for a thousand years to become eligible to ask a question.' The idea was that questioning was a serious business and when the answer was given by the teacher, the disciple should have had sufficient spiritual strength born of *tapas* to be able to assimilate the teaching. Indra then went for a thousand years of *tapas*, came back and was granted permission to ask a question. He was enlightened with the answer and wanted to know more. When he wanted to ask one more question, Brahma told him: 'My son, go back and perform another round of *tapas* for a thousand years.' Another thousand years for one more

question! What rigorous discipline! Teaching was imparted only when the disciple was fit to receive the instruction so that the teaching bears fruit. Of course, a thousand years was certainly an exaggeration, what Swami Vivekananda called the Oriental hyperbole, to drive home the point of the disciple's readiness and spiritual maturity to imbibe the teaching and the importance of *tapas* in preparing the disciple in his spiritual journey to Illumination.

So the young disciple of our story, Bhrigu, went for another and final dose of *tapas* and reached the ultimate layer of Brahman, the *anandamaya*. The Shruti finally declared:

*Anandam Brahmeti vyajaanaat, anandadhyeva khlalvimani bhuanijayante,
Anandena jatani jivanti, anandam prayantyaabhisamvishanti*

From *Ananda* (Bliss Absolute) all beings arise, in *Ananda* all beings rest, and into *Ananda* all beings finally merge.

This is a remarkable Vedantic discovery of the five-layered human personality: *Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya, Anandamaya*. The Upanishad calls each of these layers Atman in its own right: *Annamaya-atman, Pranamaya-atman, Manomaya-atman, Vijnanamaya-atman, Anandamaya-atman*. Shankaracharya, however, interprets these layers as coverings or *koshas*, and looks at the Atman as beyond these five *koshas*. The Brahman beyond these five *koshas* is present in all beings as the Atman, the self-luminous Entity of the nature of Consciousness-Bliss (*chidananda-swarupa*). This identity of the Atman-Brahman, *atma-brahma-aikya* as Shankara would call it, is the ultimate Truth of Advaita Vedanta.

One may ask: What is the relevance of this Vedantic study? Is it merely for intellectual pleasure? No, certainly not. We should remember that Vedanta is not a polemical system of philosophy for intellectual gymnastics by scholars. In fact, Vedanta is not even philosophy. Vedanta is not metaphysics. Vedanta is certainly not a religion. Then what is it? It is a wonderfully remarkable worldview comprising and emerging out of a simple compendium of the profound answers

which a human mind is rewarded with when it asks simple questions! The problem with us is that we cannot ask simple questions. We are fond of making simple things complicated. We train our minds to ask complicated questions. But the Truth Itself is so simple though profound that if we ask simple questions, the answers that we get are so profound.

Our children often ask very simple questions which we, the so-called educated elders, call stupid. But when we look carefully, we see that some of these simple questions fetch profound answers. Children ask simple questions in their pristine innocence because they directly commune with Nature, unspoilt by the so-called education by which we, the 'educated' elders, have allowed ourselves to be spoiled. Albert Einstein was once asked: 'How did you come upon this great discovery of the theory of relativity that has revolutionised Physics and man's conception of space and time?' He smiled and said: 'You see, when we are children we ask very simple, naive questions of our parents and elders which they usually dismiss as stupid. So when we grow up, we become self-conscious about our knowledge acquired through the so-called educational process and thus stop asking such questions. In my case I didn't quite stop asking these questions even after I grew up and therefore I came upon this great discovery as an answer to my simple questions of childhood!' Vedanta, therefore, is about asking very simple questions about life and existence, and the profound answers to these questions are the Upanishads! For example, the *rishi* asks questions like: 'How is it that I see when I open my eyes? How does the ear hear sounds? By what process does the mind think?' The meaning is: is it the mere presence of the eyes or the ears or the mind that makes the process of seeing, hearing or thinking possible, or is it something else apart from the eye, the ears of the mind which makes this possible? These questions appear to be too naive and bordering on stupidity. But the answers to these simple questions form the content of one of the most important of the Upanishads, *Kenopanishad*, on which Shankaracharya wrote two commentaries, the *pada-bhashya* and *vakya-bhashya*. This Upanishad begins asking the following simple questions:

*Keneshitham patati preshitam manah, kena pranah prathamah praiti yukta,
keneshithaam, vacham imam vadanti, chakshuh srotram ka u devo yunakti*

meaning, 'impelled by whom does the mind think about various things, the vital energy (*prana*) functions, the speech, the ears and the eyes perform their respective functions?' This is the very first question with which the *Kenopanishad* begins and the answers form the immortal treasure of spiritual wisdom called the Vedanta. So this Upanishad begins by asking: 'Impelled by whom does the eye see, impelled by whom does the ear hear, inspired by which *Devata*, the luminous being, is the mind able to think.' The idea is that the eye by itself cannot see; there is some other thing apart from it that makes it see. Similarly, the mind, the ear, vital force, all these organs function by being impelled by Brahman, of the nature of Pure Consciousness, *Chaitanya-swarupa*, without which they would be only dead matter. The Upanishad puts it dramatically: it is not by the eye that one sees but by the 'eye of the eye', it is not by the ear that one sees but by the 'ear of the ear', it is not by the mind that one sees but by the 'mind of the mind', and so on. A person who can realise, can intuitively understand the eye of this eye and the ear of this ear and the mind of this mind, such a person goes beyond death and becomes immortal.

*Shrotasya shrotam manaso mano yad, vacho ha vacham sa u pranasya pranah
Chakshushash chakshuratimuchya dheeraah, pretyasmaallokadamrita bhavanti*

This is why Vedanta is so relevant for all ages: it is asking simple questions about our life and existence, about our body, our senses, our mind, our thoughts, their deeper meaning and significance. Ultimately, Vedanta asks:

What is this 'I' that everybody feels and talks about constantly? What is the real nature of this 'I'? Is it the hands or the feet, the organs of the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect, the sense of egoism? What exactly is it? This 'I' is so well known, so frequently, commonly, constantly used, but is the least understood!

Vedanta unravels the mystery of this apparently best known, but actually least known 'I'! There was once a very interesting survey by the American Psychologists' Association on what was the most frequently used word in the English language.

The answer they got, which everybody could easily guess, is the ubiquitous, one syllable word 'I', which governs the whole universe! The moment we get up from sleep we begin with 'I' and when we again retire to bed we constantly keep saying, I did this, I said this, I went there, I like this, I don't like this—this endless assertions of the 'I'! This 'I' is called *aham in Sanskrit*. The discovery of the true nature of this *aham* is the whole scope of Vedanta. Interestingly, the *Brihadaranyakopanishad* says *aham* itself is the name of the Atman, just like *Om* is the name of Brahman!

Thus we see that Vedanta is based on our daily experience. It is not something transcendental and mystical, cut off from and unrelated to our daily experience. It is the very basis of our daily experience and day-to-day perceptions. Vedanta is a scientific quest into the basis and nature of our daily experience, and from an analysis of our daily perceptions, we come upon the profound Truth of our life and existence. For example, assume somebody knocks at the door, or somebody presses your call bell at the door. You call out from inside: 'Who is that?' Invariably, the person calling spontaneously responds as 'I', You then ask: 'Who's it?' He may perhaps then announce himself by his name. This simple daily experience tells you that 'I' or *aham* in Sanskrit is the name of the Self, the Atman, which is my real nature. This is a profound Truth discovered by the Upanishad, by Vedanta, as a result of the investigation into a simple daily experience! There is another interesting investigation made in the Upanishad. The *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad, for example, asks the simple question: 'What is the most favourite, most beloved object in your life, something you love the most?' Investigate into your daily experience. Maybe you love your possessions, your wealth, your bank balance, your position in society, your intellectual attainments, your bodily features, your beautiful eyes and face, your wife, your children, and so on—the list is perhaps endless. But, when it comes to giving up any of these, vis-à-vis your own

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self coming to an end, you would prefer to sacrifice everything in order to cling on to and preserve your 'I', your individuality, yourself. Thus, investigation into oneself reveals that one loves oneself the most. I am in fact the most beloved of myself. Many experiments have been done on human beings and animals and they have revealed that the most beloved of oneself is one's own self. The 'I' is the 'most dearest', if we can use such an expression following Shakespeare's use of the phrase 'the most unkindest' in his famous play *Julius Caesar*. The 'most dearest', the *priyatama*, the dearest of the dearest is the 'I'. From this simple daily experience, deeply investigated, the Upanishad, the Vedanta, comes to the profound conclusion that love of one's own self is the very basis of all love in life. The 'I' could be explained as the lower self, the ego, or the higher self, the Atman, the real nature of being. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* goes to the extent of saying you love everybody because you love yourself. The root cause about love itself, people liking something, loving something, is this love of oneself. Psychologists have discovered that a person develops psychosis or mental derangement when he does not love himself. Self-hate is a sure symptom of mental derangement leading often to violence, madness, suicide, etc. Suicide and violence invariably are the result of self-hate. The only difference between Western psychology which has discovered that lack of self-love leads to mental derangement and ultimately to suicidal tendencies, and Indian psychology of Vedanta, is that while Western psychology sees the self with a small 's', Vedanta says this self, being a pale and insignificant, in fact non-existent, shadow of the higher Self, should be replaced with a capital S—Self rather than self! The bigger Self is the Atman of the *Upanishad*, the *Atmachaitanya*, which in fact is identical with the Infinite, or Cosmic Consciousness or *Brahmachaitanya*.

There is an interesting passage in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. Yajnavalkya is the greatest figure, a *rishi* of outstanding spiritual stature, and could be considered the central figure of this *Upanishad*. Yajnavalkya, interestingly, was not a *sanyasi*, a monk, but a householder with two wives! These great *rishis*, to whom we owe everything of the Upanishadic wisdom of Vedanta, cannot be and need not be classified as monks or householders. They are essentially men of God who lived a divine life, absorbed and soaked in divine consciousness. The difference between

a *sanyasi* (monk) and a *grihastha* (householder) came much later, perhaps due to the influence of Buddha who pushed the monastic ideal a little too far. As Swami Vivekananda remarked, Buddha made the whole nation monastic, gave nothing for the householder. When one lives a divine life, a life of godliness, a life of intense spiritual awareness, a life of great elevation of the mind, it is immaterial where one is stationed and into what category one is classified.

As we said, Yajnavalkya had two wives, Maitreyi and Katyayani. Maitreyi was a *Brahmavadini*, one who dwelt on and was deeply concerned with Brahman or the Supreme Reality. Yajnavalkya called both his wives and said: 'Look, I am going to distribute all my property between you two and I am going away from the household as a mendicant.' Yajnavalkya was a very interesting person. He was an elevated *rishi* but was nevertheless intensely practical. This is another important characteristic one finds in all the spiritual and godly men in the Upanishads. Their absorption with God did not prevent them from being highly practical and down-to-earth in their daily life and behaviour, something we see so wonderfully illustrated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda's remarkable guru. He used to jocularly tell his disciples: 'You see, I often cannot manage to keep my cloth on my body, but I scarcely forget anything or misplace anything!' One mistaken notion prevalent in India is that Vedanta makes a person impractical on account of an overdose of other-worldliness. Truth to tell, the lives of the great Upanishadic *rishis*, repeated in modern times in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, show clearly that Vedanta makes a person much more practical than a person who is not a Vedantist. This is because a Vedantist realises the very essence of the Truth and Truth is the most practical and realisable thing in life.

For example, there is a beautiful story in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* to illustrate Yajnavalkya's intense practicality and even his acute sense of humour. Yajnavalkya goes to Janaka's court where he finds Janaka surrounded by great *rishis* and Vedic scholars. Not only Janaka, but many kings contemporaneous to him were always surrounded by illumined *rishis* and men of great Vedic wisdom. There suddenly arose a desire in Janaka's mind to know who among the *rishis*

assembled in his court was the most knowledgeable of the Vedas, called a *Brahmishtha*, the greatest Vedic scholar, not merely intellectually, but also in realisation of the Vedic truths. He openly offered to reward this *Brahmishtha* with one thousand cows, the cow being considered the most precious gift those days, with each of the cows having a large amount of gold attached to its horns. None of the Vedic sages assembled there got up, for who would dare to declare himself as the greatest Vedic scholar? Yajnavalkya looked around and finding nobody getting up, smartly got up and told his disciple, Samashrava, 'My dear boy, take these cows home.' The moment Yajnavalkya declared this, there was a huge furore and protest, everybody asking in one voice: 'Yajnavalkya, are you the greatest among the Knowers of Vedas in this assembly?' Yajnavalkya's humour here was so delightfully subtle. He said: 'Sirs, I bow down to the greatest Knower of Vedas in this assembly, but I badly need those cows!' That was the practical wisdom and profound self-confidence born out of direct realisation of the Supreme Reality expounded in the Vedas and the Vedanta. The other *rishis* were up in arms and a big debate ensued. One by one, these *rishis* began to throw questions at Yajnavalkya who answered them with perfect ease and equipoise, his luminous answers arising from the depths of his realisation of the Supreme Reality. This wonderful debate forms the core of the Vedantic wisdom of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.

Such was the Vedantic method: debate, reasoned argument based on the authority of the Shruti or the Scripture (*shutyanugriha tarka*), and free flowing discussion, interaction, exchange of high thoughts among enlightened minds keenly eager to explore, investigate and discover the Ultimate Truth. This was and is the 'argumentative Indian', about whom Professor Amartya Sen speaks. When Yajnavalkya was at his eloquent and spiritual best, beating *rishi* after *rishi* in his debate, he finally had to confront a woman *rishi*, Gargi, who challenged Yajnavalkya saying: 'O Yajnavalkya, I am now going to throw two questions at you like two sharp arrows. If you can answer these two questions, then we will concede that you are *the* greatest Knower of the Vedas among those assembled here and you will be allowed to take these cows home, otherwise not.' Yajnavalkya, with his characteristic poise and confidence, said: 'Come on Gargi,

ask, *priccha Gargi!*' Gargi put the two questions which Yajnavalkya answered nonchalantly and with bubbling confidence born of his realisation of the Supreme Truth. Gargi then told the assembly of *rishis* in Janaka's court:

O ye, assembly of great Brahmins and Vedic scholars, men of great wisdom, nobody among us can ever defeat Yajnavalkya as far as his profound Knowledge of the Vedas goes and if you all can just bow down to him and then quickly escape, you should feel blessed and thank your stars! Don't dare to debate with him anymore. He is undoubtedly the greatest Knower of the Vedas, Brahminshtha among us all.

Yajnavalkya then put questions to the assembled *rishis* and when none of them dared open their mouths to reply, he himself answered all his questions and took the cows home.

We have related this Upanishadic story elaborately to illustrate the high level of debate, investigative enquiry, open dialogue that engendered the Vedantic wisdom in ancient times. Swami Vivekananda points out how kings—and absolute monarchs they were—not only found time to encourage such highly-strung discussions in their courts, but they themselves actively participated in these debates, questioning and learning constantly. Janaka's thrill at the continuous spiritual journey of discovery of spiritual truths from the teachings of Yajnavalkya, his great teacher, is a wonderful saga positioning the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* as a Lighthouse of Vedantic wisdom. Swami Vivekananda said that it was only because our nation was prosperous, rich and economically advanced that the kings could afford to spend so much time and energy in the pursuit of spiritual knowledge, eagerly absorbing the sublime teachings of the *rishis*, rewarding them with great wealth and motivating their subjects to constantly cultivate high and lofty thoughts. It is a remarkable fact that even in recent times, at a time when India was under subjugation by British rule, the Maharaja of Mysore printed and distributed copies of perhaps the most profound of the Advaitic texts, the *Ashtavakra Samhita*, to all his subjects and made it a textbook, as it were, for his whole kingdom! When Swami Vivekananda was once questioned at the Harvard Philosophical Club about the Vedantic idea of

civilisation, he said: 'True civilisation is the manifestation of the divinity of man. That civilisation is the greatest where the highest truths become the most practical.' In the light of this definition, it is undoubtedly true that ancient Indian civilisation, based on Vedanta, attained sublime heights.

The *Yajnavalkya-Maitreyi samvada* (dialogue) is one of the immortal passages in Vedanta, giving in clear terms the *raison-d'tre* of why the Self is the dearest pursuit of everyone. When Yajnavalkya says that he was going away as a mendicant monk after distributing his wealth between both his wives, Maitreyi, the *Brahmavadini* (one devoted to the pursuit of Brahman), asked him: 'Through this wealth will we be able to attain immortality, the Supreme Truth?' Yagnavalkya answered: 'No, you may live a comfortable life in the world with this wealth, but you cannot realise the Supreme Truth through it.' Maitreyi immediately shoots back: 'What is the use of this wealth if we cannot realise the highest Truth? What will we do with something that will not give the realisation of the Supreme Truth?' Imagine a wife telling the husband in such bold terms that she is outright rejecting the wealth being offered to her because that cannot bring her the knowledge of the Supreme Reality! At what a sublime level society was functioning can be seen from this one simple example. Maitreyi then implored her husband to teach the way to the Supreme Truth. Yajnavalkya was delighted beyond words. He said: 'O dear, you have always been dear to me, but now you have become dearer and more beloved by showing your determination to seek and realise the Supreme Truth. I would now answer this profound question that you have raised and show you the way to the Supreme Reality.' Then he began the discourse which is one of the most wonderful passages in Vedanta. Yajnavalkya rose to his eloquent best in his exposition of the Self, which he shows as the dearest of all.

It is not because of the love of the husband that a husband is beloved of the wife, but because of the love of the Self; it is not because of the love of the wife that a wife is dear to the husband, but because of the love of the Self. It is not because of the love of the son that a son is dear to the father, but because of the love of the Self, it is not because of the love of the father that a father is dear to the son, but because of the Self.'

And so on it went. He concluded by saying:

It is because of the love of the Self that everything in the Universe becomes beloved and loveable. This Self, this Atman, has to be seen (realised), by hearing (*shravana*) about the Atman, reflecting or contemplating (*manana*) upon the Atman, and a profound intuitive absorption (*nididhyasana*) in the Atman.

Na va arey patyuh kamaya patih priyo bhavati, atmanas tu kamaya patih priyo bhavati;

na va arey jaayayai kamaya jaaya priya bhavati, atmanastu kamaya jaya priya bhavati;

na va arey sarvasya kamaya sarvam priyam bhavati; atmanas tu kamaya sarvam priyam bhavati; atma va are drastavyo srotavyo mantavyo nididhyasitavyah.

Everything is dear to us because of our love of the Self, love of ourselves, and it behoves us therefore to understand the real nature of our own selves, which is the dearest to us!

This is a great passage which highlights the importance of Vedanta and clearly shows its relevance in modern times.

Swami Vivekananda said that 'the dry, abstract Advaita should become poetic, living in everyday life'. He wanted to retrieve Vedanta from the forests and the mountain caves. The sages and saints have been cultivating this Vedantic knowledge in the stillness of the forests and the silence of the mountain caves. Swamiji wanted that this Vedantic knowledge should become a living, vibrant force and power that would resound and reverberate in the tumult of modern society, bringing about a fundamental change in our outlook, attitudes and worldview. That was why he said that he would bring the forest-Vedanta and cave-Vedanta from the forests and caves, and scatter and broadcast them in the market place and the households, making Vedanta a living philosophy to be practised and lived by everybody. Apart from its philosophical underpinnings,

In modern times, Ramana Maharshi, the great sage of Arunachala, made this self-enquiry a great technique, a wonderful Vedantic practice suited to the present age—namely, to constantly question: Who am I? *Ko'ham?* this remarkable passage justifies and vindicates the study of Vedanta in modern times by showing its relevance—since my Self is the dearest to me, it is but natural and necessary that I should know the Self thoroughly, its real nature. For, would you not like to thoroughly know what you love the most, to think constantly about it, to contemplate it, to become absorbed in it? In fact, Shankara says that in a sense everybody is an Atmajna, the knower of the Self; only he does not know the real nature of the Self. Hence the need for enquiry, for investigation into the real nature of the Self, leading ultimately to the discovery that the Self is identical with Brahman, the Supreme Reality. This is the brahma-jijnasa that Vedanta talks about.

Interrogating is a modern word used often these days in social sciences. Vedanta asks us to interrogate our own Self through the process of *Ko'ham*. We use the word 'I' at every moment in our daily conversation, but seldom do we ask the above question. The notion of 'I' is associated with several layers of yourself—with the body, with the mind, with the intellect, and so on. When my body is not feeling well, I say that I am not feeling well. When my mind is upset, I say that I am feeling bad. When my intellect is challenged, I say that I am an undisputed scholar and my views are the only right views on this subject, and so on. Vedanta calls it *adhyasa* or *abhinivesha*, false identification, false superimposition. The true Self, the Atman, gets superimposed upon the false coverings and in turn the false coverings get superimposed on the Atman. This process of mutual superimposition—technically called *anyonya adhyasa*—is responsible for ajnana or ignorance, false knowledge. The coverings are essentially five—*annamaya*, *pranamaya*, *manomaya*,

vijnanamaya, *anandamaya*, physical (vital energetic), mental (intellectual and blissful). Somebody asks you: 'How are you?' You instantly reply: 'Oh, I am not well.' He then asks: 'What has happened to you?' You say: 'I have a bad toothache, I have a headache or a stomach ache.' Look at how false identification functions: My tooth is aching, stomach is aching, head is aching, and I immediately feel that I am not well! When my tooth or stomach or head aches and my body therefore feels unwell, why should I say that I am not well? This is on account of my identification with the body. I feel that I am beautiful to look at because I have a beautiful pair of eyes, or I have a beautiful nose or ears or fair skin; here, I identify myself with my eyes, with my nose, my ears or skin and feel that I am beautiful. This is identification with the *indriyas*, the sense organs. Somebody spoke harsh words to me, insulted me in public and I feel deeply upset. One of my friends comes along to ask: 'How are you?' I immediately react to say: 'Oh, I am not at all well. That fellow insulted me, spoke so harshly to me, I just can't take it. I am very upset.' Here, the 'I' is identifying with the mind. I think I am a great intellectual. Someone comes along and criticises my lecture, my book. I feel upset and immediately react: 'What do you understand of these things? Shut up, don't criticise, you stupid fellow!' What has happened in this case? The 'I' has identified with the intellect and my book, and I feel unhappy if my intellect is challenged or questioned or criticised. After all, it is my book that is being criticised, why should I be upset?

So if you carefully reflect, introspect, go deep into yourself, you will see how the 'I' is continuously getting identified with my *annamaya*, with my *pranamaya*, with my *manomaya*, with my *vijyanamaya*, with my *anandamaya* selves—the *annamaya-atma*, *pranamaya-atma*, *manomaya atma*, *vijnanamaya atma* and *anandamaya atma*—and foolishly saying I, I, I at these various levels, whereas the real 'I' is none of these and is beyond all these levels, the ever pure, the ever awakened, the ever free Self—*nitya shuddha*, *nitya buddha*, *nitya mukta*.

Vedanta therefore urges us to enquire, investigate—this is the process of enquiry or *jijnasa*. The whole of Vedanta is a mighty investigation, a grand exploration into one's own inner world of the Self—*atmaloka*. It is a simple scientific enquiry

into the inner Source of the Self that is the real nature of 'I'. Vedanta is thus not some theology to believe in. It is not metaphysics to speculate about. It is not even philosophy to argue about. 'It is not doctrinal conformity nor ceremonial piety', as Dr. S. Radhakrishnan said about religion itself. Vedanta then is just pure investigation into the nature of Reality, the nature of the Self, the instrument of enquiry being the pure mind, concentrated, sharpened and focused inward—*drisyate agryaya buddhya, sukshmaya, sukshmadarshibhih*, as the *Kathopanishad* says: 'This Atman is seen by the sharpened pure, subtle, higher intelligence by sages who are given to subtle and deep perception.' The *Vedanta Sutras*, also called *Brahma Sutras*, begin with the very first sutra or aphorism: *athato Brahma jijjnasa*, 'Now begins the enquiry or investigation into the nature of the Supreme Reality, Brahman'.

Vedanta is also called *Uttara Mimamsa*, meaning that it is the determined conclusion after a deep search and enquiry into the nature of the Ultimate Reality. This comes after all the enjoyments of the world of senses have been exhausted and one has developed *viveka* and *vairagya*, discrimination and dispassion. After worldly pursuits are at an end, you ask, being intensely dissatisfied: 'Is there something beyond this world of senses, beyond sense gratification?' Swami Vivekananda said that religion begins with an intense dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs and the deep desire to transcend the senses and realise That Undying, Undecaying, Immortal Reality beyond the senses. Gautama the Buddha was a glorious example of this dissatisfaction. Being a prince, he was living in the lap of great luxury. He had apparently felt no sorrow of his own, but the moment he saw sorrow outside, he could immediately connect to that sorrow, internalise it within and intuitively understand the *universality of sorrow*. That is why he is called an *avatara*, for an *avatara* lives the life of entire humanity in his own life. Buddha saw that this universal sorrow was eating into the vitals of all *humanity*. He was so overwhelmed that he began to enquire into the cause of this universal sorrow and to find out the means to end it. This simple question about the nature and source of sorrow led him to a profound discovery that has shown humanity and is, even now, two thousand five hundred years after his advent, showing the way beyond sorrow through attainment of Nirvana by pure enquiry.

Vedanta, then, begins with an intense enquiry into the nature of one's own self: get to the depths of your own consciousness and enquire: 'Who am I?' *Ko'ham?* Here the path of pure *jnana*, the path of enquiry blends with the path of devotion or *bhakti*. Shankara defines *bhakti* as that intense longing, the intense love of the inner Self that draws the mind towards its enquiry and realisation:

Swaswarupa anusandhanam bhaktrityabhidhiyate

That is, enquiry into the nature of your own higher Self is *bhakti* or devotion. So that path of enquiry is common to both *jnana* and *bhakti*. The enquiry *ko'ham*, 'who am I', leads to the realisation of the higher Self, this realisation being described in two different types of language: *bhakta*, the follower of the path of devotion (*bhakti marga*), ends up by realising *naaham*, *naaham*, 'not I, not I'—the annihilation of the ego, the small I, what Swami Vivekananda calls the 'puny I', while the same realisation is described by a *jnani*, the following of the path of knowledge (*jnana marga*) as '*so'ham*, *so'ham*, 'I am He, I am He', that is, in my real nature, I am identical with That Supreme Reality or Brahman. Buddha also spoke of this realisation as Nirvana, literally 'putting out', annihilation of the ego, the realisation of *anaatta*, non-self. The simple formula thus reduces to:

ko'ham → *naaham* (*bhakti marga*) or *so'ham* (*jnana marga*)

Both these realisations are identical, only put in two different idioms or paradigms.

Girish Chandra Ghosh, the famous dramatist and playwright from Bengal was transformed from a Bohemian to a saint of a high order by the divine touch of Sri Ramakrishna. He put the above idea dramatically and poetically as follows: Mahamaya, the great Enchantress of the Universe, Mother Divine, cast her net to capture two great personalities: Swami Vivekananda and Sri Durga Charan Nag (called Nag Mahashaya), both of them great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Nag Mahashaya, although a householder, was so self-effacing and self-abnegating that his ego was reduced to a tiny point as it were, almost vanishing into nothing by the power of his extraordinary self-surrender. Swami Vivekananda, who Sri Ramakrishna used to call *khap-khula-talwar*, or 'unsheathed sword',

was a gigantic spiritual personality who realised his identity with the Supreme, realised himself as that Infinite and the Absolute. When Mahamaya cast Her net to capture these two great souls, Nag Mahashaya escaped the net easily because he had erased his ego to such an extent that he realised the Truth *naaham, naaham*, 'not I', 'not I'—he had no personality of his own to get caught! Swami Vivekananda, on the other hand, was so immeasurably vast and infinite, having realised the Truth, *so'ham, so'ham*, that Mahamaya's net could not contain him! So, the zero on the one hand and infinity on the other hand, both of them are the same thing! What Buddha called *sunya* and what Vedanta calls *purna* are identical!

Swami Ramakrishnananda, one of the great monastic disciples of Ramakrishna, tried to mathematically prove that zero and infinity are one and the same thing. Most of us have some knowledge of school mathematics, particularly of trigonometry. We know the four quadrants in trigonometry and that in the first quadrant, sine, cosine and tangent are all positive. In the second quadrant, sine is positive while cosine and tangent are negative. In the third quadrant, tangent is positive while sine and cosine are negative. In the fourth quadrant, cosine is positive while sine and tangent are negative. All of us know this. Now, Swami Ramakrishnananda says that when you go on increasing the angle and it reaches 90 degrees or $\pi/2$ radians, then tangent becomes infinite—tangent 90 degrees is infinity is a well-known result in trigonometry. Now, if we increase the angle further, even for an infinitesimal increment, tangent becomes negative. To be able to move from infinity to negative, it should have passed through zero! Even if an infinitesimal increase of angle beyond 90 degrees takes tangent 90 degrees from infinity to negative, having necessarily passed through zero, it clearly shows that zero and infinity are identical. QED! *Sunya* (zero) and *purna* (infinity) are thus identical: *bhakti*, leading to the realisation of *aham-sunyata* ('zero ego' state), and *jnana* culminating in the realisation of *purnatva* ('infinity' state)—thus, *naaham, naaham* realisation, and *so'ham so'ham* realisation are identical!

In this connection, I am reminded of an interesting incident that took place when I visited Bangkok some years ago to attend a conference of Presidents of Universities all over the world. President of a University in the American system

is the equivalent of a Vice-Chancellor in the British system. The Chancellor of Oxford University was inaugurating the conference. He was a great scholar and a very witty person. He began by saying,

It's my privilege and honour to have been called upon to inaugurate this international conference. I'm reminded of an incident that occurred when I went to inaugurate another conference some time ago. Before I began to speak, I asked the audience, as I usually do, 'how long do you want me to speak?' In one voice they all said: 'Sir, you are such a great scholar, a very learned person, and you have come all the way for our sake, please do speak as long as you can and as long as you like; but we leave at 11 o'clock!'

Let us again go back to the question of how Vedanta gets reflected in our ordinary daily experience if only we care to analyse our experiences. This remarkable analysis is again by Swami Ramakrishnananda who, as I said earlier, was a direct monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a faithful brother-disciple of Swami Vivekananda. From our experience in daily life, we see that one cannot imagine one's own death, one's own non-existence. Nobody wants to die. Nobody can imagine his own destruction. When we read the newspapers, watch the daily television news and see people dying, see deaths by the hundreds, by the thousands, terrible, gruesome deaths by accident, suicide, murder, etc., we often cry out in pain, 'Ah, what a terrible thing!' We feel so much agony, so much empathy. But the very next moment we are back to our regular conversation. It doesn't strike us, even for a second, that we too could die this every moment! This shows that we just cannot imagine our own destruction, our own non-existence. In the grand immortal epic *Mahabharata*, an interesting question has been raised: 'What is the greatest wonder in life?' The answer is equally interesting: 'Day after day we find people dying by the hundreds, but we seek perpetuity, we feel that we are going to live for ever, what could be a greater wonder?' Vedanta analyses this experience and says that at the very root of this feeling is the fact of our real nature being Existence Itself. It is not that we exist, our very nature is Existence. Since Existence can never become non-Existence, we feel that we will live forever; we seek permanence. The Vedantic term for this

feeling is that we are *Satswarupa*, Existence Itself is our real nature. Interestingly, nobody can deny his or her own existence. Nobody can assert: 'I do not exist'! Because, to say that 'I do not exist', the 'I' should be present! Vedanta therefore says that this undeniable, incontrovertible, irreducible, constant, unchanging, eternal 'I' of the very nature of Existence is the Self, the Atman, the Ultimate Truth about oneself. This Self, the Atman, is the Supreme Reality, Brahman. There is no other God apart from this Self or Atman/Brahman that Vedanta posits, and it is interesting that this is deeply reflected in our daily experience. Vedanta has

So, what is the urge which makes the human mind explore the unknown? The urge is the hunger for knowledge, to know more and more. This deep craving for knowledge arises, Vedanta says, from the fact that your real nature is Knowledge Itself. The Vedantic terminology is that the Self is *Jnanaswarupa*, *Chitswarupa*, the very embodiment of Knowledge, of Consciousness, of Awareness.

no qualms about a person who does not believe in God because he has to believe in himself, in his own higher Self or Atman, which is an undeniable entity. Swami Vivekananda couched this fundamental Vedantic principle in the following startling statement: 'The old religions said that he is an atheist who does not believe in God, but the new religion says that he is an atheist who does not believe in himself.' Shankara, the great Advaita Acharya, commenting on why one cannot deny the Atman, says beautifully: 'This Atman is the very Self of the person who is the denier!'

So, Shankara says, everybody is in fact an *Atmajna*, or possesses self-knowledge. It is only that one does not know the real nature of this self as the immortal, undying, eternal Atman. Hence the urgent necessity of Self-enquiry, *Atmavichara*.

Everybody wants to know things and nobody wants to remain ignorant. One wants to know more and more. There is no satiation of knowledge. One wants to explore continuously, to seek, to find, to learn, to search. As the great poet Tennyson said in his famous poem *Ulysses*: 'One equal temper of heroic hearts, made weak by time and fate, but strong in will; to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.' What is the urge which makes man explore the dense, impenetrable regions of the Amazon forests, the depths of the Pacific Ocean, the peaks of Mount Everest, probe the depths of space at such risk? Is it for any personal gain? No. It is not even for

the advancement of science. When you are launched into space, you are lost there, at it were, the chances of your being back on earth is anybody's guess! When you are not even sure of your return, who cares if science advances or doesn't? So, what is the urge which makes the human mind explore the unknown? The urge is the hunger for knowledge, to know more and more. This deep craving for knowledge arises, Vedanta says, from the fact that your real nature is Knowledge Itself. The Vedantic terminology is that the Self is *Jnanaswarupa*, *Chitswarupa*, the very embodiment of Knowledge, of Consciousness, of Awareness. Chit is a beautiful word in Vedanta which means expression or manifestation. How do you know that this table exists? Because you see it. How do you see it? Science will explain this phenomenon by saying that light falls on this table and the reflected light comes to the eyes and the brain interprets this as a table. So this table needs an external light to reveal it, to show it up. Now, this table is matter, *jada vastu*, and therefore requires a conscious principle to certify to its existence. This world does not come and tell me 'I exist', but I say this world exists.

Let me give you a simple example. Thousands of devotees throng the holy place of pilgrimage, Belur Math, where I live, on special days considered sacred by the Hindus. There is an enquiry booth from where continuous announcements are made to inform people of many things, important among these being the whereabouts of people who have lost touch with their companions, children who have lost contact with their parents and guardians, and so on. Suppose a mother has lost contact with her child. She runs about calling out her child's name: 'Hey Ram, where are you?' The child, hearing the mother's voice calling him quickly responds: 'Amma, I'm here.' Now think of another similar situation. You are about to rush to the office, it's late and you need to catch the train. At that moment you cannot find your pen, your watch, your diary. You cry out in anger and desperation: 'Where's my pen gone, where's my watch, where's my diary?' Does the pen or the watch or the diary come and say, 'Sir, I'm here'? No. Why? Because the pen or the watch or the diary is a *jada vastu*, a piece of unconscious matter which cannot announce itself, cannot reveal itself, cannot self-manifest. It needs a conscious entity to certify its existence! What then is

the difference? The difference is that *Consciousness can announce itself, can reveal itself, can self-manifest*, while *jada vastu*, unconscious matter, cannot. This means that *Jada*, matter, is dependent for its existence on consciousness, whereas consciousness has an independent existence and does not need anything apart from itself to certify to its existence. Consciousness, therefore, is *swayam prakasha*, self-revealing, *because it is Existence Absolute and Consciousness Absolute*. Being *Satswarupa*, Existence Absolute, It is also *Chitswarupa*, Consciousness Absolute. In Vedanta it is therefore called *Swayam-prakasha-jyoti*, the Self-revealing Light [of Consciousness]. The word *jyoti* or light is used because it is light that always reveals. But here it is not the light of the ordinary kind. It is the Light of Lights, the Light of Consciousness (*Chaitanya jyoti*), which is self-revealing, It reveals or manifests Itself on its own. It is therefore called *swayam prakasha*, self-revealing light of Consciousness, and this Light is the 'Light of Lights' (*jyotisham jyotih*), It is this Light that imparts light to all ordinary luminous objects, the lights in the world like the sun, the moon, the stars, the fire and so on. The famous verse in the *Kathopanishad and Mundakopanishad* says:

Na tatra suryo bhati, Na chandra tarakam

Ne maa vidhyuto bhanti, kuto'yam agnih

Tameva bhantam anubhati sarvam

Tasya bhasa sarvam vibhati

'There the sun shines not, nor the moon or the stars, nor the lightning, what to speak of this fire! It (the Atman/Brahman) shining all [the so-called luminous objects] shine after It, all these shine by the light of the Atman/Brahman.' This the fundamental truth of Vedanta that Consciousness which is Existence Absolute (*Satswarupa*) is also *Chitswarupa* (Awareness or Knowledge Absolute) and is *swayam prakasa jyoti* (self-manifest or self-revealing Light).

Everybody wants joy. We relentlessly seek happiness. Only, the direction from which one seeks happiness is external. Imagining happiness to be external, out there, we run about seeking pleasure of the senses, only to end up in sorrow. But the fact remains that joy is the fundamental pursuit of man. This shows that

joy is our real nature. We are *Anandaswarupa*, of the very nature of Joy and Happiness, not the happiness that is derived from something outside, but the happiness that is our own inner Being, Bliss Absolute. We are thus Existence Absolute (*Satswarupa*), Awareness (Consciousness or Knowledge) Absolute (*Chitswarupa*), Bliss Absolute (*Anandaswarupa*). In Vedantic parlance, we are *Satchidanandaswarupa*. When you are just sitting quiet, not thinking of anything in particular, just enjoying your own existence, the joy you feel is a semblance of the *ananda* which is your real nature. Thus, *awareness of existence is joy*, the awareness of 'I am'. In the intense state of that awareness, the awareness of 'I am' springs up spontaneously within you like a fountain. Ramana Maharshi calls it *sphurana*, a continuous spring of joy welling up from within like a fountain as 'I am', 'I am', 'I am'. That feeling wells up spontaneously and continuously as pure Awareness-Joy (*chidananda*), remaining as a pure Witness of all your activities and thoughts.

This state of pure Existence-Awareness-Joy (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*) is our real nature. Wellness is a concept used these days to denote a state of wellbeing. This is our natural state. Any deviation from this state due to our own wrong thoughts and actions is called illness. Suppose your friend asked you: 'How are you?' and you replied: 'Oh, I am not well.' Your friend's spontaneous reaction would be: 'Why are you not well? What happened to you?' Suppose you had answered in the first place: 'I am well' and he asked: 'Why are you well?' it would look ridiculous and laughable. Why? Because wellness is your natural state and not being well is an unnatural state. A natural state does not have a cause, but an unnatural state has. Nobody asks you: 'Why are you healthy?' Because health is our natural state of existence. Swami Vivekananda beautifully derives the meaning of the Sanskrit word for health, namely, *swaasthya*, from *swastha*, meaning literally, *being or remaining put in oneself*. If you are just in your own Self, you are healthy. The moment you move away from your own Self, seeking something external to yourself, ignorantly and foolishly imagining that happiness is out there, you become *a-swastha*, that is, *not well* or *ill*. Thus, from our daily experience, including daily use of language, we see that wellness or being in the Self is our natural state. All that the Upanishad, the Vedanta asks us to do is to deeply analyse our

The human mind wants to universalise. It always looks to unify. Nobody wants to be isolated. Somehow we want to unite. In modern times, the best example of this tendency to unite, to connect, is, I think, the mobile phone! A rag picker on the street or a beggar on the road or a poor man struggling for two square meals a day will nevertheless have a mobile phone, in some cases with a double sim card! This is true in Kolkata or Delhi or Mumbai, or any country in the world for that matter, even in the face of the most dire poverty in a slum. What could be the secret behind this?

daily experiences and ask simple questions to understand the meaning of these experiences. The result would be profound answers that constitute the body of Vedanta. You are *Satswarupa*, you are *Chitswarupa*, you are *Anandaswarupa*: you are *sat-chit-ananda-swarupa*. This truth is derived from a deep analysis of our daily experience. This analysis is called *vichara*, reflection, contemplation. We imagine that we are unhappy, we are ignorant, and so on, because we do not do relentless *atmavichara* or Self-analysis. The practice of *atmavichara* is a fundamental Vedantic practice.

When Swami Vivekananda expounded these truths of Vedanta in the West and bombarded the Western audience with the idea that they were *Satchidanandaswarupa*, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, he was challenged by a person in his audience who said that the Swami was 'hypnotising' them, for did our daily experience not dictate that we are small, we are limited, we are joyless, we are ignorant? In that case, asserting that we are *Satchidananda*, we are Infinite and Immortal Spirits, and so on, is only hypnotising ourselves into believing what we actually are not. Swamiji instantly and spontaneously replied: 'Just the contrary! I'm not hypnotising you, but de-hypnotising you! You're already hypnotised into believing that you are limited, you are weak, you are ignorant and so on. I'm helping you to come out of this delusion, this spell of hypnosis, by teaching you your real nature as *Satchidananda*, by de-hypnotising you!'

Man's real nature as *Satchidananda* is a universal principle that alone can unite mankind. It alone can bring about human unity. That is the last bit of Vedanta which I will deliberate upon.

The human mind wants to universalise. It always looks to unify. Nobody wants to be isolated. Somehow we want to unite. In modern times, the best example of this tendency to unite, to

connect, is, I think, the mobile phone! A rag picker on the street or a beggar on the road or a poor man struggling for two square meals a day will nevertheless have a mobile phone, in some cases with a double sim card! This is true in Kolkata or Delhi or Mumbai, or any country in the world for that matter, even in the face of the most dire poverty in a slum. What could be the secret behind this? To my mind, it is because the mobile phone satisfies one of the most fundamental urges, if not the most fundamental urge, of the human heart, namely, to communicate and to stay connected. The advertisements are everywhere: *duniya mutthi mein*—the world in your fist, you hold the whole world in your palm, as it were. That means man wants to hold the whole of the universe on his own person. He wants to realise his connectedness with the universe. So the urge to get connected and stay connected is to embrace everything and communicate at any time with anybody. This overwhelms even the other basic urges like hunger, thirst and sleep. Many schools of psychology appeared to answer this question: What is the most fundamental urge in the human heart? Seeing the modern world of the mobile phone and internet connectivity, one gets a new revelation about what this fundamental urge is: to stay connected, to feel united, to embrace and share. In one word, *interconnectedness* is the most fundamental urge.

Here is where Vedantic thought becomes so relevant in the modern age. Vedanta declared thousands of years ago that Oneness is the most fundamental principle—Oneness at the physical level, Oneness at the mental level and Oneness at the spiritual level. Vedanta talks about the microcosm and the macrocosm, *vyashti* and *samashti*, and declares their Oneness at all levels. Swami Vivekananda, in his famous Paper on Hinduism read at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, speaks about three kinds of monism (meaning Advaita or Oneness): materialistic monism, philosophical monism and spiritual monism. The urge at interconnectedness or connectivity manifests at all these levels.

Vedanta says you do not need the mobile phone to stay connected. You may communicate with another mind through the Cosmic Server called the *Hiranyagarbha* or the Cosmic Mind of which both the minds of the communicator and the communicated are parts. All that you need to do is to simply stay constantly

connected with *Hiranyagrabha*, who is also known by several other names like *Prana*, *Sutratma*, *Ishwara*, *Apara Brahman*. And the main spiritual practice, *sadhana*, in Vedanta is to be able to stay connected to the Supreme Spirit, the *Paramatman*, all the time to establish 24x7 connectivity through a pure and highly refined and concentrated intelligence or mind (*agryaya buddhya sukshmaya*) of infinite broadband. The Gita calls such a person *nityayukta*, that is, *constantly connected*, *satatayukta*, that is, *always connected*. This is one meaning of Yoga coming from the root *yujir*, that is, to unite, to connect. Vedanta therefore urges man to live a life of constant, continuous and unbroken connectivity with the Divine Source, the Supreme Truth, the Infinite and the Absolute. This is one dimension of spiritual life. The other, equally important, is to stay constantly connected, through the Divine Source that is the common Source of all, to all of creation, all of Nature—with humans, sub-humans, plants and trees, animals and all living beings, all non-living beings—by means of selfless love and loving service. These two dimensions may be called the vertical and the horizontal dimensions, the Transcendent and Immanent Reality permeating, interpenetrating and suffusing our entire being on the one hand, and all of Nature on the other, connecting the two by an unbroken divine selfless love expressed through service. If one is connected to the Cosmic Reality all the time and hence to the entire universe, one lives a life that is in tune with the Infinite that expresses itself as the finite universe, as it were. To communicate through this Cosmic Server or the *Hiranyagarbha*, one needs a password, and this password is the *mantra*. Just as one would like to keep one's password a secret, the *mantra* too is something kept especially to oneself.

So Vedanta declares that this Cosmic Connectivity is your natural state of being. You can always stay connected because *in reality you are connected*. This is the truth of Vedanta—Oneness of the individual and the universal. We are individuals only when we are universal. The moment we ignorantly think or imagine that we are little beings, isolated and disconnected, we cut ourselves away, as it were, from the Cosmic Reality. The latest theories in the physical sciences, Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, for example, based upon Mach's principle, assert Oneness at the physical level. This Oneness at the physical level is jocularly expressed by saying that if you lift your little finger, you disturb a star in the cosmos because

it is all one ocean of matter of which your little finger and the star out there are like little whirlpools! My body is a part of the ocean of Cosmic Matter, my mind is a part of the Cosmic Mind, and my spirit is part of the Cosmic Spirit. So I am one with the Infinite, connected at all levels. This is the meaning of the famous *Mahavakyas* or Great Sayings of the Vedanta that assert the Oneness of the individual and the cosmic, of Atman and Brahman. Swami Vivekananda interpreted these Great Sayings in the light of modern physical and mental sciences to mean Oneness at all levels of existence—physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual.

This is the essence of Advaita Vedanta as interpreted by Shankara in the olden times and Swami Vivekananda in modern times: A-dvaita means: no dvaita at all. There are no two things, it is all One. I am always connected to the Cosmic Reality because *I Am That Infinite Reality—aham Brahmasmi*. Therefore, to be able to connect to the Infinite Reality, to always stay connected to That Infinite Reality and in all circumstances, and to realise that we are, have been, and always connected to That Infinite Reality is the ultimate realisation of Advaita Vedanta. We are afraid of losing our individual little self. I want to cling passionately to my little self, my name, my form, and so on. I want a little identity of my own. This is the modern slogan, my little identity. But if you look carefully, particularly through the lens of Vedanta, you will notice that your so-called little identity is simply a myth. It is real insofar as it is one with your Cosmic Identity. Your true identity is the Cosmic Identity that you are the Infinite Reality, inseparable and ever connected. Foolishly, I want to isolate myself, cut myself away from the Cosmic Reality by asserting that I have a little name, I have a little form, I have this silly position you should honour and a series of such stupidities! I want to foolishly and vigorously cling to my so-called little individuality for otherwise I feel lost. But what is my individuality apart from the Cosmic Reality, the Universality. As Swami Vivekananda said: 'We are not individuals yet, we shall be when we realise ourselves as Universal'.

I end with a beautiful anecdote from Swami Vivekananda's life. There lived a famous opera singer and an actress in Paris, Emma Calve, contemporaneous with Swami Vivekananda. She was a great celebrity at that time, and as all celebrities usually

are, she was very unhappy. She was so terribly depressed that she was almost contemplating suicide. She was desperate to meet someone who could save her from psychological collapse and disaster. Somebody told her that a great Indian yogi was residing in Paris and could perhaps help. She made an appointment with Swami Vivekananda and came to meet him. Swamiji was in his study writing something when this lady entered. She was so terribly disturbed mentally that the vibrations could be palpably felt. Swami Vivekananda, without even looking up to see her, said gently, with great compassion, 'Oh, my child, what a terrible atmosphere you have brought with you! Come on. Calm down, calm down.' She came in and sat down on the chair in front of Swamiji, who looked into her eyes and started talking about some of the innermost secrets of her personal life that she had not shared with anybody, not even her closest friends or relatives. She was flabbergasted. Was this some magic or mystic power? She cried out in fear: 'Sir, how do you know all this? Did somebody speak to you about me?' Swamiji smiled and said: 'Is it necessary? I can read you like an open book.' Swamiji then told her, in his own inimitable way, that she was not a little suffering individual, but one with the Infinite Reality—*Satchidanandaswarupa*, there was no death for her, no ignorance and no sorrow. He said: 'Do not dwell any more on your secret sorrow, do not think of yourself as a little individual person, you are always connected to the Cosmic Reality, to the Infinite. Live in joy because your very nature is Joy. Live in peace because your nature is Peace. Stay always connected to the Cosmic Reality.' The strong Advaitic dose that Swamiji gave her and the spiritual power that he radiated went straight into her inner being and she felt overwhelmed. She felt that her little personality was melting away, she was losing her individuality. She could not cope with this annihilation of her 'puny ego', the vanishing of her individuality and cried out in great fear: 'Sir, what are doing to me? I am collapsing, you are taking away myself from me, what will happen to my individuality?' Swamiji often used to throw Advaita Vedantic thought bombs, spiritual missiles during his lectures in the West, and when the listeners in his audience were frightened about losing their individuality, he used to make fun saying: 'You Westerners, you are so terribly afraid of losing your in-di-vi-du-a-li-ty', deliberately stressing each syllable of the word to mock their false clinging to their little imaginary selves. And he used to

say: 'You are not individuals yet, you will be when you will become Universal.' Swami Vivekananda then told Emma Calve a story: a water-drop was falling into the ocean. The drop started crying. The ocean asked the drop: 'My child, why are you crying?' The water-drop replied: 'Oh, I'm going to lose my individuality as a small drop. I'm going to lose my identity.' The ocean then smiled and said: 'My child, you are not going to lose your individuality as a drop, you are going to regain your individuality as the ocean! You were with me and you were me, the ocean, and the rays of the sun took you far away and gave you this little individuality as the drop. Now you are coming back to my bosom and joining your brothers and sisters, the billions and trillions of water-drops like you. Come back to my bosom and regain your individuality as the ocean.'

This is a great lesson for all of us as serious students of Vedanta: to regain our individuality as the Infinite Ocean of *Satchidananda* and not be afraid of losing our little individuality as 'so-and-so' with a little name and a little form. This is the true glory of the human being: that he is the Infinite Ocean of *Satchidananda*, Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute.

Swami Vivekananda was never tired of exhorting human beings to realise their real nature as the Infinite Ocean of *Satchidananda*. He defined his Ideal in one sentence: 'My Ideal indeed can be put in a few words: to preach unto mankind its Divinity and how to manifest It in every movement of life.' He once dramatically ended his speech in the West, striking his chest saying, 'Never forget the glory of human nature. Buddhas and Christs are but waves of the Infinite Ocean that I AM'. This is a paraphrase of the famous verse from *Ashtavakra Samhita*, the great Advaitic text of which Swami Vivekananda was very fond:

Mayyananta mahambodhou, ascharyam jiva vichayah

udyanti ghnanti khelanti pravisanti svabhavatah

'What a wonder! In Me the Infinite Ocean, *jivas* (embodied beings) arise constantly, play around and get dissolved naturally'. I am that Infinite Ocean of *Satchidananda*. That is our real nature. We are that Infinite Self, Atman or Brahman. We are the Infinite Reality, the *Satchidanandaswarupa*. We are beyond birth and death, we

have no death, we have no fear and we have no limitations. Swami Vivekananda exhorted: 'Realise this great Truth, dream of It, think of It, reflect upon It, contemplate on It. Call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakens. Power will come, glory will come, beauty will come, goodness will come and all that is excellent will come when the sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.'

Now that man is most panic-stricken, confused, strife-torn, conflict-ridden, depressed, and living in constant fear, this great message of Vedanta comes like a healing balm, like the cool breeze, gentle but powerful, filling humanity with hope and strength, with fresh vigour and vitality, ushering in the new age of *satya yuga*, the Truth Age, the Spiritual Globalisation of humanity. We will not lose anything by giving up the false clinging to our puny little individuality, this world of duality comprising false names and forms. By losing this little self, this 'puny ego', we will gain Eternal Life, the Infinite Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. In fact, we gain nothing new, nothing that we do not already have. We only awaken to our true glory, our true Self, our true nature as the Infinite and the Absolute that we had forgotten through our own foolishness and ignorance. We wake up from the deep slumber of ignorance in which we have been immersed since beginning-less time. The call of the Upanishad, echoed in trumpet voice by Swami Vivekananda in recent times is therefore: 'Arise, Awake'.

Vedanta calls upon you and me and entire humankind to embark on his joyous journey to the Infinite on the uncharted sea of human and spiritual excellence by the manifestation of the potential Divinity. May the roar of the Lion of Vedanta reverberate and resonate in our hearts: 'Awake, awake, O ye Children of Immortal Bliss! Manifest your potential Divinity, through which you will gain everything in the Universe—because you are the Universe, and the Universe is you! **'You are That [Infinite and Absolute]—*tattwamasi*.'**

I conclude with the famous Upanishadic Peace Chant (*Shanti Mantra*) on the Infinite interpenetrating (*otaprotā*) and suffusing all Existence, both Transcendent and Immanent, Absolute and Relative:

*Om, Pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate
om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ*

Om Tat Sat.

Sri Ramakrishnaarpanamastu

‘Om. That [Supreme Brahman] is Infinite. This [the manifested universe which in reality is Brahman couched in name and form] is Infinite. From [that] Infinite has been projected [this] Infinite. Taking the infinitude of [this] Infinite, [that] Infinite [Supreme Brahman] alone remains.’ Om That Existence.

May this [entire exercise of discoursing and listening] be an offering unto [the Supreme Being in the form of] Sri Ramakrishna.

Swami Atmapriyananda is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order serving the Ramakrishna Mission, an organisation started more than a century ago by Swami Vivekananda with the motto: *atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha*, that is, 'for the liberation of oneself and the welfare of the world'. Presently he is serving as the Vice Chancellor of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University which is trying to actualise Swami Vivekananda's educational vision.

