

# **ESSAYS ON ANCIENT WISDOM**

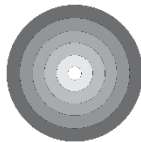


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# **Essays on Ancient Wisdom**

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1st Edition 2025. Only for free download on Inner Search Foundation Website

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## Contents

Introduction .....	6
Samkhya Yoga .....	8
Yajna and Karma Yoga .....	25
Karmasanyaas .....	48
Karma and Jnana Kanda.....	52
Dhyana – Meditation.....	62
Maya .....	79
Om.....	104
Ishvara.....	111
Freewill - do we have it? .....	125
Gunas .....	146
Rebirth and Reincarnation .....	158



## Introduction

Humble pranaams at the lotus feet of my beloved Baba Gurudev Swami Rama through whose guidance I dare to attempt to write these few words, with the aspiration that they may inspire the reader with Jigyasa - a thirst for knowledge. At no time does the author claim any scholarship of Sanskrit, the language of the Gods or an in-depth study of Vedanta under the tutelage of a Brahma Nishtha (established in Brahman) Guru. Yet, the knowledge and the insights gained, through the repeated study of the Bhagwad Gita and the Upanishads, just had to be shared.

The topics covered were mainly inspired by the tenets expounded in the Bhagwad Gita. The reader may therefore find extensive quotations from the Bhagwad Gita veritably a manual for daily living. It is not a dry text to be read after you are 60, or when you have nothing better to do. The questions which arose as we studied were many and varied.

In chapter 2 which is titled Samkhya Yoga, Shri Krishna tells us of the indwelling Reality – Purusha – Pure Consciousness. This goes largely unrecognized and ignored due to what? Ignorance! Then in Chapter 3 Shri Krishna gives us the valuable key of Karma yoga for daily living such that we can spiritualize every single action. In Chapter 6 Shri Krishna explains the methodology of Dhyana - Meditation. Our Gurudev Swami Rama has also elaborately taught us as well. In chapter 7, Shri Krishna talks of His Maya, which is very extremely difficult to overcome and lo! The author fell into the trap of trying to unravel this most elusive power! As if it ever could be! Then, Shri Krishna ignited the curiosity to study Om in chapter 8 when asked by Arjuna what is the best way to leave this body. Like that on and on it went: till the author wondered do “I” have any free will at all? Or am “I” being used as an instrument of the divine and being goaded to write as if there

was not enough written already! Well, “I” have no explanation for that and do not offer any.

As a co-student on this path, I have learned as much from those who attend the programs I facilitate, and each interaction has deepened my own understanding.

May the reader be benefited and may it be a ready reckoner for some obtruse concepts is the only hope this author has. Jai Gurudev!

### **Acknowledgement**

The author wishes to acknowledge Mr. Pawan Kapoor’s loving service in formatting this book and giving his valuable inputs, while also making it available on the website of his most prestigious company. After all he is my Guru Bandhu! Jai Gurudev.



## Samkhya Yoga

*and its practice according to Lord Shri Krishna.*

Philosophy arose in Bharat as a quest for knowledge that would explain and remove suffering experienced in this life and ultimately lead to unravelling the mystery of the meaning and purpose of existence. Why is man endowed with this discriminative faculty? Where from do we come and where to do we go? What was the primary cause of creation?

Indian philosophy classifies the various schools of thought in the following manner based on three principal tenets. Belief in:

- a) the Vedas as the source of knowledge.
- b) the premise of Brahman, and
- c) afterlife and Devas.

***Naasti Samkhyasamam shastram Naasti yogah samam balam.***

*There is no scripture like Samkhya and no power equal to Yoga.*

In discourse 6 of the Bhagwad Gita, Shri Krishna has given the practise of yoga which is the very essence of Self-knowledge. The further evolution of an aspirant is also assured in case he leaves his body before he has attained his goal.

Regarding Samkhya, Shri Krishna elaborates and defines Purusha and Prakriti, in the following discourses.

Discourse: 3 Prakriti as the cause of action along with its Gunas,

Discourse: 7 Shloka 4 and 5 explains aspects of Prakriti which veil the Jeeva.

Discourse: 9 Shloka 8 on how through Prakriti creation is brought about again and again according to Karma.

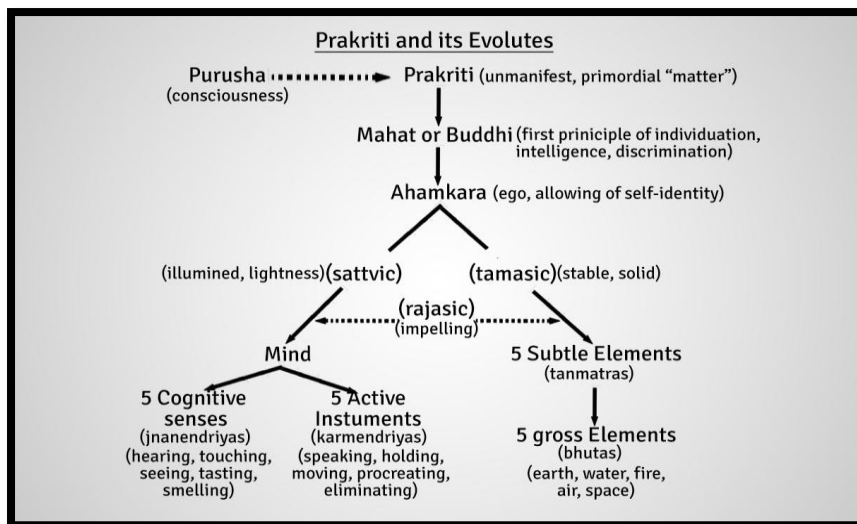
Discourse: 13 talks of the Kshetra (field) and Kshetrajnya (knower of the field).

Discourse: 14 gives detailed examples of the three Gunas – Satva, Rajas and Tamas the three strands with which Prakruti weaves the fabric of manifestation.

Discourse: 15 defines Purshottama (Shri Krishna) - the Supreme Being-Godhead.

The word Samkhya refers to number - Samkhya as the Tatvas (fundamental elements, building blocks) are enumerated herein. It also is understood as sam – balance, khya - knowledge, signifying balanced knowledge. The Samkhya system of Kapila was existent before Shri Krishna, however the earliest available text on this philosophy is the commentary by Ishvara Krishna, 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E. The system is most notable for its theory of evolution and for its reduction of the numerous categories of Nyāya and Vaishesika (also schools of thought - note given in the end) to two fundamental ontological realities namely, *Purusha (Universal Awareness)* and *Prakriti, (Universal energy)*. It is a strongly dualistic theory to explain the origin of the manifest universe and the meaning of life.

Prakruti has three modes or Gunas: *Sattva, Rajas and Tamas*. *Tamas* indicates inertia, *Rajas* indicate activity, and *Sattva* is the equilibrium of the two. Everything that we see or experience in this world is the combination and re-combination of these three *gunas*. When these three universal vibrations are held in equipoise, there is no action, according to the theory. It is only when there is a disturbance of the equilibrium that evolution begins. Universal Energy or *Prakriti* is unconscious, and it is only through the presence of the conscious Purusha that evolution begins. *Prakriti* comprises of 23-24 *Tatvas*. The term *Tatva* literally means ‘thatness’, the following chart gives the details.



*Sattva* is the guna whose essence is purity, fineness and subtlety. *Sattva* is associated with the ego, mind and intelligence. Its association with consciousness is the strongest, though an essential condition for consciousness, it is not sufficient. Consciousness is *Purusha*.

*Satva* binds due to the experience of happiness (Discourse 14)

*Rajas* is associated with activity and motion. In material objects, motion and action are the results of *Rajas*. In living beings not only activity and restlessness, but pain also is caused by *Rajas*. It binds through greed and attachment (Discourse 14)

*Tamas* is the constituent concerned with inertia and inaction. In material objects, it resists motion and activity. In living beings, it is associated with coarseness, negligence, indifference and inactivity,

ignorance. It is another word for ignorance and binds the *Jiva* through ignorance (Discourse 14).

1. Intelligence (*Buddhi*)
2. Mind (*Manas*)
3. Ego (*Aham*)
4. Five subtle senses (*Tanmatras*)
5. Five organs of perception (*Jnanendriyas*)
6. Five organs of action (*Karmendriyas*)
7. Five great elements (*Mahabutas*), namely earth, water, fire, air, and space.

These 23 constitute the *Sambhuti Prakriti*. Of them 1, 2, 3, and 4 constitute the subtle body (*Linga Sarira*) of a being, and the rest, the gross body. *Asambhuti Prakruti* is the Primordial unmanifest *Prakruti* and if we add this the total becomes 24 and if *Purusha* is added it becomes 25.

According to *Samkhya*, *Manas* and *Buddhi* together with Consciousness ignite the fire of knowledge which then turns to ash the veil of ignorance. To light this fire, modifications happen in the *Manas* and *Buddhi* - these are known as *Vrutti*s. All modifications are called *Vrutti* and only a *Vrutti* of Knowledge can get rid of the *Vrutti* of ignorance. The *Buddhi* merely reflects the light of *Purusha* or Consciousness onto the ignorance residing in the mind and *ahamkara*.

*Samkhya* cites two types of perceptions: Indeterminate (*Nirvikalpa*), such that an infant has, he/she can perceive its environment but is not aware of name and form, and hence interpretation is lacking. Determinate (*Savikalpa*) is the mature state of perceptions, which have been processed and differentiated appropriately.

About Purusha: this is one of the most complex concepts in Hindu Philosophy. Purusha ordinarily means a male, it is also split into puru – east and usha – dawn, eastern dawn signifying the beginning of creation. Purusha is the Universal Principle that is eternal, indestructible, without form and all pervasive.

The concept, however, dates to Vedic times and it evolved through the Upanishadic period. In the early Vedic period Purusha was a Cosmic Being whose sacrifice by the gods created all life. In the Bhagavata Purana the Ultimate Purusha is Vishnu and, in the Shiva Purana, it is Shiva. However, the Purusha Sukta which is interpolated into the Rigveda from a later time, according to the Indologist W. Norman Brown, is addressed to Vishnu who with his three steps measured all the manifest universe. Research to try to understand Purusha reveals 41 definitions!!

Relevant to our study today in Samkhya, Purusha is the plural immobile male (spiritual) cosmic principle pure consciousness. In Samkhya it means the principle of spirit or pure consciousness, immutable, eternal, and untouched by happenings. Although there are a variety of views held in different schools of Hinduism about the definition, scope and nature of Purusha, many of them agree that it is what connects everything and everyone. Purusha cannot be measured by any unit of measure, is not attached to anything, is imperishable, immutable, is without decrepitude, is immovable and is without the senses of sound, touch, smell or form. The most paradoxical element of this philosophy is the plurality of Purushas. This beats logic for if Purusha is infinite the infinity of Purusha A would automatically falsify the infinity of Purusha B and vice versa.

*It is vital to understand the function of Prakriti in our daily life, for only that will help us to get to our true nature. It is said that Prakriti veils the Purusha, and this indeed is our experience, but it is also said that*

*Prakriti helps us to disrobe her to reveal Purusha, our true nature. Let us see how. When we are little, we are taught our name, our gender, our relations, etc. etc. Then we grow up identifying with all that we have been taught and what we acquire e.g. our profession, then our families and so on the list is endless. When we are asked, kindly introduce yourself this is the list on our CV as well. All this including our body, thoughts, emotions, wealth, health – keep on changing – that is the very nature of Prakriti, so as we age, a little bee whispers, “you are getting old!” We tend to deny it, but it persists. Then we are plunged into depression and disease! It is here Prakriti is helping us and directing us towards the Truth if we would only but listen. Wise is the one who does not require this whisper from Prakriti.*

*The point to be noted once again is that all that changes is Prakriti, all that does not is Purusha- that pure immutable consciousness. Our error lies in identifying with Prakriti while we are Purusha all the while. If for a moment we reflect we will observe there is something within that insists “I have not changed”. That voice is true too; the Purusha does not change! When a dear friend or relative dies we are stunned for a while and we recover quite well over time, for something within is confident death may happen to others it will never happen to me - but of course it will and more importantly it will NOT! Now the choice is yours identify with Prakriti and perish life after life or identify with Purusha and remain immutable eternal infinite indefinable!*

### **Samkhya and God**

Kapila, the proponent of the Samkhya School, rules out the existence of God. He asserts that the existence of God cannot be proved and that God does not exist. Samkhya argues that if God exists and if God is eternal and unchanging as is widely claimed, then he cannot be the cause of the world. A cause has to be active and changing. However, some of the later commentators of Samkhya seem to bend towards a theistic interpretation.

This point of Samkhya not accepting the need of a creator to explain creation has been debated by other schools on the ground that if an individual Purusha is required to make an individual Prakruti function, then what about the Universe- it must have the Supreme Purusha or Ishvara to make it function and maintain order. This is the only point where Yoga differs from Samkhya, and it then goes on to teach how to be liberated from the bondage of Prakruti.

A little note on how perception occurs and the role of Purusha: We have seen the 23 *Tatvas* of Prakruti and from that can deduce that whatever happens is experienced by the elements alone e.g. if a rasogulla is placed on the tongue (Prakruti), the taste buds (Prakruti) send signals via the sensory nerves to the brain (Prakruti) the cognitive mind which resides in the brain frontal cortex interprets it (Prakruti) and announces it is delicious (Buddhi) again Prakruti, so what then is the role of Purusha? Purusha if defined as Consciousness is the witness of all this drama that happened in its presence and due to its presence. As there is no observation without an observer. How can there be? If a Divine Being came and said He was very pleased with you and was willing to grant you the Universe, asking you only for your Consciousness in return, what use would that be to you? That then is Purusha. (We do not know we are That)

### **Bondage and Salvation**

Like other major systems of Indian philosophy, Samkhya regards ignorance as the root cause of bondage and suffering. According to Samkhya, the Self is eternal, pure consciousness. Due to ignorance, the self identifies itself with the physical body and its constituents - Manas, Ahamkara and Mahat, which are products of Prakriti. Once the self becomes free of this false identification and the material bonds, salvation is possible. Here the question may arise that if the Self is the knowing principle why does it not know itself? The reason given

by Sankaracharya in Vivekchudamani is that both Knowledge and Ignorance are eternal principles, but ignorance has an end while knowledge does not. One cannot become ignorant once one has knowledge, can one?

The 3rd century C.E. commentator, Isvara Krishna, writes in his explanation of Samkhya, “Verily no spirit is bound; nor does any migrate; nor is any emancipated. Nature alone, having many vehicles, is bound, migrates, and is released. Bondage, migration and release are ascribed to the spirit, in the same manner as defeat and victory are attributed to the king, though actually occurring to his soldiers, because it is the servants that take part in the undertaking, the effects of which - grief or profit - accrue to the king. In the same manner, experience and emancipation, though really belonging to Nature, are attributed to the spirit, on account of the non-discrimination of spirit from Nature.”

Here we must mention the **schools of philosophy in our shastras**. The name of the Rishi who posited the school is given in brackets.

### **1. Astikas (schools that consider the Vedas as authority)**

(i) *Samkhya*, a philosophical tradition that regards the Universe as consisting of two distinct identities- Purusha (Pure Consciousness) and Prakruti (Creative power, Nature consisting of the Tatvas given above). Based on the concept of duality. Does not believe in a God. (Kapila)

(ii) *Yoga*, school similar to Samkhya (or perhaps even a branch of it) which accepts a personal god and focuses on yogic practice. (Patanjali)

(iii) *Nyaaya*, a philosophy which focuses on logic and epistemology. (Gotam). It accepts six kinds of pramanas (the means to acquiring knowledge):



1. Pratyaksha (perception)- direct sense perception- seeing is believing.
2. Anumana (inference)e.g. where there is smoke there is fire.
3. Upamaana (comparison and analogy) if an object like an animal seen is to be described it is compared to a known animal and then the differences are highlighted.
4. Arthaapatti (postulation, derivation), eg. Devadatta is fat, he does not eat in the day so he must be eating at night.
5. Anupalabdi (non-perception, negative/cognitive proof), when I do not find an object in a certain place, I say it is not there in this place, e.g. I look for my glasses on the table and say they are not there.
6. Shabda (Reliable testimony) The testimony of the scriptures, the Bhagwad Gita, the Upanishads, the Vedas etc. (the shrutis and smrutis)

This school is a form of direct realism and a theory of substances (dravya) much like modern science using sophisticated logic.

(iv) *Vaisheshika* is closely related to the Nyaya school but focuses on the metaphysics of substance and defends the theory of atoms. It makes use of only 2 pramanas (means of knowledge) namely Pratyaksha (direct perception) and Anumana (inference). (Konada)

(v) *Purva Mimamsa*, a school which focuses on the critical explanation of the Vedas, philology and the interpretation of Vedic rituals, part of the Karma Kanda of the Vedas (Jaimini)

(vi) *Vedanta* (also called Uttara Mimamsa) focuses on the Upanishads and is part of the Jnana Kanda of the Vedas. It deals with the metaphysical ideas related to Atman and Brahman. As it comes at the end of the Vedas it is termed Vedanta. There are many schools of Vedantic thought: Advaita - Shankaracharya, Vishishtavaita - Ramanuja, Dvaita - Madhavacharya, Dvaitadvaita - Nimabarka, Shuddhadvaita – Vallabhacharya and Achintya Bheda Abheda – Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

There are differences between Vedanta and Samkhya which also need to be discussed

**2. Nastikas and Sramanicas** (believe in srama - labour, seekers take to becoming mendicants) These schools do not accept the authority of the Vedas

- (i) Ajivika
- (ii) Jainism
- (iii) Budhisim
- (iv) Charvak

Charvaka (Sanskrit: चार्वाक; IAST: *Cārvāka*), also known as *Lokāyata*, (for the masses).

Charvaka is an ancient school of Indian materialism. It holds direct perception and conditional inference as proper means of knowledge-pramana. It is a philosophy that embraces skepticism and rejects rituals, supernatural reality as a mere superstition.

It is time we now discussed the **Yoga school as it is even considered a branch of Samkhya** and basically this is what Shri Krishna expounds. This philosophy diverges from Samkhya in the one principle of Ishvara. The steady stream of knowledge is flowing since time immemorial and “Ishvara is the Teacher of even the ancient teachers, being not limited by time. Its manifesting word is Om” We have seen this being declared

by Shri Krishna in Discourse IV right at the beginning. He is that, Ishvara. In Discourse 17, Shri Krishna has laid emphasis on OM as the primordial sound.

It is easily seen that devotion to the Guru inspires us and makes us steadfast on the path, ensuring we do not deviate. As Sir Isaac Newton has said “If I have been able to see this far, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants.” It is such awareness that removes mental obstacles and focuses attention. The mental obstacles that arise are disease, mental laziness, indecision, carelessness, instability of mind and distraction. The one mental obstacle that seemed most important to me has been mistaken notion and missing the point. *This extensive note is for the purpose of highlighting the point of sadhana and bringing clarity to the notion of the goal.*

#### **Shloka 14 Ch. 6 B.G.**

**प्रशान्तात्मा विगतभीर्ब्रह्मचारिव्रते स्थितः ।**

**मनः संयम्य मच्चित्तो युक्त आसीत् मत्परः ॥**

*Firm in the vow of complete chastity and fearless, keeping himself perfectly calm and with the mind held in restraint and fixed on Me, the vigilant yogi should sit absorbed in me.*

The shloka given above explains how the Yogi should get absorbed in Samadhi: Fearless, serene minded, firm in the vow of godly life, having restrained the mind, thinking on Me, and balanced, let him sit looking up to Me as the Supreme. In this shloka the word samyama is used. To understand in depth this word I undertook this research and am now presenting here what it entails.

We need therefore, to explore in brief the tenets of Raja yoga (discourse 9) as laid down in the Patanjali yoga sutras.

The goal of sadhana in Raja yoga is Samadhi - a state of intense concentration (dharana) achieved through meditation (dhyana), at which union with the divine (samadhi) is reached (before or at death). These three together are included in the Samyama.

How is this to be attained? The pathways taught in the Bhagwad Gita include:

- Karma-Buddhi yoga - doing action in the prescribed manner (ref. discourse III)
- Jnyaan yoga - discourse II – discriminating between the sat and asat (Real/Unreal)
- Raj yoga – the ashtanga yoga of Patanjali in discourse IV / IX this is a system of practices comprising of eight limbs, and we shall proceed to discuss this here in brief.
- Bhakti yoga in Discourse XII where the condition of a true Bhakta is given (not as easy as it seems)

## **Raja yoga**

The ashtanga yoga of Patanjali is a masterpiece in psychology for it lays the foundation for a science of the mind. It addresses all three aspects of wellbeing of man - the physical, the psychological and spiritual! Vivekananda writes in his characteristic humorous style, “Every science must have its own method of investigation. If you want to become an astronomer and sit down and cry ‘Astronomy! Astronomy!’ it will never come to you. The same with chemistry. A certain method must be followed.” The end is the knowledge of the Self, the *Atman* Patanjali says that the human mind is usually in one of five general states: wandering (*kshipta*), forgetful (*mudha*), occasionally steady or distracted (*vikshipta*), one-pointed (*ekaagra*) and restrained (*niruddha*). It is the last two states of mind that are essential for the realisation of the *Atman*

The highest state of mind, according to Patanjali, is the state of *Samadhi*, or perfect understanding. The last stage is characterised by the fact that there is no thought wave in the mind, it is perfectly still and supremely aware of itself. Thus, it is an identity with the state of *Brahman which is svayam siddha - self-evident*, described in the Upanishads.

Swami Prabhavanand while discussing the Patanjali yoga sutras says, "Concentration is achieved through shraddha, recollected-ness, absorption and illumination."

We begin with an emphasis on practice as explained to Arjuna by Shri Krishna in verse 35 – *Abhyasa and Vairagya*.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।

अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥ 35॥

*Lord Krishna said: O mighty-armed son of Kunti, what you say is correct; the mind is indeed very difficult to restrain. But by practice and detachment, it can be controlled.*

Abhyasa is repeated effort and once the discipline is followed, Vairagya - dispassion happens; it is the freedom from desire for what is seen or heard.

As the various steps are a preparation to meditation and samadhi they have both an external and internal component and are therefore to be practised in thought, word and deed. The eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga are - Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi.

**Yama** – restraints- the ‘don’ts’, these embody the ethical principles derived exclusively for the purpose of concentrating the mind, this is the first rung of the ladder.

1. Non-injury (*ahimsa*),
2. Truthfulness (*satyam*), is also how we relate to ourselves, are we true to ourselves?
3. Non-stealing (*āsteya*),
4. Celibacy (*brahmachārya*),
5. Non-possession (*aparigraha*). It refers to the tendency of the mind to be greedy, to be grasping or to extend the “tentacles of selfishness” outward. It also applies to our tenacious grip on our thoughts and feelings. Often, we hold on to a dogma or a creed and seek comfort from it. *Aparigraha* implies non-attachment as an ideal amplified in the Gita. Thus, we see that mastery even of the first step of this yoga will make one into a saint.

**Niyamas** – the ‘do’s’- observances, the second rung, are also five:

1. Cleanliness (*sauca both internal and external purity*),
2. Contentment (*santosha*),
3. Austerity (*tapas*),
4. Study (*Svadhyaaya*) and
5. Devotion to Ishvara (Ishvara pranidhan) is meant the awareness of the “river of Teaching” flowing since time immemorial, as a background thought, and total surrender to Ishvara.

**Asana** (posture) is the third rung, basically to enable one to sit for prolonged period of time without discomfort and ensures physical wellbeing. If combined with an internal awareness leads to a subtle dissociation from the body as self-identification. Proper practise keeps

the spinal column straight and prevents sluggishness of the mind which tends to be engulfed by tamoguna if we slouch. When one is not feeling that good, a brisk ten-minute walk is often a great help in bringing cheerfulness to the mind.

**Pranayama** (regulation of breathing) the fourth rung in the ladder to the top! Over the millennia, these two steps Asana and Pranayama have been expanded upon by the yogis into a series of stretching and breathing exercises. These disciplines were then encoded as *hatha yoga*. In Patanjali's yoga sutras they form a means for the mind to reach higher levels of awareness.

**Pratyahara** (restraint of the sense organs) We need to withdraw our senses from their objects as a prerequisite to concentrating the mind, making it one pointed which is the next step. The senses are merely a symptom of the mind, should the mind be in a state of withdrawal the sense and their objects can hold no sway. Essentially what is being referred to is the out-going tendency of the mind and this must be restrained. For example, when we sit to do some creative work, we find we are unable to start. This is just restlessness of the mind and the best way to eliminate it is simply to begin the work at hand and withdraw from the distractions. Through effort, the restlessness disappears. The essence of *pratyahara* is not to identify with the thought wave as soon as it rises, but to watch it.

**Dharana** (concentration) to make the monkey mind ekagra, i.e. one pointed and focussed on a single object like the breath or mantra or by synchronising both. Vivekananda describes the restless mind as follows. "Well has it been compared to the maddened monkey. There was a monkey, restless by his own nature, as all monkeys are. As if that were not enough someone made him drink freely of wine, so that he became still more restless. Then a scorpion stung him. When a man is stung by a scorpion, he jumps about for a whole day; so, the poor

monkey found his condition worse than ever. To complete his misery a demon entered him. What language can describe the uncontrollable restlessness of that monkey?

The human mind is like that monkey, incessantly active by its own nature; then it becomes drunk with the wine of desire, thus increasing its turbulence. After desire takes possession comes the sting of the scorpion of jealousy at the success of others, and last of all the demon of pride enters the mind, making it think itself of all importance. How hard to control such a mind!" Even Shri Krishna agrees the mind is by nature restless Ch.6 shloka 35 given above but by practice and dispassion it can be brought under control.

A practical suggestion to change the course mind might take when stung by the scorpion of anger, attachment, jealousy and the like, is by offering it a diversion into some pleasant event such as kissing an infant or meeting a friend - when the opposite is experienced an immediate change overcomes the mind and it becomes amenable to the right suggestions.

Dharana is holding the mind and increasing the stamina for sustained concentration.

**Dhyana** (meditation) is an unbroken flow of the mantra or breath awareness or idea one may have held during dharana. The dharana is sustained in an unbroken flow is what is meant by dhyana.

**Samadhi** (is the ultimate state of transcendence possible for the mind-super consciousness) All spiritual personalities of history have attained this state of mind which once attained one knows that he or she is one with Brahman and forms the substratum of the Universe, there is no sense of separation - it is the state of total absorption in the Supreme.



All this exercise was undertaken to understand thoroughly the one-word *Samyama* used by Bhagwan in the 14<sup>th</sup> verse of this discourse. So, samyama comprises of dharana, dhyana, and samadhi all three have to be taken together. This process has been compared to the trajectory of a three-stage rocket, where the lower stages drop off at an appropriate time so that the rocket can be propelled into higher reaches of space. In a similar way, concentration merges into meditation, which finally culminates in *Samadhi*.

**A word on the salient differences between *Vedanta* and *Samkhya*.**

Advaita Vedanta accepts only one reality and considers the manifest universe as a superimposition – ‘Adhyaropa’ on consciousness whereas Samkhya is a purely dualistic theory and admits of two ontological realities Prakruti the eternally changing and Purusha - Consciousness the Immutable, eternal reality. The second point the diverge on is Samkhya postulates plural Purushas and Vedanta admits of only the ONE. Both accept the cause of suffering as the ignorance of our true nature, which is pure eternal immutable indestructible Consciousness, this is not known to us for it is veiled by Prakruti in Samkhya and Maaya in Vedanta. Maaya being different from Prakruti for **Prakruti is and Maaya only appears to be.**

**Samkhya** Is the foundational philosophy, and a basic understanding is necessary for the study of Vedanta and the most precious text of all our Bhagwad Gita. For after all:

***Naasti Samkhyasamam shastram Naasti yogah samam balam.***  
*There is no scripture like Samkhya and no power equal to Yoga*

## **Yajna and Karma Yoga**

In chapter 3 of the Bhagwad Gita one of the most important concepts of Karma yoga and Yajna have been discussed in detail, it therefore felt appropriate to study these in greater detail. The Bhagwad Gita is unique in its rendering of Karma Yoga – set as it is in the middle of a war. How is a man of the world to progress in spiritual endeavour without renunciation and taking to the ochre robe? This is the vital question that plagues the man with family responsibilities. One cannot even begin to imagine what the Pandavas would have done had Arjuna decided to renounce and go to the Himalayas! Yajna is one of the major tenets of Karma yoga and we shall discuss this first.

### ***Yajna***

The word Yajna is derived from the verb root yaj - to worship or to offer. When Brahma created the myriad forms, He gave one word DA to all i.e. the Devas (celestial Beings) the Daityas (Demons) and the Manavas (Humans). The Devas understood it to mean – daman - i.e. to exercise restraint or to control. The Daityas understood it as Daya i.e. compassion, and the Manavas understood it as Daan i.e. charity. Thus, the practise of Yajna began where cows were gifted to Brahmins and food to the poor etc. all with the hope of acquiring merit in this world or the next, or to establish supremacy over others or to get an offspring etc.

The prescribed method for attaining liberation depended on the Yuga in which one was born. In each Yuga a practise is given to attain Liberation:

Satya or Kreta Yuga - It was Tapas (Penance) – One needed to do intense penance for many years before one could hope to become Self realised. In the Treta Yuga – Dhyana and Jnana - Meditation and

Knowledge has been prescribed. In the Dwapara Yuga it was Yajna or worship and therefore Shri Krishna is advising Arjuna regarding the types of Yajnas – why they are done and what one’s attitude should be towards worship. In the present or the Kali Yuga, it is the easiest to attain liberation for it is by Namasankirtan or devotion, so even though there is so much strife and degradation of values etc it is the easiest yuga to attain the Lord.

### ***The Yugas:***

Time by the long count calendar is divided into 4 yugas as described below from:

- Yogic astronomy divides the orbit of the Earth around the Sun into 27 segments, called nakshatras.
- Each nakshatra is further divided into four equal sectors called padas or steps. Multiply 4 by 27 and it equals 108.
- These 108 units mark the 108 steps that the Earth takes through space.
- Each nakshatra equals one half of the moon cycle around the Earth. The cycles within the human body respond and correspond to that.
- The nakshatras describe in detail the motion of the earth, sun and moon.
- The Yuga cycles are a way to divide the motion of the earth, sun, and other astronomical figures.
- It’s based on the notion that the sun has a third motion as it revolves around its partner star somewhere in the cosmos.
- Today binary star systems are known to be far more common than single star systems.

What are the 4 Yuga Cycles?

The Yugas are a cycle that spans over a period of roughly 25,920 years and is associated with the precession of the [equinoxes](#), or the 'Great Year'.

It is broken up into four eras known as "Yugas". They each correspond to a period in relation to humanity's level of perception of the non-material or spiritual universe.

Each of the four Yugas is assigned to specific amounts of time throughout the cycle. These generally have the ratio of 4:3:2:1, with the smallest denomination of this ratio roughly 1296 years.

Today the length of each period is disputed, above is the most widely accepted version.

As the entire cycle is roughly 25,920 years long, the Kali Yuga, or Iron Age, lasts for 2,592 years.

The Satya Yuga or Golden Age has a longer length of 10,368 years.

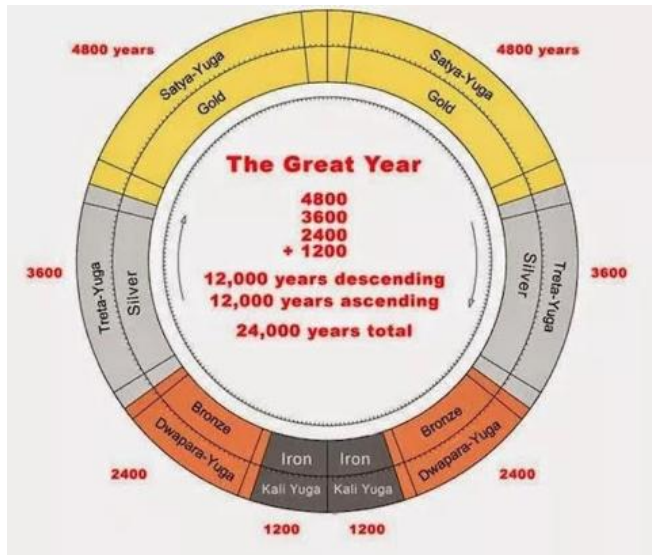
When estimating these times, we must take into account the elliptical orbit the sun makes with its supposed [binary twin](#).

As it approaches its twin and encounters a greater gravitational pull, the sun behaves like a car approaching a sharp corner on a road.

Its velocity decreases as it makes a close orbit around its twin, before it is slingshot back out into space once more.

As it approaches, there would be such a gravitational pull on our sun that we would stay in that area of the universe for longer than we would be away from it.

Our sun would be drawn with such gravity towards its twin before being slung back out into space once more.



The Yuga Cycles are broken into

- Satya,
- Treta,
- Dwapara,
- and Kali Yugas

### 1) *Satya - Kreta Yuga* or the *Golden Age*

The Golden Age marks the time of humanity's purest era, where truth and love, is valued over all else and balance reigns on the planet. It is believed that spiritual senses are at their peak too, with mankind's ability to perceive the non-material at an all time high.

As humanity is currently in the depths of the Kali Yuga, we are at the lowest point of the descending cycle, about to begin the long journey back up. It won't be for roughly another 12,000 years, or half-cycle, that we will return to the top of the Satya Yuga or Golden Age.

## 2) *Treta Yuga* or the *Silver Age*

As we enter the third quarter of the Yuga cycle, humanity is thought to be able to comprehend the subtle energies at play throughout the universe. Things that seem unimaginable in modern times start to become perceived.

These include sensing natural electromagnetics and other subtle energies like electricity in the air, as well as refined awareness of seemingly paranormal phenomenon like synaesthesia and telepathy.

## 3) *Dwapara Yuga* or *Bronze Age*

The second quarter of the cycle is linked to mental virtue. It is believed that, during this period, we will begin to comprehend spiritual ideas and begin adopting them worldwide.

## 4) *Kali Yuga* - *Iron Age*

The Kali Yuga is the fourth and present age of the world cycle of Yugas, or “ages.” It’s also the end of the four ages that comprise a cycle and is often referred to as the dark age. In [Hindu belief](#), the Kali Yuga leads to destruction of the world and then the creation of a new cycle of the four yugas.

It is filled with war and conflict. Spiritually, civilization degenerates throughout the yuga, as people drift farther and farther from the Divine. At the end of the Kali Yuga, Hindus believe that Lord Shiva will come in the form of Lord Kalki to punish and cleanse the world, which will have devolved to the point of being incapable of enlightenment. The resulting transformation and re-creation of the universe is the start of a new cycle of yugas.

## **What Causes the Yuga Cycles?**

As planet Earth moves throughout the cosmos, the Yuga Cycle continually ticks like a master clock. But what causes this slow spin?

While the background of stars is constantly moving as time goes by, there is one star that appears not to move at all; Sirius. What is interesting about the Sirius star is the fact that it appears to be the sibling star to our sun. This is also defined as the Siddha Loka - where the realised beings go - Siddhas. That is, it seems logical that our sun is in a binary relationship with it, causing it to appear still against a moving background of stars.

This idea might seem strange for us, but it was completely accepted by many ancient cultures from around the world. It has long been discussed by ancient cultures that the sun is not a lone ranger in the cosmos, but instead paired with a binary partner. This is most apparent in Hindu cosmology, with many references to this idea. \*

Conclusion

It is still a mystery as to how the Ancients came to understand the Yuga Cycles. For such a long period of time, a comprehensive picture would have needed insanely long observations passed down over many generations.

Just the sheer amount of time the Yuga Cycles span is hard to comprehend. For the entire cycle to be observed by a culture, it would require 360 lots of 72 years. If we say 72 years is the lifespan of just one individual, that is a whole lot of lifetimes to spend observing the skies.

***How do you think the ancients came to understand the Yuga cycles?***

This is a question which can be answered only by the term revelation for in their states of Samadhi (transcendental meditation) this knowledge lay revealed to them. The hierarchy of Devas - Divinities revealed each new tenet into their Buddhi and this was then recorded by them.

Since we are studying the Bhagwad Gita and in the Dwapara Yuga of Shri Krishna we need to understand a little more about Yajnas:

The deity of Yajna is Agni (fire). The offerings given are unto Agni however, the nectar of the Yajna is offered to all Devas. Agni acts as the messenger to the respective Deva to whom the Yajna is addressed e.g. Indra.

“Vedic (Shrauta) yajnas are typically performed by four priests of the Vedic priesthood: the Hota, the Adhvaryu, the Udgata and the Brahma. The functions associated with the priests were: The Hota recites invocations and litanies drawn from the Rigveda. He uses three Rig verses, the introductory verse, the accompanying verse and benediction as the third. The Adhvaryu is the priest's assistant and is in charge of the physical details of the ritual like measuring the ground, building the altar explained in the Yajurveda. The Adhvaryu offers oblations. The Udgata is the chanter of hymns set to melodies and music (sāman) drawn from the Samaveda. The Udgata, like the Hota, chants the introductory, accompanying and benediction hymns. The Brahma is the superintendent of the entire performance, and is responsible for correcting mistakes by means of supplementary verses taken from the Atharva Veda.

### **Offerings and style**

There were usually one, or three, fires lit in the centre of the offering ground. Oblations are offered into the fire. Among the ingredients offered as oblations in the yajna are ghee, milk, grains, cakes and soma. The duration of a yajna depends on its type, some last only a few minutes whereas, others are performed over a period of hours, days or even months. Some yajnas were performed privately, while others were community events.



The benedictions proffered ranged from long life, gaining friends, health and heaven, more prosperity, to better crops. For example, May my rice plants and my barley, and my beans and my sesame, and my kidney-beans and my vetches, and my pearl millet and my proso millet, and my sorghum and my wild rice, and my wheat and my lentils, prosper by sacrifice (Yajna).

Yajurveda 18.12. (Wikipedia)

There are five different kinds of Yajnas:

- (i) Deva Yajna- offerings to the Gods for getting mundane gains.
- (ii) Pitru Yajna – offered to the ancestors (Tarpan- water is offered, rice is kept on the edge of the compound wall for the crow to eat.)
- (iii) Bhuta Yajna - feeding the cow, dog, birds etc.
- (iv) Manushya Yajna – daan to orphans etc. and atithi devo bhava - feeding guests as God.
- (v) Veda and Brahma Yajna- study of the Upanishads, and scriptures, meditation and other penance for attaining liberation.

In the present age - Kali yuga – namasankirtan - Japa, Shri Krishna says in chapter 10, is the highest Yajna. At present we are in the Kali yuga which is the iron age - or the age where all morals are lost and people are only after selfish gain; poverty is rampant and hardly anyone thinks of spiritual matters. We are therefore great punyatamas (virtuous beings) to have taken birth in the Kaliyuga for we are first of all turned towards the goal of existence, and the means to liberation in this yuga is so simple. A little like being 'andho mein kaana raja'- (the cock-eyed person is king among the blind!) Most are still struggling to feed their stomachs, and others are only interested in self - aggrandisement and appropriating wealth.

All that is given above is from ancient times, more than five thousand years ago and it had to be done exactly or else a reverse result might ensue too. This was termed the period of 'karma kand' where rituals were of utmost importance. The nature of the rituals evolved over time and ultimately the external rituals were replaced by "internal oblations performed within the human body". These ideas of substitution, evolution from external actions karma-kanda to internal knowledge jñana-kanda were highlighted in the Upanishads. Yajnas were symbolic, such as in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad hymn 3.1.6, where "the mind is the Brahmin of sacrifice" and the goal of sacrifice was complete release and liberation.

So, how can we practise this sentiment of Yajna? In the shloka 12, Discourse 3 Shri Krishna tells us that the Devas serve the one who offers the fruits of his action first to the Gods and then partakes of whatever is left, and the one who does so only for his own self is verily a thief.

Shri Krishna says in Chapter IV shloka 33, that the highest Yajna is the Jnana Yajna, after enumerating the various other ways of Yajna, such as, worship of Gods, Pranayama, renunciation of one sense organ e.g. taking the vow of silence, and many other forms.

Brahma is present in every Yajna for each of these methods has been enunciated in the Vedas, and how did the Vedas come into being? The Vedas emanate from Brahma Himself (the source of Knowledge) and were transmitted to the rishis in deep meditation. Thus, in each type of Yajna which includes the ashtanga yoga - Rajyoga, Bhakti or Karma yoga Brahman is present for that is the source of knowledge. All these modalities can take you to the source but one should not get distracted by what comes on the way - e.g. boons bestowed by the Devas, for this leads to only mundane and material, benefits which are temporal and soon pass. All the offerings and worship even made to

the Devas reach the Lord alone but with the mistaken belief for worldly gain. Those who perform such Yajnas come again and again- recycling their desires!

Desires is the cause of misery, and we feel that the fulfilment of desire is the cause of joy. Actually, we have got it upside down. Shri Ramana Maharishi has said it is only the appeasement of the agitation caused by desire that appears to give joy. This only gives birth to another desire and more agitation. It's like a mismatched blood transfusion and we suffer. Yet we fall prey to the same again and again, because it has become a habit. It has become a habit because we feel the tangibility of sensations like seeing, tasting etc. and are convinced that therefore it must be truth. Senses can mislead us so much, the prime of these being the mind, which chases after sense pleasures, in vain hope of finding joy which at best is fleeting only. Both pleasure and pain are fleeting, yet in sorrow we go down into the depths of despair.

This then is the chakravayuh - there is only one way out and that is Yajna, meaning offering every act at the feet of the Lord - Offering means Arpan, means samarpan (surrender), means aahuti - offering in worship. *'If one is not willing to die for something one has not lived at all.'* The ideal of course should not be a mistaken one - one should be able to die (death of the ego) for the Truth alone, and that will set us free, that is the intensity of aspiration that should arise in us.

The attitude of Yajna will have to be brought into every act that we perform. If we are doing japa only the act of rolling the mala will not do, every mantra one chants with every bead is done with attention to its meaning thereby offering one's mind to the Lord. That would be appropriate japa yajya. The mantra of course has its vibrational quality and will have some effect which could be multiplied millionfold if done with awareness.

Second Yajna one can do is to begin and end the day with appropriate chants once again paying attention to the meaning. One should offer everything that enters one's mouth to the Lord first for has not Shri Krishna said, the one who eats only for nourishing his body is verily a thief? Two poems composed by my mother, come to mind, for the morning and night are as follows:

**For the morning:**

Sushupti mataa sushuvekumaram aham nisshchyam tatrah sadyah  
karomi. Karomi yat sarvam idam tvardartham hrudisthite  
radhnicaracharannam Uktam matam deva tatha krutam cha havyam  
tatah pavanputamastu kuryam na kinchit par peed naya paropi  
mham naiv tatha dunotu.

*In the morning after waking from deep sleep I firmly decide today: I  
will do all that I do for You who are established in my heart and in the  
moving and unmoving Universe, my thoughts, words and deeds are  
verily an offering to be purified and holy, I will hurt no one and may  
no one hurt me.*

Begging mother earth to forgive us for placing our feet which carry this ego and are touching Her is part of the morning prayer. Looking at our hands and chanting - "karagre vasati Lakshmi, Kara madhye Saraswati Kara mule tu Govinda prabhate Kar darshanam is also one of the first chants in the morning. Once one realises the Self, Mother Earth feels so happy to have the blessed feet which do not carry the weight of the Ego on her bosom.

Throughout the day when one is rendering service to a fellow human being, if the attitude is one of an offering made to the Lord - there can be no resentment, aversion or duress to perform the action and the mind shall get automatically purified. If one is offering a meal to a

mendicant, a servant or any guest if one offers it as though one is offering it to the Lord – it becomes an act of worship. Even when offering advice to a child if we consider it is the Lord to whom we offer advice, what will the words chosen sound like? If one is being told something – listen as though the Lord is talking to you, will it be just hearing or deep attention which leads to an appropriate response and all reactivity will be transcended. One will experience the Lord in all and ere long in Oneself!

Becoming aware and vigilant is after all in one's own interest. For is it not true that at the core we are all self-centred as we should be, more correctly, we should be centred in the Self? It is the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad which has said: \*

न वा अरे पत्युः कामाय पतिः प्रियो भवति,  
आत्मनस्तु कामाय पतिः प्रियो भवति।

न वा अरे जायायै कामाय जाया प्रिया भवति,  
आत्मनस्तु कामाय जाया प्रिया भवति।

न वा अरे पुत्रस्य कामाय पुत्रः प्रियः भवति,  
आत्मनस्तु कामाय पुत्रः प्रियः भवति।

न वा अरे वित्तस्य कामाय वित्तं प्रियं भवति,  
आत्मनस्तु कामाय वित्तं प्रियं भवति।

न वा अरे सर्वस्य कामाय सर्वं प्रियं भवति,  
आत्मनस्तु कामाय सर्वं प्रियं भवति।

*"It is not for the sake of the husband that the husband is dear,  
but for the sake of the Self (Ātman) the husband is dear.*

*It is not for the sake of the wife that the wife is dear,  
but for the sake of the Self she is dear.*

*It is not for the sake of the son that the son is dear,  
but for the sake of the Self he is dear.*

*It is not for the sake of wealth that wealth is dear,  
but for the sake of the Self it is dear.*

*It is not for the sake of all that all is dear,  
but for the sake of the Self all is dear."*

When one becomes **utterly butlerly selfish one avoids that which will ultimately harm us**. Let us take the long-term view instead of being myopic and focussing on instant self-gratification. Let us not be Vimudha – not just mudha, ‘stupid’ but a vimudha ‘vishesh mudha’ one who does not know he is mudha, the deluded one. So let us do that which is good for our total wellbeing both psychological and spiritual.

**And for the night:**

Tathakrutam deva yathaivkaritam tatha matam  
devayathivajnyapitam tathoditam deva yathaivavaditam  
samaptamaitraiva vibodhinavratam. Sushuptinayayasmanstad devat  
tvam prathayamahe tvadutsangha prabho ekam sthirshanti  
sukhaspadam.

*All actions happen as per you; all thoughts are inspired by you all words were spoken as per you and this the end of my daily diary. May I sleep on your lap I pray for that alone is eternal peace.*

## Karma Yoga

The word karma is derived from the verb root kru - to do. Karma, therefore, means action performed through the senses. Every human being is endowed with eleven indriyas or sense-organs. These organs are five jñānendriyas - cognitive senses - senses of action, five karmendriyas and a mind.

The Jnanendriyas (cognitive senses) are given in the following chart, along with Karmendriyas (senses responsible for action), which are the products of the satva and rajas aspect of the five tanmātras, respectively, as follows:

Jnyaendriyas	Panchamahabhuta	Tanmatra	Karmendriyas	Action
Ear	Akasha- Space	Shabda Hearing	Vaak- vocal apparatus	Speech
Touch	Vayu- Air	Sparsh- touch	Paani -hands	Grasping
Eyes	Agni- Fire	Rupa- vision	Paada- legs	Walking
Tongue	Aapa- water	Rasa- Taste	Paayu-organs of excretion	Excretion- letting go!!
Nose	Prithvi- earth	Gandha-smell	Upastha-Sexual organs	Reproduction

So, Karma can be performed by all the 10 senses **and the mind** which is considered the eleventh sense.

The law of Karma as expressed by Swami Vivekanand is “good - good, bad – bad, none escapes the law, but whosoever wears a form wears the chain too. Far beyond name and form is the Atman ever free, know thou are that sanyasi say om tat sat.” This means both Dharma - righteous action and Adharma - unrighteous action leads to bondage, for then a physical form is a must for experience. It takes for granted that one accepts the theory of rebirth.

### **Karma is classified as:**

**Prarabdha:** events happen in our life which cannot be explained on any action taken by us in the present life. Even our birth is apparently not of our choosing. Paul Brunton (the author who introduced the sage Ramana Maharishi to the west) has said events in life are fixed but our attitude to them is not. Guru Goenkaji says ‘agar vyakulta ka beej boge to vyakulta hi milegi na? (If you sow the seed of misery, you will reap only misery, no?) Ramana Maharishi is quoted as saying every action is destined even so much as your making a cup of tea at any given moment. This may possibly be explained on the basis of what we have learnt above, that the Gunas are at play and accordingly they act in a predictable manner. So, this is the karma we come with to be experienced in this very birth. The accounts have to be settled here in this life. What can we do about it? We can change our attitude and opt to behave such that the action leads to our liberation by following the advice given by Shri Krishna.

**Sanchita** is the karma we have in the storehouse or may be likened to a quiver which has many arrows. Those that have been fired are the Prarabdha and those left in the quiver are the Sanchit, what one has accumulated and continues to do so through this life too.



**Kriyaman** - those actions which we perform in this life. These actions even though they happen according to the Gunas can be transformed if we bear in mind the tenets given above and summarised below.

There are four *types* of action:

1. Nitya karma: action as a routine e.g. brushing the teeth, eating, ablutions, no results accrue for this etc.
2. Nai Nithya karma: shradha, vivah depends on social background, caste and custom.
3. Kamyas karma: are the rituals performed with a specific material desire e.g. putrekaameshti (desire for son) etc.
4. Nishidha karma: forbidden action in ancient times there was no difference between sin and crime - ethics and law were not divorced, what was a sin was also a crime.

As Shri Krishna explains later (Ch.4 Shloka17) to Arjuna that action (karma), inaction (akarma) and prohibited action (vikarma) and their results, and the Truth of karma (includes akarma and vikarma) is indeed inscrutable, mysterious. It hits us when we find the good in the world suffering great hardships, and the so called wicked enjoying a relatively comfortable and sometimes luxurious lifestyle. This apparent, I say apparent because the mundane is only a relative perceptual world and there is nothing absolute about it. To my mind any suffering that leads you to the ultimate goal in life is the fruit of good karma and even luxury or happiness which leads you away is only the fruit of some bad karma. It was none other than Kunti the mother of the Pandavas who prayed "let there be sorrow in my life so that I may never forget Thee, Shri Krishna." Shri Krishna has said in the shloka quoted that it is very mysterious and inscrutable. To try and make sense of the cause and effect is an exercise in futility. There is also such a thing as collective karma for we are all interconnected and what we do always affects the general good or bad. It is hard for us to make the connections, but the Divine Computer makes no mistakes.

Ultimately it is all our own doing there is no one dispensing justice and punishments. We create our own field, and we are our own farmers - let's resolve to sow seeds of joy and desire freedom!

Now 'The doctrine of Karma' is like the law of gravity infallible and equally applicable to all. The birth we get depends on the Prarabdha karma i.e. the Karmic endowment allotted for experience in this lifetime. This is selected from the Sanchita Karma which is a warehouse for our Paap (sinful acts) karma and Punya (virtuous) karma, and the conditions available for the fructification of the same. For any action there are two results one is the Drishta - immediate - seen experience and one which is Adrishta - invisible one which gets added to the Sanchita wherefrom it appears for a particular birth. For example, when we do a Punya karma, virtuous act, we feel immediate satisfaction in our heart that is the Drishta result but the reward for the same will also be experienced at some later date that is the Adrishta. The vice versa is applicable to Paap karma. This is the only doctrine that satisfactorily explains why good people seem to suffer and the bad seem to prosper. It was none other than Draupadi who explains why so much misfortune had befallen the Pandavas in the Aranyaka Parva of the Mahabharat. When asked how she knew so much she explained that when her father Drupada was performing a Yajna, Brihaspati the Guru of the Gods was giving a discourse, and she sat on her father's lap to listen. She then goes on to explain that there are three possibilities:

1. All is ordained – predestined: if all is such that one can do nothing about it, there is no need to act at all or at worst there is no use of effort at all. It is clear this cannot be so for our experience denies it. We do find effort paying off and we do sometimes get the expected result. So, whereas there is some truth in it as the result of any action is not wholly dependent on effort, it cannot be the whole truth.

2. All is by chance: As a random effect for example the wind on the sea for sailboat may blow it off course, and this occurred due to the tide or other geographical factors which could not be foreseen or explained in any other way.
3. By effort alone: we have all experienced failure in the face of great effort and the reverse, success when we have made only little effort. This means that although effort is required it is not the only factor.

Draupadi then continues to say that in fact all three factors play their part in any given outcome of action. ***Life would lose its meaning if effort was of no avail and justice would not be evident if it were not explained on Adrishta karma fructifying in the future.*** To confound all matters there is also something as collective karma and therefore members of a family or community or even country and the world at large affect each other both beneficially or detrimentally. Even Shri Krishna points out in Ch 4:

**कर्मणो ह्यपि बोद्धव्यं बोद्धव्यं च विकर्मणः ।**

**अकर्मणश्च बोद्धव्यं गहना कर्मणो गतिः ॥ 17॥**

*The truth about action should be known even as of inaction and prohibited action too, for mysterious indeed are the ways of karma.*

We see in the following selected shlokas from the Bhagwad Gita the manner in which action should be performed to attain the goal of life.

This is called Karma yoga meaning Union with the Ultimate through Karma. When one does constant manana (reflection) it starts to translate into daily action and only then can it be called siddha karma.

So even while we are engaged with the world, we can aspire to reach the ultimate if we bear the following principles in mind and are vigilant in their practise: Chapter 3 Bhagwad Gita.

Shloka 1: Arjuna asks why he is being instructed to this most horrific act of war when the path of knowledge to liberation is more direct.

Shloka 2 - 8 Shri Krishna explains: The goal of both paths is the same, however, the path of Karma yoga is easier for people with the propensity to act. The one who renounces action physically with the senses and mentally dwells on it is a hypocrite. On the other hand, while not being attached, the one who selflessly performs action, he is said to practise karma yoga. No embodied being can be without action.

Shloka 9 to 17 The attitude of Yajna: offering the fruit of action to the Lord is explained. When the action is done without expecting any fruit thereof for that is already offered to the feet of the Lord, it cannot but bring peace and equanimity. He who does not follow this attitude comes again and again, the one who does, is established in the Self and no karma accrues to him. Concept of Yajna discussed in detail above.

Shloka 18 to 26: Those who act in this ideal manner attain the Supreme. Examples of ideal Beings, who thus perform actions without attachment, selflessly are King Janaka who worked ceaselessly for his people. Shri Krishna also gives his own example and explains how a leader should behave so as to take his people along the right path elevating their consciousness and leading them along the right path. For if a leader among men like Arjuna himself, were to renounce he would bring ruin and destruction to them. Therefore, the leader has to act with nonattachment while not disturbing the common man's mentality but gradually inspiring him towards the right goal.

Shloka 27 to 29: It is Prakruti that is acting through the Gunas, and the deluded one feels it is “I do, I do.” The wise man sees this and is ever untouched by their interactions. The deluded one on the other hand is totally mesmerised, his mind should not be disturbed by the wise.

In shloka 28 Shri Krishna explains that the Guna vibhag - division of the Gunas is in the form of the 24 tatvas and the Karma vibhag are the functions of these tatvas therefore, actions such as breathing, digesting of food etc which are happening on auto pilot are due to this complex mechanism of Prakruti and is extremely subtle. The wise know this, everything happens according to the law of nature.

Shloka 30 to 34 Shri Krishna says: therefore, surrendering all actions and the fruit thereof to me, fight, leaving behind this fever of delusion. Those who trust this advice of mine shall come to me and those that do not shall be ruined. It is the Gunas that work, even for the wise man and what can restraint by force do? It is therefore important to rise above the pairs of opposites such as likes and dislikes, sorrow and happiness, gain and loss, attachment and aversion which are the stumbling blocks on the path.

Shloka 35 is being discussed for the concept of Svadharma is pointed to by Shri Krishna. It is better to die practising Svadharma than to excel in another's dharma. Svadharma is defined as one's innate nature. In the Yugas before Kaliyuga the system of class division depended on the inherent Gunas or inclination of the person. This is once again referred to in shloka 13 chapter 4, where Shri Krishna says the four orders of men- Brah mana, Kshatriya, Vyashya, and Sudra were ordained according to the predominant Gunas in them. Arjuna is born a Kshatriya and has the characteristics of one explained in chapter 18 (shloka 41, 42, 43, 44). Accordingly, a Kshatriya is one who is generous, valorous, protects his values and people and does not run away from the battlefield. In chapter 18 again shloka 48 and throughout the

Bhagwad Gita Shri Krishna talks about the fact that even if one's duty is wrought with some evil one should not abandon it and take to another's duty for every action has some measure of evil attached to it. Therefore, remain in tune with your Prakruti and act like a Kshatriya without falling prey to likes and dislikes.

A story comes to mind where a snake had been listening to the wise words of a sage on non-violence and he decided to practise the same. Soon enough he was harassed by village children and even pelted with stones, but he did not react. Finally, he was so distressed he came to the sage and told him about his plight. The sage instructed him "it is well to practise non-violence by not biting anyone but whoever told you not to hiss?" So, he should have stuck to his dharma without becoming violent.

When the mind of a child is developed with samskaras related to his tendencies and special effort is made to make him good we say, he has acquired a good sanskruti. If the opposite happens for example a kshatriya innately is not brought up right, he may end up becoming a Goonda - terrorising people. This is then called vikruti. The one with sanskruti works for the welfare of all beings while performing svadharma even though the action may be tinged with evil and thereby practices karma yoga. He can attain the highest goal by being non-attached and surrendering the fruit of the action at the feet of the Lord. Chapter 18 shloka 46-49.

In Shloka 36 to 43, Arjuna is reflective when he asks what would be the force that pushes an intelligent and rational person into doing things that he knows will lead to disaster. Shri Krishna pours His wisdom, and we can gather the nectar. It is desire that pulls man irresistibly. This reminds me of one of Oscar Wilde's quotations, he has said "I can resist almost anything except temptation!" It is also often seen that a 20gm tongue pulls a 100Kg human to the Pizza Hut!

Shri Krishna therefore warns Arjuna, in these shlokas to first control the senses and the mind and kill this most difficult enemy of desire with the sword of reason. The senses are beyond the body, the mind beyond the senses, the intellect beyond the mind and the Self is beyond the intellect. So once the senses and mind are under one's control, the Self is revealed.

In summary karma should be done:

- (i) without expecting fruit
- (ii) selflessly
- (iii) skilfully- yoga yukta
- (iv) with equanimity
- (v) for the welfare of all
- (vi) surrendering the fruit of action to the Lord
- (vii) without attachment
- (viii) relinquishing doership and finally
- (ix) as an act of worship- Yajna!!

***To summarise therefore we have now understood how to perform action to purify our mind and attain Self-realisation while at the same time not getting disturbed by adverse circumstances when we feel like victims and to keep going in the right direction with the guidelines given in this most practical Song Divine the Bhagwad Gita.***

Important statements from **Shankara's commentary**:

- Srauta karma – Yajnas enjoined by Shruti (all householders must do)
- Smrauta karma – Yajnas enjoined by Smriti.
- From the Upanishads: "Give up religion, give up irreligion. Give up truth, give up untruth. Having given up truth and untruth give up that, by which you give them up."

- Moksha cannot be the effect of an action.
- The ignorant are swayed by Nature.
- The unenlightened should not give up Karma yoga.
- It is action of the unenlightened that sets the wheel of the world going.
- The wise should set an example for the masses.
- It is Prakruti which drives man to action, through affection and aversion, to follow the teaching at the very commencement, man should rise above these two and then act to attain the goal. These two are thieves on the path.
- Desire is the enemy of man.
- Desire enshrouds Wisdom.
- Restrain the senses cast off this sinful thing desire, subdue the self by the self and slay the enemy difficult to conquer.

*Questions of practical importance answered above:*

*Q1. Write 3-5 lines only of the key practices in daily life that will help keep your mental equilibrium in every situation. Just enumerate as you personally would like to practice in order of importance.*

*Q2. How can we be like Janak live in the world but not of it. Kindly give your personal experience and give examples where the concept can be actualised.*

*Q3. What do you understand by Prakruti? What is your own Prakruti and svadharma?*



## Karmasanyaas

Arjuna was not yet clear why he was being told to undertake Action when the path of Knowledge is quite obviously the more direct path. This term Karmasanyaas needs some reflection to properly understand and practice. Knowledge gets better and functional only when applied, performing action in daily life. Both have to be practiced together.

Eknath has titled this chapter *Renounce and Rejoice*. He says the mind is an endless series of desires. We have let our attention wander in the forest of desires, this one and that, no wonder we feel lost.

There are five levels of renunciation (Swami Tadatmanand)

- Karma sanyaas – giving up only action - the dropouts.
- Viddhi sanyaas - renouncing the rituals only.
- Karma phalatyag - Renouncing the fruit of action
- Yajna – offering even the action as a sacrifice to the Lord
- Kartutva sanyasa - renouncing the ego, the doer ship of action.

To be able to give up dependence of the fruit of action requires one to rationally see that it only leads to bondage and bondage ultimately is another word for misery. If we don't have a bigger vision of life we can be very bothered by little thing for e.g. we are upset with a person for his/her irksome behaviour, and we hear someone close to that person died, suddenly all bickering vanishes. This is how Sanyasta sankalpah happens when we increase our vision and smaller difficulties vanish until such time that our vision is universal and that is when no sankalpa remains. Sankalpa here means those thoughts which expect fruit of action and are far removed from renunciation. Sankalpa has many meanings it can also mean the sankalpa shakti – power of resolution which we all require to persist in sadhana.

The more we dwell on the mystery of this teaching the more we understand it is not unrealistic or impractical. Consider for a moment that we are at a station platform which has the possibility of two trains arriving, one goes east the other goes west. It is midday and of course we do not know which train to take. A benevolent looking being comes along and asks where do you want to go? We say we want to be successful and earn a lot of money have wonderful adventures but always win – the being answers “Take the train that is on this platform, it will go west and show you the world, whether you will be successful or not depends on the baggage you are carrying.” You take the train as it was just whistling out, without a thought! You find friends and foes all on board and feel quite comfortable as the train chugs along. The next station arrives, and someone just pushes you out - (your Prarabdha) - and you enter the city of your samsara. Eventually you have experienced the good, the bad, the ugly, or maybe you came across early in your stay someone who lived in this city but somehow seemed unusually attractive and you approach the being - when you go near you find, Oh! He is the one who directed me here in the first place and you request him for directions again. He answers simply. “You asked for this, now the only way out, is leave your baggage, go to the station in the early hours of the morning look for the train headed east and board it!”

Of course, it is difficult to leave one’s baggage and so you ask for guidance, and you are told to develop discretion (Vivek). First - keep reminding yourself, “I have to go east, they do not allow any baggage on board, let me drop this, let me drop that” (this is Karma yoga, renounce the fruit of action, keep reminding yourself - Buddhi) and as you start letting go you find a certain freedom, then dispassion (Vairagya) arises and the craving to hold on slowly slackens its grip. Once again you approach the Being and now ask him, “How come you are in this city? Where is your baggage?” and he says, “I came with none and even though it seems I have it all, I have none and will never

have any, I am here to guide you.” (He is a karma sanyasin - some of them do come to show us, the way.) You then want to know even more, as you have now started to experience some freedom, and with humility and devotion you ask him “What next should I do?” He answers, “Take the train to the East and find out.” That’s when you eagerly drop all your baggage and board the train bound East early the next morning, with none other than your Self as the guide. You find a few people there, some your friends too and the journey is filled with awe and wonder! That is Karmasamnyas – after having attained Vivek and Vairagya you very naturally drop it all and go through the journey of life with only a few like-minded persons but in a state of wonder at the Nav Nav Chamatkar – ever new miracles of existence. On this train one is never very serious, for one is free of any baggage so there are no fears, no anxieties, and whatever comes, it is welcome, be it thunder or lightning, or be it fair weather, it is all taken as part of Prakruti! What is more, the journey, the train, the destination, are all One – there is nowhere to go, there is nothing to do, there is nothing to gain, nothing to lose!

On this train the fellow passengers and you automatically behave in the following manner, all characteristics of a Karma sanyasin:

Shloka 13: Renouncing all actions by thought, and self-controlled, the being rests happily in the nine-gated city (body - 2 nostrils, 2 eyes, 2 ears, 1 mouth, 1 organ of excretion and 1 of reproduction), neither acts at all nor causes anything to act. This is so because his mind is calm unattached, he is established in the knowledge that the Self does nothing it is only the Prakruti – divine Maaya made of gunas that acts.

Shloka 18: In him who is a true Brahmana imbued with the wisdom that the Self is only One in all, sees the cow, elephant and dog and dog-eater as equal in this regard. The difference is only apparent and due

to the gunas Satva, Rajas, and Tam. The One is immutable! He knows that brahman does not get tainted by the outer garb or the mind!

Shloka 20: He who knows Brahman can neither rejoice on obtaining the pleasant (for he knows it is fleeting) nor grieve on obtaining that which is unpleasant for his mind is tranquil and equanimous. Sense objects can create pleasure and pain only to those who regard the body as Self. The Karma sanyasin is totally content nothing can diminish him or add to his infinite fullness.

Shloka 21: The sage unattached to sense objects finds perennial joy in the Self. Here for a moment try it, just drop all attachments, they are like garments, drop all identifications like your under garments and stand naked – clean shorn of false identity, that which remains is SAT CHID ANAND just try it - experiment and experience.

Shloka 23: he who can withstand the impulse to desire and anger while in this body itself, he is a Karma sanyasin, he is liberated while alive, a Jeevan mukta.

The scene, the seer and the seeing are like a dance happening in the unhappening - unmoving immutable Self. The Karma Sanyasin is so called because he has renounced (sanyasa) all actions (karma). The word 'karma' means action, and 'nyasa' means renunciation. Thus, 'sanyasa' implies the renunciation of all actions in pursuit of the Supreme (Brahman)."

**The one who has renounced action and stabilised in Brahman is a Karma sanyasi.**

## Karma and Jnana Kanda

Almost all Acharyas divide the Vedas into two parts (the word Kaand means a section, part or division of): Karma Kand (as explained by the Purva Mimamsa sutras) and the Jnana Kand (Uttara Mimamsa sutras, aka Brahma Sutras). The Samhitas and Brahmanas texts form Karma Kand, Upanishads and Aranyakas form the Jnana Kand. The Karma Kand deals with rituals and worship of Devas, and Jnana Kand deals with Brahman and Moksha. The Samhitas and Brahmanas section make up the bulk of the Vedas, and not the Aranyakas or Upanishads. There are only 13 or so major Upanishads that have been preserved well, and the rest of the 108 haven't. More of the Jnana related texts are found in the Smritis: Bhagavad Gita, Vishnu Purana, and Bhagavata Purana.

Each of the four Vedas has many different Shakhas or recensions. Each Shakha has one Samhita, one Brahmana, one Aranyaka, and one Upanishad. Most Shakhas are lost, we only have two surviving Shakhas of the Rig Veda, for instance. Only a few of the Upanishads are from Shakhas which we still have, like Isha, Brihadaranyaka, Taittiriya, Chandogya, Katha, and Kena. Most other Upanishads are either from lost Shakhas, or from unknown Shakhas, or in some cases are not authentic Upanishads at all. First, the Vedas are Apaurusheya or authorless, and in some sense it's meaningless to ask why an authorless text is the way it is. Karma Kand forms the bulk of the Vedas. In any case, the relative lengths of the Karma Kanda and the Jnana Kanda might be related to the nature of the fruits obtained through these two parts of the Vedas. There are three kinds of happiness: Aihikam or happiness in this world, Amushmikam or happiness in Swarga, and Nishkreyasam or happiness in Moksha. Aihikam is temporary and mixed with sorrow, Amushmikam is unmixed with sorrow but still temporary, and Nishkreyasam is both unmixed with sorrow and eternal. Following the Karma Kanda is what

yields Aihikam and Amushmikam, and following the Jnana Kanda is what yields Nihshreyasam.

Now Aihikam comes in many forms: obtaining a son, acquiring wealth, becoming king, getting magical powers, etc. Similarly, Amushmikam comes in many forms like going to Swarga, freedom of movement in Swarga, and rulership of Swarga. So, there are many different Yagnas to give these different kinds of fruits. But Nihshreyasam comes in only one form, namely Moksha, and you only need to do one thing to get it: know Brahman. Brahma Sutras Adhyaya 3 Pada 3 makes clear that the Brahmanvidyas in different Upanishads are interchangeable/combinable in meditation. So, Jnana Kanda doesn't need to be as long.

The Purva Mimamsa school and the Vedanta school say that the Vedas are absolutely authorless, i.e. not even authored by Brahman. It's only the Nyaya and Vaisheshika schools (and some Shaivite and Shweta sects) that say that God is the author of the Vedas.

Now as we have seen Karma Kanda is the section of the Vedas that lists rituals, ceremonies and actions, which, when performed, lead one to enjoyment and power. On the other hand, Jnana Kanda, comprising the philosophical teachings of the Upanishads, deals with the liberating knowledge and disclaims action as a means of attaining liberation. It would appear that these sections are fundamentally contradictory.

However, there is no contradiction when one notes that these are prescribed according to the qualifications and abilities of the aspirant, says Velukkudi Sri Krishnan in a lecture. Vedic thought is comprehensive and all-inclusive and provides all with options for spiritual growth. All rituals and ceremonies enjoined in the Vedas are

shown to be meaningful as they are founded on dharma and are concerned with the spiritual welfare of human existence.

Sacrifices are prescribed for the common good such as rains at proper seasons to sustain life. There are also Yajnas that can be performed by individuals for personal gain. Soma Yajna confers on an individual the chance to live in the celestial world. Dasaratha performed putrakameshti Yajna and gained the status of father. Kings perform Aswamedha Yajna to establish their empire. But such continued performance of karma and repeated enjoyment of results do not lead to salvation.

Jnana Kanda concerns three principals — God, world and the Self, and their inter-relationship. Vedanta teaches the Nivritti Marga, or the path of turning away from actions, to arrive at the knowledge of this relationship. This knowledge would redeem one from the cycle of birth and death, and not the karma performed with an eye on material and selfish aims.

Arjuna was ready to renounce the battlefield and take up the path of meditation. Krishna points out that sanyasa and meditation are not easily attained and require tremendous effort. Renunciation is located in the mind and not in the act. It calls for training of the mind and control of the senses. This is not possible when we are driven by our senses and gunas. Acts dedicated to God and done with a detached attitude help to purify the mind and lead to jnana.

Relevant to this discussion is a beautiful story and since I love stories here it goes.

*Ritualism (Karma Kanda) vs. Renunciation (Jnana Kanda) of the Vedas:  
The classic debate between Mandana Misra and Adi Shankara*

*By T N Sethumadhavan*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Among the shining stars of philosophers Sri Shankara Bhagavatpada, popularly known as Adi Shankaracharya, occupies a unique place on account of the Advaita philosophy he propounded based on the Upanishads and embellished by the incomparable commentaries he wrote on them. The principles, which he formulated, systematized, preached, debated upon and wrote about, are beyond the limitations of time and space.

Those who study his valuable works experience an intellectual feast of awe, devotion, humility and gratitude overflowing in them. His flowery language, his lucid style, his rigid logic, his balanced expression, his fearless exposition, his unshakable faith in the Vedas, and forceful arguments in debates and in his works convey an idea of his greatness that no story can adequately convey. To those who are deprived of tasting the sweetness of this feast, several incidents in his memoirs do convey glimpses of his many-sided personality.

The life history of the Acharya is made known to us through his biography called the Shankara Digvijaya. While there are various Shankara Digvijayas in existence, the most popular and traditional account of the events of the life of Bhagavatpada is attributed to the Madhaviya Shankara Digvijaya. The popularity of Madhaviya Shankara Digvijaya is not only because of the splendid portrayal of the life of Sri Adi Shankara but also due to the supreme erudition that Sri Madhava displays in portraying the great Acharya. Sri Madhava later became an ascetic and occupied the high pedestal as the Chief of Sharada



Peetham established at Sringeri by Adi Shankara as its 12th Jagadguru with the name of Sri Vidyaranya.

There is not much variation among the several 'Shankara Digvijayas' in describing Shankara's life. This essay is based on the Madhaviya Shankara Digvijaya highlighting that event in the life of the Acharya that is remembered to this day as a representation of scholarship, wisdom and logic.

### **Shankara's Early Life**

Sri Shankara was born of Shivaguru and Aryamba at Kaladi in Kerala. He lost his father at an early age. He made rapid strides in his learning. In his eighth year he obtained the consent of his mother and took up sanyasa. He started out in quest of a competent teacher. And eventually found Govinda Bhagavatpada (the disciple of Gaudapada) on the banks of the Narmada. He stayed with his Guru for a while. Under his command, he went to Kashi and Badari.

It was during this period while in Badari when he was of twelve years of age, he wrote his most profound commentaries on the Vedanta Sutras of Badarayana, the principal Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita which are known as Prasthanatraya, being the authorities on the Vedanta Sastras. The Bhashyas (commentaries) of Shankara are monumental works covering the import of the Vedic teachings and supplemented by clear reasoning and lucid exposition. This doctrine of Brahma Vidya which Shankara propounded through his works is what is known as Advaita Vedanta or Non-dualism. It confers salvation through the elimination of duality across the world.

At this time of Indian History, the spiritual life among the Buddhists was at low ebb with the vigour and purity of Buddha having vanished. The masses had moved away from the Vedic way of life comprising of

the various duties in accordance with the tradition and the stages in life. A strong and urgent need for the revival of the Sanatana Dharma was therefore felt.

The Vedic rituals and sacrifices were revived and gained a position of honour. In course of time, the sacrifices and rituals (*karma kanda*) reigned supreme and were upheld as the ultimate goal. The true Vedic dictums (*jnana kanda*) were forgotten. Spiritual insight was conspicuous by its absence. At such a crucial juncture, Sri Adi Shankaracharya appeared on the scene.

Shankara realized that unless he was able to win over this powerful group of proponents and followers of ritualism, his goal of re-unifying India and making it a beacon light of spirituality would remain unfulfilled.

Thrilled by the experiences, Shankara set his mind on the task ahead and commenced his next task namely to propagate his tenets as set out in his Prasthanathraya Bhashyas to the world.

### **Sri Shankara and Kumarila Bhatta**

Starting on this mission of a spiritual conquest of the whole of India, Shankara decided to go first to Prayag with a view to win over Kumarila, the staunch upholder of the ritualistic interpretation of the Vedas and get his explanatory comments (*Vartika*) on his Bhashya on Brahma Sutras of Badarayana – Vyasa.

Having reached Prayag, he came to know that Kumarila was about to enter into a fire, as an act of expiation for betraying his teacher from whom he had learnt stealthily the tenets of Buddhism. Sri Shankara rushed to the place where Kumarila had set himself to burn. Kumarila recognised Shankara, narrated to him his work against the Buddhists,

his awareness about Sri Shankara's Bhashyas and his desire to write a Vartika (explanatory treatise) on his Bhashyas. Kumarila explained how he was not in a position to break his vow of expiation and therefore asked him to meet his disciple Mandana Misra. He added that if Shankara could defeat Mandana Misra, whose actual name was Vishwaroopa, who was the most renowned protagonist of the Purvamimamsa School, the ritualistic interpretation of the Vedas, it would clear all obstacles in the mission that Shankara had undertaken.

Shankara then proceeded to Mandana's place called Mahishmati, in the present-day Bihar. (According to another version it is at the confluence of the Narmada and Mahishmati rivers, near Omkarnath in Madhya Pradesh)

### **Sri Shankara and Mandana Misra**

Mandana Misra received the best of traditional training at the feet of Kumarila Bhatta and perfected his scholarship. He settled at Mahishmatipura as a householder with his wife Ubhaya Bharati.

Mandana Misra and Ubhaya Bharati were an ideal couple, each of them equal to the other in all branches of learning, ethical character and strict observation of Vedic injunctions. Ubhaya Bharati was supposed to be an avatara of goddess of learning, Saraswati Devi, as Mandana Misra was supposed to be an avatara of Brahma. His scholarship and the reverence in which he was held earned him the honorific epithet of 'Mandana Misra'. His real name was Vishwaroopa. Mandana Misra was a distinguished practitioner of the mimamsa philosophy. The mimamsa philosophy is mainly derived from the *karma kanda* portion of the Vedas and emphasizes on the importance of rituals. In this school of thought, a particular ritual is done, and the results are achieved instantaneously. It displays a straightforward cause and effect relationship if practiced accurately.

When Sri Bhagavatpada reached the mansion of Mandana Misra, it was found bolted from inside. Sri Bhagavatpada, as a Sanyasi, had no right of admission into a house found closed. Such are the rules of Smriti, which govern the daily conduct of traditional Sanyasis. Sri Bhagavatpada pondered a little. He had firmly decided to redeem Mandana Misra from the rigidity of dogmatic ritualism. Therefore, he felt like using his extraordinary Yogic powers. Great Yogi and Siddha Purusha as he was, Sri Bhagavatpada entered the house through the closed door.

Mandana Misra had an innate dislike for Sanyasis because in his staunch belief of ritualism, he felt that only those who wished to escape the rigours of Vedic injunctions found a refuge in the Sanyasa ashrama. Moreover, when Sri Bhagavatpada entered the house, it was a time when the presence of a Sanyasi was most unwelcome. Mandana Misra was performing a shraddha and the Brahmins were about to be fed. The entry of Sri Bhagavatpada at such a time caused a disturbance and Mandana Misra was infuriated.

Hot and harsh exchanges followed. The Brahmins found the situation going out of control. They wished to set it right. They suggested to Mandana Misra to invite Sri Bhagavatpada for Bhiksha seeing him as a *bhokta* occupying Vishnu Sthana in the ceremony. Staunch ritualist as he was, Mandana Misra was fully bent upon saving the ritual. He invited Sri Bhagavatpada accordingly.

But Sri Bhagavatpada declined to accept the invitation. He explained to Mandana Misra that he did not come for *bhiksha* of the edibles but for a *vada bhiksha*, a polemical debate in philosophy. Mandana Misra who had never met his match in learning before was willing for a dialectical fight. He gladly welcomed it. The shraddha was allowed to be finished as ordained. The debate was fixed for the next day.

Mandana Misra was a perfect and adept ritualist who preached widely. The young and charming advaita vedantin, Adi Shankara, on his country wide tour was eager to debate with Mandana Misra, who was by then already very old. Mandana Misra reasoned that since he had spent more than half his life learning and preaching mimamsa, it would be unfair to debate with a youngster in his twenties who barely had any experience. Hence, with the intention of being fair on Shankara, Misra allowed Shankara to choose his own judge. Shankara had heard greatly about Misra's righteousness and appreciated him for his act of fairness. But he was quick to decide that none but Mandana Misra's wife herself can be the most appropriate judge for this debate. To make the dispute more purposeful, they agreed to a wager. If Shankara loses in debate, He would become disciple of Mandana Misra and get married in life. If Manadana Misra loses, he should become a Sanyasi and disciple of Shankara. This was the wager of the debate.

The debate between them commenced and continued for months. Thousands of scholars gathered every day to watch and learn. Mandana Misra, at a ripe old age, remained a man with very sharp intellect and a very solid grasp of logic, but he was slowly losing. Despite being such a young man, Shankara's realization of the ultimate Brahman and his knowledge of Maya, enabled him to win over Misra's arguments easily. Misra was a very accomplished ritualist, yet he seemed to lack some understanding of higher spiritual truths that Shankara seemed to have experienced already. At the end of a long period, Mandana Misra was almost ready to accept defeat, when his wife, Ubhaya Bharati, declared that in order to defeat a man in debate the opponent should also defeat his wife.

As Shankara had no knowledge of Kama Shastra he was told by Ubhaya Bharati to obtain such knowledge before she could be defeated. Accordingly, Sankara entered the body of a King who had just died and

was about to be taken to the cremation ground. He lived in the body for 1 month and dispensed with all his royal duties in an amazingly expert manner and then died to that body and re-entered his own. He then defeated Ubhaya Bharati as well.

**And thus re-established the tenets of Jnana Kand throughout the country.**

## Dhyana – Meditation

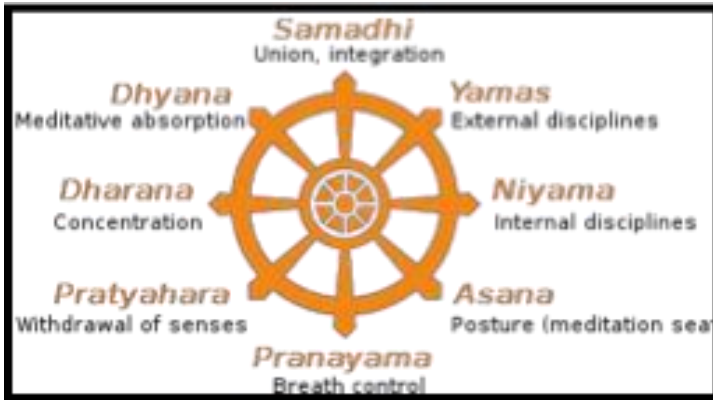
The verb root of the word Dhyana is *dhi*, which in the earliest layer of text of the Vedas refers to "imaginative vision" and is associated with goddess Saraswati with powers of knowledge, wisdom and poetic eloquence. This term developed into the variant *dhya* - and *Dhyana* or "meditation". Dhyana is a term which in common parlance means meditation and contemplation. It is however, a much more sophisticated description of a mind that is totally silent or seems totally silent when it is absorbed in a single thought much like when oil is poured it forms a ribbon which seems still even though it is continuously flowing.

### ***So, what is Dhyana?***

*No discussion on Dhyana can even begin before we refer to the Yogasutras of Patanjali: right in the very second shloka he says - Yogah ChittaVrutti Nirodhah - meaning Yoga is the total silencing of the modifications of the mind - that is meditation. In the 12th shloka like Shri Krishna, he says for this both Abhyaas and Vairagya are imperative. Patanjali, the great sage, in the Yogasutras, has codified all knowledge regarding Yoga meaning Union with the Divine.*

In the Ashtanga (eight limbs) yoga, Dhyana is the seventh limb in the goal to Samadhi, the state that reveals the Truth. This is also termed Raja Yoga and forms the basis of our tradition – the Himalayan tradition as popularised by Swami Rama.

The eight limbs are:



- i. Yama: restraints, the 'don'ts, these embody the ethical principles derived exclusively for the purpose of concentrating the mind, this is the first limb:
  - Non-injury (ahimsa),
  - Truthfulness (satya), is also how we relate to ourselves, are we true to ourselves?
  - Non-stealing (āsteya),
  - Celibacy (brahmachārya),
  - Non-possession (aparigraha). It refers to the tendency of the mind to be greedy, to be grasping or to extend the “tentacles of selfishness” outward. It also applies to our tenacious grip on our thoughts and feelings. Often, we hold on to a dogma or a creed and seek comfort from it. Aparigraha implies non-attachment as an ideal amplified in the Gita. Thus, we see that mastery even of the first step of this yoga will make one into a saint.
- ii. Niyamas, the 'do's', observances, the second limb, are also five:



- Cleanliness (saucha),
  - Contentment (santosha),
  - Austerity (tapas),
  - Study (svādhyāya) and
  - Devotion to Isvara (isvara pranidhāna) means the awareness of the “River of Teaching” flowing since time immemorial, as a background thought, and total surrender to Ishvara.
- iii. Asana (posture): is the third rung, basically to enable one to sit for prolonged period without discomfort and ensures physical wellbeing. If combined with an internal awareness it leads to a subtle dissociation from the body as self-identification. Proper practice keeps the spinal column straight and prevents sluggishness of the mind which tends to be engulfed by *tamoguna* if we slouch. When one is not feeling that good, a brisk ten- minute walk is often a great help in bringing cheerfulness to the mind. Such physical techniques are part of Raja Yoga and come under the heading of āsanā and prāṇayāma.
- iv. Pranayama (regulation of breathing): the fourth limb to the top! Over the millennia, these two steps Asana and Pranayama have been expanded upon by the yogis into a series of stretching and breathing exercises. These disciplines were then encoded as Hatha Yoga. In Patanjali’s yoga sutras they form a means for the mind to reach higher levels of awareness.
- v. Pratyahara (restraint of the sense organs): We need to withdraw our senses from their objects as a prerequisite to concentrating the mind, making it one pointed which is the next step. Essentially what is being referred to is the out-

going tendency of the mind and this must be restrained. For example, when we sit to do some creative work, we find we are unable to start. This is just restlessness of the mind and the best way to eliminate it is simply to begin the work at hand and withdraw from the distractions. Through effort, the restlessness disappears. The essence of pratyahara is not to identify with the thought wave as soon as it rises, but to watch it.

- vi. Dharana (concentration) to make the monkey mind ekagra, i.e. one pointed and focused on a single object like the breath or mantra or by synchronizing both. Vivekananda describes the restless mind as follows: "It has been compared to the maddened monkey. There was a monkey, restless by his own nature, as all monkeys are. As if that were not enough, someone made him drink wine freely, so that he became still more restless. Then a scorpion stung him. When a man is stung by a scorpion, he jumps about for a whole day; so, the poor monkey found his condition worse than ever. To complete his misery a demon entered him. What language can describe the uncontrollable restlessness of that monkey? The human mind is like that monkey, incessantly active by its own nature; then it becomes drunk with the wine of desire, thus increasing its turbulence. After desire takes possession comes the sting of the scorpion of jealousy at the success of others, and last of all, the demon of pride enters the mind, making it think itself of all importance. How hard to control such a mind!" Even Shri Krishna agrees that the mind is by nature restless, but by practice and dispassion it can be brought under control.

A practical suggestion to change the course the mind might take when stung by the scorpion of anger, attachment,

jealousy and the like, is by offering it a diversion into some pleasant event such as kissing an infant or meeting a friend, when the opposite is experienced, an immediate change overcomes the mind, and it becomes amenable to the right suggestions. Dharana is holding the mind and increasing the stamina for sustained concentration.

- vii. Dhyana (meditation): is an unbroken flow of the mantra or breath awareness or idea one may have held during dharana. The dharana, sustained in an unbroken flow, is what is meant by Dhyana.
- viii. Samadhi (is the ultimate state of transcendence possible for the mind, super consciousness): All spiritual personalities of history have attained this state of mind which once attained, one knows that he or she is one with Brahman and forms the substratum of the Universe, there is no sense of separation, it is the state of total absorption in the Supreme

Adi Shankara in his commentary on *Yoga Sutras*, distinguishes Dhyana from Dharana, by explaining Dhyana as the yogic state when there is only the "stream of continuous thought about the object, uninterrupted by other thoughts of different kind for the same object" it is called samaan pratyay – same single thought; Dharana, states Shankara, is focus on one object, but aware of its many aspects and ideas about the same object.

Vivekananda explains *Dhyana* in Patanjali's *Yogasutras* as, "When the mind has been trained to remain fixed on a certain internal or external location, there comes to it the power of flowing in an unbroken current, as it were, towards that point. This state is called Dhyana"

While Dharana was the stage in yoga where the yogi held one's awareness to one object for a long period of time, Dhyana is

concentrated meditation where he or she contemplates without interruption the object of meditation, beyond any memory of ego or anything else.

### ***How is Dhyana practiced?***

Dhyana is such a personal practice that it is said there are as many ways of practicing Dhyana as there are individuals attempting it. However, broadly it may be practiced in one of the several ways given below:

#### ***Objective:***

The commonest form of Dhyana practice is to be given an *alambana* - support or object to rest one's mind on and holding on to that first in an effortful manner - i.e. Dharana and then slipping into an effortless state of *ekagrata* - i.e. one pointed attention - Dhyana. In the Himalayan Tradition both the objective and subjective methods are taught:

Let us examine Dhyana from outside in the Objective method using an *alambana*. By *Alambana* is meant taking the support in this context to focus the mind: support of body/breath/mantra or the form of a deity may be taken to help bring the mind to one pointedness(*ekagrata*) so necessary for dhyana.

1. Posture or Asana – That is a suitable posture which is 'sthira-sukhasya asanam'- stable and comfortable - as defined by Patanjali, the Rishi who wrote the Yogasutras many thousand years ago. Why should the body be stable? So that the mind can be stilled, as it takes some time for it to become still if at all it does. This is likened to a bucket of water being carried and put down – the bucket becomes still immediately but the water takes some time to stabilise so if the body

is also moving the mind cannot be still. Now why should the posture be comfortable? So that we can sit still for prolonged periods of time. It is also advisable to keep the head, neck and trunk aligned and straight not ramrod straight but maintaining the natural curvatures of the spine. Why should this be so? Once again, the body mirrors the mind and if one slouches it is a sure sign that one is falling asleep and /or not paying attention or lacks focus. It should be noted that our subconscious mind dwells in the skeletal muscles, in the different organs of the body not only in the brain. Deepak Chopra in his book 'Unconditional Life' cites an incident when an elderly lady who had just received the heart of a young road traffic accident victim asked for Kentucky Chicken on regaining consciousness. It was very strange to the patient as she was a vegetarian. On further enquiry it was found that the donor had just had Kentucky chicken prior to the accident that killed him. This means memory gets imprinted on every cell in the body. These are our habit patterns (samskaras) and desires (vasanas).

In the Himalayan tradition popularised by my Guru Swami Rama we are first asked to consciously relax each and every muscle starting systematically from the forehead. There is a profound logic to it. We need to contact our subconscious mind and relax it so that disturbing thoughts do not arise and distract our attention. As shown above, memory gets imprinted even on organs, we are told to specifically relax and release any tension in the throat / heart and naval centre – all very scientific. The forehead is the first place we start because our cognitive mind resides in the prefrontal cortex just behind the forehead – an unwrinkled forehead is an unworried mind. A simple exercise of keeping the forehead relaxed several times in the day will lead to several insights which I will not divulge yet.

2. Breath awareness: Next, we are asked to focus on the breath from naval to nostrils as we exhale and nostrils to naval as we inhale - this helps in establishing diaphragmatic breathing another prerequisite to

help focus the faculty of attention. It is a well-known scientific fact that diaphragmatic breathing stimulates the Vagus nerve by stretching the pleura (the membrane covering the lungs), this in turn slows the heart and respiratory rate, and improves oxygenation. Once this is established the attention is brought to the nostrils – a small area to sharpen focus, with a little attention it becomes clear that the incoming breath is cooler than the outgoing breath which has been warmed by the passage through the lungs. Now notice how much leeway is there for the mind to wander? If one is sincere almost next to none, and yet, the mind often escapes. The mind is likened to a drunk monkey bitten by a scorpion! So, one has to be vigilant and sincere. Swami Rama tells a beautiful story: Once there was a fair in the country where the King and Queen made an annual visit. They found a stall with a closed box and the seller asked for 25,000 Rs. for the box refusing to open it. He however, explained that they should take it home and discover what is in it. The King walked away but the Queen was intrigued and begged the King to buy it and of course the King could not refuse. (there is a saying one cannot refuse a stubborn wife or child). On reaching the palace the Queen could not wait to open the box - out came a Genie and asked how he may serve her? He also added that if she did not give him any work, he would devour her and the palace. The Queen was foxed but kept giving him endless chores round the palace, the staff was given a vacation. No sooner was one job done the genie was ready for another. The Queen was exhausted, and the King asked the royal Guru for a solution. The Guru said ask the genie to go up and down that tall post in the palace ground. And lo! And behold! The genie was occupied the whole day going up and down the post - the Queen could finally get some sleep and rest. So, what is this genie and what is the post? You have probably guessed already - the mind is the genie, and the breath is the post! If followed carefully it will be one's experience that indeed the mind well occupied leaves the observer alone.

3. Mantra – Reciting a mantra, shloka, text loudly can also make the mind quiet because the vibration of the mantra is in itself powerful. We however are asked to chant the mantra in the mind without the use of the vocal apparatus. The general mantra used is Soham (I am That) ‘So’ with the incoming breath and ‘Ham’ with the outgoing breath, the reverse may also be done. Later, as our mind gets stabilised, we are asked to simply hear the mantra the rhythmic chanting of which is happening in consciousness.

The above is a brief description of one of the techniques of meditation followed in the Himalayan tradition

As we move along this Objective pathway towards our interior there comes a time when the mind becomes so silent and focussed like a ribbon of oil being poured which although moving looks still. The mantra also drops, and the mind is likened to a lake of silence. This can then proceed to the state of Samadhi where all body consciousness has dropped and only Awareness remains.

### ***Subjective***

(a) **Atmatatvalokanam** as taught in our tradition of Himalayan yoga. Here all objects are experienced in awareness, the focus of attention is the awareness that makes experience possible. So, sensations in the body, thoughts in the mind, emotions arising- all are witnessed keeping in mind that anything that can be observed cannot be you. We are also taught how to do this by simply withdrawing our attention from all that is not me - a process of self- enquiry - If I can perceive, feel or think something it cannot be me this means the body, emotions, and thoughts. Once the intellect is convinced it drops into the state of Being - no longer any doing. We are human Beings not human Doings (a common cliché). It may, however, be difficult to practice unless the mind is purified.

**(b) Nidhidhyasana - Contemplation** - After concentrating the mind and letting go even that effort a few moments of silence ensue - in those few moments the Buddhi suggests a well-known sentence expressing the Truth - such as 'Aham asmi - sadaa Bhaami' meaning - I am – Ever illuminating. This is the awareness in which all becomes known. Then one uses all one's mental energies to experience the statement.

Nidhidhyasana is practised after Shravana (listening) of Vedantic Truth and Manana (constant reflection contemplation).

In early Brahmanical yoga, the goal of meditation was considered to be a nondual state identical to unmanifest state of Brahman, where subject-object duality had been dissolved. In the Guru Gita from the Skanda Purana it is said that the knower and known become one by this method - 'Jnyanam jnyeya samam kurvaan nanya pantha dvitiyika.' Many Upanishads refer to the practice of Dhyana including Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, and Prashnopanishad.

### ***Devotion:***

This makes use of one's devotion to a particular Deity and that emotion goes a long way in helping one to focus attention on the Deity this can lead to Samadhi as well. It is a merger of the meditator with the deity. The Sikhs also use this approach trying to feel God's presence within and emerge in the divine light. It is called simran.

There are several other methods and prayers in English may also be dwelt on. The western way of classification of techniques of meditation are broadly two:

1. **Focused** or concentrative similar to the objective given above.



**2.Open monitoring of Mindful meditation** (most research done in the present times is on this type of meditation)

Then of course there are other types such as **Zazen** - which is simply to sit and if the teacher sees you are doing well you get hit, off and on. It is called shikantaza in Japan.

**Vipassana** is the Theravada school of Buddhism and adopts both breath awareness and physical sensations as objects for meditative practice and later they guide the meditator to samatha - calm abiding. Other schools encourage a thought-empty mind and so on.

In Discourse 6 of the Bhagwad Gita, Shri Krishna guides us right from the basics to the advanced techniques, encompassing all of the above. The classification is somewhat arbitrary, and one may flow from one technique to the other, although it is said that sticking to one technique is more beneficial for proficiency. This is so because when one is digging well one should choose a spot and continue to dig in the same spot - sooner or later one is sure to strike water.

My own argument is for the reverse, one should try all techniques determine what is most suitable and naturally flow from one to the other if one experiences the deepening of one-pointed attention- I feel like a sculptor chiseling a block of marble hitting at various places to carve the statue he has visualized - as long as the goal is kept in mind and in the heart one can experiment and experience. *(This, however, is only my opinion and not the truth - most Gurus do not recommend it so kindly do not follow.)*

The entire Discourse 6 of the Bhagwad Gita is on the practice of meditation, first the preliminary technique and the fruit thereof and then the advanced technique and the fruit thereof, is given by Shri Krishna. Then Arjuna's pertinent question regarding the fickleness of

mind is answered cryptically that no doubt the mind is fickle and restless but with Abhyas (practise, repetition keeping the goal in mind) and Vairagya (dispassion) it can be brought under control. Arjuna then expresses his doubt regarding what if the sadhana is incomplete in the present life? Shri Krishna explains that sadhana gets carried forward even though the physical bank balance does not! All Karmic balance does, and that includes sadhana. It was therefore thought necessary that a note be made on Dhyana.

### ***Obstacles to practise of meditation:***

Primarily one should ask oneself – why am I doing what I am embarking on? If the answer is ‘I don’t know’ reflect and only when a sincere desire arises to get to the bottom of this enigma called life, begin. Then no obstacles can threaten you. However, the common obstacles are:

(i) **Laziness** this is the first obstacle and is due to the preponderance of Tamoguna (one of the three strands that make the fabric of this manifestation – the quality of ignorance, laziness and indolence). The first thing to do for this is to develop the opposite – that is activity - Rajoguna (the strand that leads to action, passion and even greed – let there be greed for the Truth) and then convert this into (Satvaguna the strand that bestows the quality of clarity and happiness)

That is why in our tradition on waking up we do not sit for meditation straight away; we do our joints and glands exercise (gentle limbering of limbs to relax and release the laziness) then we follow it with Pranayama and finally enter Dhyana.

(ii) **Doubt** in the chosen technique, doubt in the Guru, doubt in the possible result. The best way out of this is to make sure before you start, of the authenticity of the source, and whether it synchronises

with your own aptitude – if you are a bhakta by nature, all this talk about Truth and Consciousness may not appeal and vice versa. If you are an atheist/ agnostic or even an intellectual - all this God Deity business may not gel. Once the path is chosen stick to it.

### Shloka 5 Ch. 6 (on Dhyana yoga)

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।

आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥ ५ ॥

*One should lift oneself up with one's own efforts and should not degrade oneself, for one's own self is one's friend and one's own self is one's own enemy.*

This is one of the celebrated shlokas of the Bhagwad Gita and Swami Veda Bharati often told us – ‘if you know only this one shloka of the BG and practice, it is enough.’ This is because once the right resolve and the priority is set, the rest follows.

(iii) **Desire for instant gratification** - you go buy a pizza and it is immediately delicious – it does not work that way with meditation. Continuous, regular and singular practice is bound to succeed and infact once you even taste a bit of It, you will be hooked. So, patience!

(iv) After initial success the craving for more - well unfortunately this is exactly what comes in the way. For the one who is practicing is not the one to gain freedom - he is the one we have to get freedom from - the ego! Slowly it dawns. Has not Shri Krishna said you have all the right to do an action but no right to the fruit thereof?

### ***How to overcome obstacles?***

Samyama the route to Samadhi and Self-realization – moksha (freedom) from suffering. Samyama is defined as the practice of

Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi, all three form the core of Samyama. The word itself simply means – holding together. The Yoga Sutras assert that this practice can be applied to a certain object to get specific results: A yogi who focuses on the customs and notions (Pratyaya) of men knows the series of ‘psycho-mental states of other men. (Swami Rama was a Master of this, and He demonstrated it to several of his disciples)

When a yogi successfully completes Samyama on ‘distinction of object and idea’ he realizes the ‘cries of all creatures’, which leads to immense compassion. Accordingly, the yogi can develop several powers - Siddhis. Vachaspati Mishra, a scholar of Vedanta has written, “Whatever the yogin desires to know, he should perform *samyama* in respect to that object.”

For Moksha the object of practice is Sattva (pure existence), Atman and Purusha (Pure Consciousness), or Bhagavan, as given in the Bhagwad Gita by Shri Krishna - dwelling on Me become one with Me. Adi Shankaracharya has said Samyama is means for Jnana yoga to achieve the state of Jivan mukti - liberation while in the body.

A matrix to successful meditation is as follows:

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Solution</b>	<b>Method</b>
Ignorance – Ajnana, not knowing the true Self	Knowledge - Jnana	Shravana, Manana, Niddhidhyasana - Jnana
Vikshepa – restless mind	Ekagra – concentration, focus	Upasana – meditation, worship, Bhakti and Raja yoga
Impurity of mind - Chittamala	Chitta Shuddhi	Karma yoga.

### ***What is expected if Dhyana is practiced regularly? (Phalashruti)***

This reminds me of the oft asked question in modern life “what’s in it for me?’ It depends on one’s aim. If it is only to de-stress, that will happen too, if it is the lofty goal of attaining Samadhi, that will happen too!

### ***Scientific evidence on the benefits of Meditation***

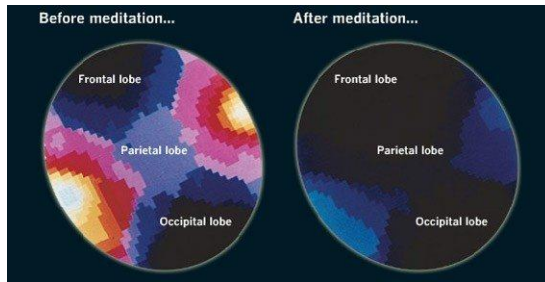
There's a section of our brains that's sometimes called the “Me Centre” (it's technically the medial prefrontal cortex). This is the part that processes information relating to ourselves and our experiences. So, when we experience scary or upsetting sensations, we can more easily look at them rationally. A lot of research with the use of functional MRI, has contributed towards elucidating the centres in the brain involved in meditation and the EEG has been used to map the waves during meditation. In the image below you can see the EEG pattern and how the beta waves (shown in bright colours on the left) are dramatically reduced during meditation (on the right). Beta waves indicate that our brains are processing information.

Below is the best explanation found of what happens to the brain during meditation:

**Frontal Lobe:** Is the most highly evolved part of the brain which is responsible for reasoning, planning emotions and self-conscious awareness. During meditation it tends to go offline.

**Parietal Lobe** processes sensory information about the surrounding world, orienting us in time and space- during meditation this activity also goes down. **Thalamus** Is the gatekeeper funnelling some sensory data deeper into the brain and stopping other signals in their tracks, meditation reduces the flow

of incoming information to a trickle. **Reticular formation** receives incoming stimuli and puts the brain on alert, ready to respond. Meditation reduces this arousal signal.



Our Gurudev Swami Rama had demonstrated all these changes under laboratory control at the Meninger Institute of Neuroscience Kansas City USA. Swami Veda after him had done so too and had established a lab at Swami Rama Sadhaka Grama Rishikesh. Several papers have also been published in leading journals of the findings. The reader is referred to Swami Veda's book "The Yogi in the Lab."

All the above results in the scientifically proven benefits as follows:

- ***Less anxiety and less stress.***
- ***Better focus and faster learning***
- ***More creativity.***
- ***More compassion.***
- ***Better memory***
- ***More grey matter where it matters! Meditation has also been shown to diminish age-related effects on grey matter and reduce the decline of our cognitive functioning.***

**The spiritual outcome:** This however is not the goal of the study and practice of meditation. When the goal is no less than Samadhi and

liberation from suffering, the above benefits pale into insignificance and the practitioner continues onward with zeal and inspiration.

***In its highest application it will lead one to Moksha - Kaivalya, Liberation. Let us be ambitious and keep the goal of Enlightenment ever before us and by focusing our attention on the prescribed manner given above let us come to that attainment. \*<sup>1</sup>***

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<sup>1</sup> Foot note: this is by no means an exhaustive essay on Meditation and its practice. The reader is referred to books on the subject by Swami Rama by Swami Veda Bharati and many great scholars. This is only a brief sketch.

## Maya

दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया ।  
मामेव ये प्रपद्यन्ते मायामेतां तरन्ति ते ॥ 14 ॥ Ch7 BG

*For, this most wonderful Mayaa(veil) of Mine consisting of the three Gunas (modes of nature) is extremely difficult to breakthrough; those however, who constantly adore Me alone, are able to cross it.*

This is the *shloka* which inspired me to clarify my own understanding of Maya.

‘*Brahman* is simple *Mayaa* is complicated’ ...Swami Sarvapriyanand.  
A young girl in the US asked Eknath Easwaran, can you tell me the meaning of my name *Maya*? His answer was “If I could explain this Sanskrit word *Maya*, I would give you the secret of life.”

A story illustrates this point beautifully. It goes like this... the greatest devotee of Shri Vishnu Bhagwan is Narada an enlightened being, who roamed all the three worlds singing the glory of Vishnu, once asked Shree Vishnu “Beloved Lord, what is *Maya*? It always perplexes me.” The Lord replied looking at him quizzically, “Sure, I will but just now I’m very thirsty could you get me a glass of water?” Off Narada went to the nearest village, where he found a maiden drawing water from a well, and asked her for some water- as she lifted the pot to pour the water into his jug, their eyes met, she was exquisitely beautiful and Narada was left gaping at her. Soon he found himself accompanying her to her home and asking her father for her hand in marriage. They were wedded and passed many a day in love and marital bliss, she gave birth to an enchanting baby. Years rolled by and Narada was a successful agriculturalist with many farms. One day torrential rain and the river in spate swept away his family, he found himself stranded on



the bank crying to the Lord and lo! He found Vishnu mischievously asking for his glass of water, "I have been waiting for over half an hour, where is my glass of water?" Shri Vishnu no longer had to explain Maya. Narada learnt.

### **So, now what is Maya?**

The Grammarian can only give us the derivation of the word – yaa maa saa *Mayaa*- Yaa means that which is and Maa means not – So that which is not is *Mayaa*!

To get a glimpse of what might be meant by Maya we must first understand what *Vedanta* says about *Brahman*, *Jiva* and then explore Maya, and the way out of this maze. The Absolute *Brahman* alone is real and the finite manifestations are illusory. There is only one absolute undifferentiated reality, the nature of which is constituted by knowledge. The entire empirical world with its distinction of finite minds and the objects of their thoughts is an illusion. Subjects and objects are like fleeing images which encompass the dreaming soul and melt away into nothingness at the moment of waking. The term Maya signifies the illusory character of the finite world. *Sankara* explains with the analogies of the rope and snake, the juggler and jugglery, the desert and the mirage, and the dreamer and dream. In our dreams we can create the largest of mountains and the deepest of seas, the most glorious of moments and the worst nightmares, all of which simply vanish on waking!

The three scriptures on which the six schools of philosophy are based, i.e. the Prasthanatrayee are 1. The *Upanishads*, 2. The *Bhagwad Gita* and 3. The *Brahmasutras*. Shankara is credited with bhasyas (commentaries) which extract the exact meaning of the Prasthanatrayee. Sutras are extremely pithy, and in their brevity are liable to be misinterpreted or interpreted in various ways.

Here we will follow Shankara who expounds the theory of Maya in all its ramifications and glorious mystery.

The theory is that there is only the One and all that appears is a mere illusion similar to a rope being perceived (in dim light) as a snake with fear and suffering arising due to this misconception. Once the rope is known for what it is with the help of knowledge the ignorance is removed and that is the end of suffering. In a single line it is expressed as follows:

ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः।

अनेन वेद्यं सच्छास्त्रमिति वेदान्तडिण्डिमः॥

Brahma is real, universe is mithya(neither real nor unreal). *Jiva* is *brahman* itself and not different. This should be understood as the correct Sastra. This is proclaimed by *Vedanta*.

To at least get a glimpse into what Maya means one needs to familiarise with the concept of *Brahman*, *Jiva* and therefore Maya. The entire exercise is for just the one and one purpose of seeking the end of suffering by the *Jiva* who in essence is none other than *Brahman* but is under the illusion of being a separate entity.

Let us see how this comes about after first getting *Brahman* and *Jiva* out of the way!

### ***Brahman***

There are five great commentators on the Brahma Sutras by Badarayan / Veda Vyasa:

Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhavacharya, Nimabaraka and Vallabhacharya.

All commentators on the Brahma sutras agree on certain points:

1. *Brahman* is the cause of this world

2. The knowledge of *Brahman* leads to final emancipation which is the goal to be attained
3. *Brahman* can be known through the scriptures and experience (anubhava) and not through mere reasoning.

*Brahman* is defined as Satyam Jnyanam Anantam (Existence, Knowledge, Infinite-source of joy) and again by the famous expression 'Neti, Neti,' meaning not this, not this.

*Brahman*, according to Shankara, is attributeless (*Nirguna*), immutable, pure Intelligence.

When the creative power of *Brahman* – Maya- comes into action the first product is *Brahman* plus Maya = *Ishvara*. This is the highest reading of *Nirguna Brahman*. *Ishvara* can wield Maya and hence the *Jiva* can appeal to *Ishvara* in times of distress. This concept holds true even in *Vedanta*.

*Vedanta* further says sarvam khalu idam Brahma- all is *Brahman*! All is not, *Brahman* alone is!

To understand the concept of *Brahman* at least intellectually one needs to study the six schools of philosophy. Suffice it to say here:

*Samkhya* believes in duality- Prakriti being the material cause of the Universe and *Purusha* of Consciousness. This school was enunciated by Kapila Muni and is quoted in the *Bhagwad Gita* which endorses it partially only. Badarayana the author of *Brahma sutras* refutes *Samkhya* along with the other schools and establishes the underlying unity of Consciousness -*Brahman*, and the Universe.

Badarayana, author of the *Brahma sutras* was familiar with Mayavad- that states this Universe is nothing but *Brahman*, it only appears different due to the power of Maya – which covers It with a veil of ignorance or casts a spell of illusion over the substratum which then appears mutable and destructible like the Universe and world we

experience. The world is a Vivarta (apparent transformation) through Maya of the *Nirguna Brahman*. The *Nirguna Brahman* in reality is Satyam, Jnyanam Anantam. Everything in this world has five factors in its make up viz. Asti, Bhaati, Priya, Naama, Rupa. The former three have *Brahman* for its cause the corresponding three factors are Existence, Intelligence, Bliss and the last two Naam (name) and Rupa (form) consist of Maya and are unreal. This indicates that Name (naam) and Form (rupa) are the Vivarta resulting from the power of Maya. Thus, *Brahman* – the One appears as many. These myriad forms and names have Asti(existence) Bhati(intelligence) and Priya(bliss) in common with *Brahman*.

A few shlokas from the *Bhagwad Gita* which tally and indicate what *Brahman* is follow:

अविभक्तं च भूतेषु विभक्तमिव च स्थितम् ।

भूतभर्तृ च तज्ज्ञेयं ग्रसिष्णु प्रभविष्णु च ॥ 17 ॥ Ch.13

He is indivisible, yet He appears to be divided amongst living beings.

Know the Supreme Entity to be the Sustainer, Annihilator, and  
Creator of all beings.

In Ch 12 Shri Krishna explains that *Brahman* has a twofold nature, the *Nirguna* which is Its real nature and the *Saguna- Ishvara* which is the creation of Maya. In *shloka* 1 Arjuna asks by which pathway is it easier to attain the Truth Shri Krishna answers that those devoted to the *Saguna* aspect are better versed in yoga, as devotion to *Ishvara* is easier for the embodied *Jiva* and therefore best suited to Arjuna and the generality of mankind.

In chapter 6 Shri Krishna says the true yogi uniting his Consciousness with God sees all living beings in Me and Me in all living beings. There

is thus no difference between *Ishvara* and *Jiva* in essence. *Tat Tvam Asi-* That Thou Art.

### ***Jiva***

The nature of *Jiva* as defined by all commentators, except Shankar, is that the *Jiva* is atomic, an agent, and a part of the Lord. Shankara on the other hand says none of these are the real nature of *Jiva*, it's nature as a sansarin(transmigrating entity) is unreal, and that in reality it is all- pervasive and identical with *Brahman*. It is not *Brahman* who transmigrates (it is the *sukshma sharira* which does) as the very nature or Swarupa of *Jiva* is *Brahman*.

BG *Shloka* 8, Chapter 15

शरीरं यदवाप्नोति यच्चाप्युत्क्रामतीश्वरः ।  
गृहीत्वैतानि संयाति वायुर्गन्धानिवाशयात् ॥ ८॥

*As the air carries fragrance from place to place, so does the embodied soul (Jiva) carry the mind and senses with it, when it leaves an old body and enters a new one.*

The *sukshma sharira* transmigrates.

The analogy given is 'if we move a glass of water from one place to another, what moves? The glass of course does, but does the air or the space in it move? How can that which is all pervasive and infinite move from one to other life? The glass in this analogy is the *sukshma sharira*(subtle body.)

So, *Jiva* is *Brahman* when covered by *Avidya*, (Ignorance) *Maya* so called when in the context of *Jiva*.

*Avidya*- Ignorance shrouds/veils *Brahman* in the following two ways:

### **Aavaran (veil)**

Via the upadhi (limiting adjuncts) of the

1. The Panch *koshas* – five sheaths and
2. The three shariras- bodies.

*Koshas*:

- *Annamaya*, sheath made of food outermost
- *Pranamaya* -vital force-air circulation
- *Manomaya*- the mind with emotions and vacillations
- *Vijnanamaya*- the intellect, decision making determining aspect of mind
- *Anandamaya*- the bliss sheath of total ignorance innermost core

-

These are considered the sheaths of which our composite whole is made.

- The Sthool *sharira* or gross body is made of the *Annamaya kosha*, the food body.
- The Sukshma *sharira* is made of the *Pranamaya* (breath, vital force), *Manomaya* (mind field) and *Vijnanamaya* (Intuitive field) and the
- Karana *Sharira* is made of the *Anandamaya kosha*.

Swami Rama explains in his classic diagram that BREATH is the link between the mind and body and therefore although it is difficult to control the mind which is like a restless, drunk monkey bitten by a scorpion, it can be tamed through the power of breath.

The **Vikshepa** faculty distorts what we experience – it is not what is – it is what our brain concocts and projects (like a snake on the rope).

Under the delusion of being a separate entity from the rest of the world due to *Avidya* the *Jiva* is susceptible to desire- *kaam* to gratify which he undertakes action- *Karma* which binds him further to more gratification as he gets hooked when he finds pleasure as the fruit of some of his actions. So, a vicious loop forms -*Avidya*- leading to *Kaam* leading to *Karma* leading to more ignorance *Avidya* and on and on the rolls from one lifetime to another in search of happiness that is his own true nature.

Shri Krishna explains in the *Bhagwad Gita* through the following verses:

Ch 13 shlokas 29-34 Describe the real nature of the soul as identical with *Brahman*. But the soul in its state of bondage being deluded considers itself an agent, and experiencer, atomic and a part of the Lord.

The *Jiva* is all-pervading and identical with *Brahman*, though individualised by its Upadhis the Panch *koshas* and the 3 shariras, it regards itself atomic, as an agent, and as apart from the Lord.

The Knowers of *Nirguna Brahman* attain It (*Brahman*) directly and have not to go by “the path of the gods” Knowers of the *Saguna Brahman* go to Brahmaloka from where they do not return. Knowledge is the only means of liberation.

### ***Maya***

Illusion works impenetrable  
Weaving webs innumerable.

Her gay pictures never fail,  
Crowd each other, veil on veil;  
Charmer who will be believed  
By man who thirsts to be deceived.

**R. W. Emerson.**

In Drig Drushya Viveka *Sankara* explains in detail this concept of Maya:

It's like taking a step out off the cliff. Explanation of *Tat* is like that. Shakti dvyam Mayahah- Mayaa has two powers. What Maya is - is horribly misunderstood. One of the things Shankaracharya is renowned for is his clarity of what Maya is - It is an explanation. Maya is not a thing; it is an explanation for something that cannot be understood otherwise.

The ancient Rishis said: Satyam Jnayanm Anantam Brahma- limitless, source of existence and consciousness. How does that one and only one *Brahman* appear as such a diverse Universe? How did creation arise from this nondual *Nirguna Brahman*? Metaphor which we can relate to is that we have the power to create a snake in the rope in a dim lit dark alley complete with markings, the shade etc. of the snake can be seen- so we really do experience a snake. Who created the snake? How? That is the meaning of the word Maya – it is a technical term which cannot be translated as illusion. It is indeed a mysterious mechanism. So how did *Brahman* create this manifold universe? The experience of the snake is undoubtably real. The experience does not change until light is brought in and only a piece of rope is seen and if we then ask how did the snake become a created experience? Can we explain?

In order for us to experience the snake- two powers (shakti dvayam) were required - the first is one has not to see the rope- the rope was obscured (*aavarana*, or aavrutti-veil) by darkness so the snake got



created but if it was totally dark it would not have been seen. So, the second aspect of Aavrutti is, it is not total. Why do we project a snake? we do so from the fear in the mind.

Projection is *Vikshep* which is the second power Both factors are necessary in the creation of the snake. These are the two kinds of Shakti- shakti dvayam two powers- which belong to *Avidya*. *Aavarana* and *Vikshep*.

*Vikshep* jagat srujet – creates the world in our own experience., we project onto the world through likes and dislikes, opinions and judgements and many conditioning factors, we never see what Really is there. This is the power of creation by *Avidya* (ignorance of our true nature).

Not only this world but your own individuality is projected by this *Vikshep* shakti of *Avidya*. This is the ignorance we all experience- this in reference of the individual- Vyashti (Microcosm). So *Avidya* of Vyashti has these two powers-Aavarana(veil) and *Vikshep*(distortion-projection).

But what about the whole? Samashti (Macrocosm)? From this standpoint it is called Maya which has both these powers – *Brahman* associated with Maya is capable of creating the Universe of names and forms. Shaktidvayamhi Mayaaha *Vikshep* and Avrutti(veiling) shakti. That power of projection which creates the universe till the end-Brahmanda- antam – upto linga aadi i.e.our own subtle body. From the perspective of Samashti the Reality that is *Brahman* is obscured by Maya by the Aavarann shakti and due to the *Vikshep* shakti we see myriad things when there is only One reality. For *Brahman* cannot be deluded by superimposition of appearance – vitarka- as the power of Maya is His own creative power here he is known as *Ishvara* -the Lord of all.

These (13/14) verses of Drig Drushya Vivake show the power of *Avidya*- at both the Vyashti (microcosm) and Samashti (macrocosm) level. The goal however, is Knowledge, not just knowing about Ignorance.

Srushtihi – nama- that which we call creation is a projection of *Brahman* through the power of Maya.

The Rishis have said – Sarvam Khalu idam Brahm- all this indeed is *Brahman*. That *Brahman* is the source for all that is intelligence as well as things. Vastu- is the reality due to which all things come into being- i.e. *Satchidanand* rupini – all that exists is the underlying reality. What we perceive is naam rupa prasarana- the form and name expansion. To resolve this we have the *Vikshep* shakti upon the Vastu- meaning due to the *Vikshep* shakti on the Vastu just like on the ocean are projected phen – bubbles. The underlying Reality is missed as we see the waves, bubbles etc. and fail to recognize water. Why do we fail to recognize- due to Aavarana- veil. Satyam Jnyanam Anantam *Brahman* is here and now but hidden due to these two powers Aavarana, and due to *Vikshep* we project the naam rupa. Ignorance affects our relationship with Samashti (Universe) and with our own true nature.

To try to understand Maya in another simple manner one has to reconsider the dream analogy which is very useful for the following:

That like in the dream the material cause – i.e. upaadaan kaaran- is only one's own consciousness, a modification of the mind and we can create an entire universe- thus a material cause need not be postulated, it is there. And the intelligence (nimitta) cause(kaarana) is the power of our mind to create similarly *Brahman* is both the (efficient and material cause)Nimitta and Upaadana kaarana of the Universe. *Brahman* goes nowhere to buy materials to make stars and the rest and requires no architect to plan it.

A dream is mere appearance on the substratum of consciousness even as this manifest universe is on the substratum of *Brahman*. The dream proceeds according to certain impressions we have in our waking life although it can become quite weird – still the origin is in the experiences of the waking world. Similarly, this world moves according to certain laws – the fundamental one being the Law of *Karma* and all other physical laws we know.

If we apply this analogy to manifestation- we the characters in this dream are seeking the One who is having the dream, and maybe we attend a lecture on the *Bhagwad Gita* and understand that it is the power of the Lord- i.e. the Creative Capacity of the Lord- this is called Maya (Kriya Shakti). To know the One who is having the dream one would naturally have to wake up from it!

How does one wake up from any dream?

- a) if the dream becomes a nightmare, one automatically gets jolted into wakefulness.
- b) if someone shakes you and wakes you up.
- c) rarely when one is having a semi-lucid dream one wonders is this real.

So, to wake up from sansar one needs

- a) to be hit by some storm- financial, emotional, medical!
- b) if some great Guru shakes you and wakes you- it might work but in case you are in a stupor it might not,
- c) if you are already partially awake!

Shri Krishna in Ch. 15 *shloka* 3 tells us that with the sword of dispassion this tree of ignorance can be axed at the root.

Scientists are looking for the unified theory which will explain the Universe in its diversity- this is presently the string theory or in *Bhagwad Gita* terms the *Gunas*!

In discourse 7 Shri Krishna says “He loves the Jnani the most why? Is it because Shri Krishna is partial? No, because the jnani in this dream knows that he is not separate from the Dreamer and the fact that no one is other than Him! For the Jnani is yuktatma sthita- established in the union with the Lord, due to previous samskaras from many past lives.

“This Universe is the wreckage of the infinite, on the shores of space, time and causation,” says Swami Vivekanand. He was once very pleased with a disciple Manmatha by name and asked him to ask any doubt he may have. Promptly Manmatha asked, “What is *Maya*?” Swami Vivekanand said, “Ask me something else.” But of course, Manmatha persisted and suddenly found the entire room like a whirl of atoms spinning at a dizzying speed including Swami Vivekanand whose form was vague and his own body too. He exclaimed “Swami you too! Are an illusion?” and as he said that he came back to so called normality. Then Swami Vivekanand said, “and this is *Maya*.”

Shri Ram Krishna gave the example of a serpent who has the most vicious poison in the mouth which kills but does nothing to the snake! Lord wields the power of *Maya* which does not touch Him. The deluded mind- is like muddy water where the self is not reflected. The hyacinth covers the pond, and *Maya* similarly covers the mind, when hyacinth is separated water is visible, this is what happens in satsang and as soon as satsang is over, the hyacinth of delusion dances back!

In the past, debates used to be conducted on these topics in a very interesting manner, without them turning into arguments, purely for the sake of knowledge. The objection to any theory is called *Purva*

paksha- prima facie what the tenet says, and then the one explaining his point of view restates the objection confirming whether the objection was understood correctly or not. Once this was done, he proceeded to counterattack.

Ramanuja is a dualist and has tried to shred Mayavad with the following objections. In any debate the point of contention is restated by the opponent in an effort to clarify that he had understood the proponent, this is called -mahaapurva paksha, Ramanuja – gives a fair statement of what advaita is. He shreds it on the basis of Maya.

Objections: saptavidhan anupatti- anupatti is inconsistency of seven types:

1. Aashraya- what is the locus of Maya is it in *Brahman*, is it in Jeeva? Because *Brahman* alone is present as *Jiva*.
2. Svarup anupatti- what is its nature?
3. Sadasad- logical inconsistency – it is either true or false it cannot be both – so anir vachaniya does not stand. Law of the excluded middle.
4. Tirodhan – it vanishes when *Brahman* is realised and if it is only an appearance and only *Brahman* exists- How can *Brahman* vanish? Impossible can the sun disappear with closing the eyes.
5. What is Bhaava arupatva – it is a positive something- ignorance is simply the absence of knowledge what is this positive not knowing?
6. Nivartaka- what will remove this ignorance? Knowledge of *Nirguna* Brahma how can such knowledge remove this

ignorance? How can *Brahman* have no characteristics? Anything, you know, must have characteristics. God has many is the anant kalyanna gunaganna.(One who has limitless auspicious characteristics)

7. Nivrutti – Nirupa (one without form) anupatti (inconsistency)? What will remove this ajnyan (ignorance)- aham Brahmasmi? then there is no possibility of getting over such a Maya for it has no form!

Swami Vivekanand answers these contradictions and explains what Maya is in one of his lectures where he has said, “this is Maya 17 times!” Swami Sarvapriyanand summarises Swami Vivekanand’s lecture. Some excerpts:

- There is the tremendous fact of death saints die, and sinners die, kings die, and paupers die, learned people die and the ignorant die, and yet there is this tremendous clinging to life- and this is Mayaa
- Limits of knowledge, unknowability. The more we know our senses drag us outwards and pleasure deceives us leaving us hankering, until crippled we are swept away by death and this is Maya
- With every breath I feel I have free will and as soon as we go out to do something we find we cannot achieve it and this is Maya
- The more we chase utopias we just seem to end up redistributing misery and this is Maya.
- As we increase the power of enjoyment we are increasing the power of suffering in geometric proportion. And this is Maya. It has been said by Somerset Maugham that if you pursue pleasure single-mindedly, you will end up with no pleasure at all.

- The drama of life – a mother loves her child irresistibly irrespective of his behaviour because she cannot help herself – and that is Maya.
- When time passes and one visits his school after many decades in the same place other children are studying and are growing up and playing – and suddenly one realises what has happened – and this is Maya. Our very being is these contradictions, series of paradoxes and he says this is Maya.

It is simply a statement of fact it is not an explanation.

Name and form and thing (Naama/ Rupa/ Vastu) are a limitation and hence that limitation is Maya. The absolute can never be limited. The answer is not in the flow of change but against the current, infinity is not to be found here, in *samsara*. Nivrutti withdrawing therefrom that is renunciation is the basis of peace. That is *Vedanta*. The moment we get form and name we seek to transcend it – get more, look for meaning, look within for answers- art, science and spirituality all are a quest for freedom – Neti Neti, therefore mere agnosticism will not satisfy.

*Brahman* - is satyam jnanam anantam *Brahman* is the reality because of which everything exists. The universe that is filled with such unlimited creativity – is represented as Maya. It is the power of darkness that can make a rope seem a deadly snake.

Exactly how this happens is a mystery- that is anirvachanam (cannot be explained).

A glimpse of the Naasadiya Suktam Rig Veda is given at the end in an attempt to understand Maya (that is the greatest Maya if ever there be one), and the beginning of creation.

To my understanding Maya is ignorance represented as darkness which veils Knowledge or Truth. It is said that the veil is woven with the strands of the *Gunas- Satva, Rajas, and Tamas*. *Tamas* creates the delusion of separateness; *Rajas* takes you for a ride to the razzle-dazzle of sense gratification. Only *Satva* can still your mind and keep you alert. It is not what the eye sees that is perceived, it is what the mind sees that is perceived and so if the mind is still, calm and clear it may be possible to lift the veil of Maya. In Radiology it is said, the eye does not see what the mind does not know.

If one tries to understand this through the intellect it will not be possible for the intellect- part of the antah karan is the very ignorance that covers the Truth. Yet it is knowledge of Truth which removes ignorance Maya – such knowledge is termed Vidya Maya and the knowledge about *samsara* is *Avidya* Maya. Vidya Maya includes *Bhakti* and all other yogas. The veil or ignorance that covers is not total or else it would be more powerful than Truth and it would never be possible to get even a glimpse let alone drop the veil. It cannot be total darkness or ignorance for then nothing at all would be visible. Maya is superimposed (Aadhyas) on *Brahman* – Sarvam Jnanam anantam Brahma. Prakruti and Maya to an extent could be used interchangeably because when Prakruti gets associated with *Purusha* creation manifests, the first evolute of Prakruti then is Mahat-Universal intelligence from which is born ahankara – the cause of identification with the body, mind and intellect. Thus, Prakruti or Maya, the creative power or kriya shakti of *Brahman* creates this grand illusion from *Brahman* itself like the spider weaving a web (Mundakopanishad) from itself. Once the Universe (web) – *Brahman's* website is created the beings in it identify with the website and not the Designer! Wonder, might we not just be the AI of *Brahman* and therefore have no inherent power of any kind?



The underlying substratum is *Brahman* can only be indicated as Saakshi meaning Witness. Truth cannot be spoken of directly as it is beyond concepts, it can only be indicated by *tatashta lakshan*, e.g. this is the bank of the river indicating the river, although the bank cannot describe the river it does indicate the river.

Now, we know through quantum physics there can be no observation without an observer and also the observer has the power to modify the observation! If for a moment we suppose that *Brahman* is the observer and the Universe is the observation created by It through the power of *Maya*, then all that is seen is a projection of *Brahman*. Just like when we dream, we can see mountains, rivers and other humans, sometimes angels and devils out of our own mind-stuff- exactly similarly *Brahman* has manifested as the Universe. The difference being our dreams last but a few moments and are not a shared reality with others, while the universe lasts an eternity and is shared by all other beings on earth. This is so because there is only One Dreamer – *Brahman* underlying all beings, besides *Brahman* is not limited by Time Space and Causality. In any case all analogies have their limitation, yet the key to understanding the Divine Leela (play) is given to us.

There can be no doubt that All Is *Brahman* alone. Advaita *Vedanta* (Shankara) explains the doctrine of *Maya* giving many examples like the mirage, the snake and the rope and the dream analogy given earlier. The theory is that the substratum is *Brahman* and all that is seen is *Maya* or transformative appearance. Once the Truth is realised suffering comes to an end. The appearance is so mesmerising that even Sage Narada, in the story given above, got deluded what of mere mortals like us. Into this fine tapestry of the Universe woven with the threads of the *Gunas* is the pattern of *Karma* which traps the beings- is there a way out of this? Why does one need a way out? For, we must admit there is suffering. What is the cause of suffering? These and other questions such as why we are here, what is our role in the

cosmos? These questions arise in any thinking and curious mind. To discover the Truth however, mere curiosity will not suffice. Only when we get desperate, we discover.

It seems like a cruel game of hide and seek to play- the Lord is hiding from view, and he has covered you with this veil of ignorance such that you cannot look beyond and to top it all, He hides within you! Anyway, who am I to judge the cruelty of the game the divinity lies within me too! The divine plays with the divine. Apparent separation and factual unison lead to an almost impossible paradox to unravel. But Sri Krishna assures us there is a way out and that is hold steadfastly to the feet of the Lord and He will guide you through. Kabir has said in one of his dohas (couplets) that the sansar is like the two grinding stones of a grain hand mill and our condition is like the grain that is being ground in between. His Guru Nipatniranjan guided him saying “do not be afraid hold fast to the handle of knowledge of this mill, as I do, and do not wander away from the same, but turn inward to the centre and you are sure to be saved” grasp the feet of the Lord and you will escape the crushing.

Experience noted one morning:

It could be seen that the one “i” called “i” was only a conglomerate of memory, conditionings, desires and opinions which again fit into the recording system we know as memory- it surfaces and poses itself as “i” and of course every new experience, feeling, thought is added to this conglomerate which changes every moment. Paradoxically it appears steady for all that has gone through this biocomputer is stored in this cloud awaiting easy access depending on the unique filing system. As the necessary memory comes forth it is presumed to be the self. This faculty is an absolute must for transacting in the world or else we’d be stranded, unable to pass through time or space and have no record of this dimension at all. The recording by some mysterious

power (MAYA) assumes the place of the true I and even when this body falls the cloud of memories and desires lingers on till it finds a suitable biocomputer to enter into and start playing the game all over again. All of this has the substrate of Brahma like for the mirage to appear the desert and sun are necessary or else the illusion cannot appear. Yet, the desert is not by itself the cause of the mirage and will exist even after the appearance disappears! What then is there to be afraid or sad about? Appearance and disappearance are the play of Maya I support it so that it may dance on Me and She deludes Me into mistaking the pseudo for the real. Breath-taking game only the Divine can play with Itself.

### **Moksha**

Shri Krishna has said in Ch. 7 *Shloka* 3

मनुष्याणां सहस्रेषु कश्चिद्यतति सिद्धये ।

यततामपि सिद्धानां कश्चिन्मां वेति तत्त्वतः ॥ ३ ॥

*Hardly one among thousands of men strives to realise Me; of those striving Yogis again, some rare one, devoting himself exclusively to Me, knows Me in reality.*

From this *shloka* one is left wondering why it is that humanity is so deluded, they do not even think there might be a way out of suffering. Often times it is a blow from Prakruti that jolts one into the pursuit of Knowledge.

The ways to *Moksha* – liberation are several, I believe as many pathways as humans.

However, some are highways and described in detail in the scriptures and eventually one arrives at the highway if one would like to reach the destination quickly. As this essay is not about means to liberation, the paths are only mentioned. One would like to note the *Sankara's*

point of view however, which states that only Jnyana (Knowledge) can remove ignorance (*Maya*) Karmayoga can never result in *Moksha* it can only lead to purification of mind. In the *Bhagwad Gita* the Lord begins with Jnyana and *Karma* and Yoga and finally expounds *Bhakti* yoga. In effect four.

Shri Krishna lays emphasis on *Bhakti* in the *Gita*, but nowhere does the Lord say that *Bhakti* is superior to Knowledge. On the other hand, we find Knowledge highly praised,

*Ch. 4 Shloka 37-38*

*“The fire of Knowledge burns all Karma to ashes. There exists nothing so purifying like Knowledge.”*

*Ch 7 shloka 17, 18*

*“Supremely dear is the wise man to Me. I regard him as my very Self.”  
All the four Paths are supremely instructive and give us a road map  
for attaining That by which nothing remains to be attained.*

Then once enlightened or awake does the illusion of this universe disappear? Or do the enlightened beings still experience this Universe as we do? Such questions are a natural corollary to the analogy given of a rope being perceived as the snake and once the TRUTH is known the snake vanishes! Like all analogies, this one too serves only to indicate the possibility. Only experience would reveal the entire truth. The way my understanding goes is that the fear of annihilation vanishes as we can see *Brahman* – the All Pervading! The treatise named *Atma Bodh* by *Sankara* explains the three levels of experience:

- Vyavarihika sat – is the reality of perception and behaviour at the level of this waking state.
- Pratibhasika sat- the reality perceived in the dream state- seems as much true as the waking at that time, story of Janak. \*

- Paramarthika sat -The ultimate reality known in the state of Samadhi which can be Nirvikalpa (no mind) Savikaalpa (Deity) with object and Sahaj – all the time identified with the Turiya state.

So, that clarifies that the Universe does not just disappear on enlightenment but that it ceases to frighten or create anxiety or sadness. Once the Paramarthika sat is known or realised the mystery of *Maya* is unravelled. *Maya* that has no beginning, but it does have an end!!

### **In summary:**

*Brahman* is simple - untouched, unchanging, infinite, without attributes, Pure Knowledge - Consciousness Its very nature is Satyam(existence) Jnanam(Knowledge) Anantam (Infinite) also called Sat Chid Ananda. (totally fulfilled)

*Jiva* is *Brahman* with *Avidya* – ignorance caused by *Maya* at the individual level through the upadhis (the three bodies – gross -sthool, subtle-sukshma and kaarana-causal as also the five sheaths or *koshas*) *Maya* the Creative power of *Brahman* which brings about an appearance of ignorance like a current in the ocean creates a wave (ocean and wave both only water). At the Cosmic, universal level it is called *Maya* and is under the control of *Ishvara* (*Brahman* plus *Maya*), at the individual level it is called *Avidya* and is not under the control of the *Jiva* who is subjected to *kaam*(desire) *karma*(action) and *Avidya*(ignorance). To ask why? Is an irrelevant question and is purely due to ignorance. *Maya* has no beginning but certainly has an end-once we see through the game and ignorance -*Avidya*, drops- only self-evident Knowledge/ Pure awareness/ *Brahman* remains.

*Moksha*- Liberation from suffering is attained by a very few. Knowledge- *Jnana* is the only eraser of ignorance- *Avidya*.

**Conclusion:** Maya is mysterious and paradoxical, anyone who tries to explain gets trapped. Only when this ignorance is axed with the sword of dispassion that Knowledge of one's true nature can reveal itself.

\*The story of Janaka: It so happened that on a hot afternoon King Janaka lay for rest in his chambers. His wife Sunayana was fanning him. He suddenly woke up in a sweat and started crying 'Is this true or is that true?' No one could make out what had happened to their Lord. He had had a dream where the enemy had battled hard and vanquished him. His life had been spared but he was banished and told to leave the country within 24 hours, as his was a huge land in spite of nearly running all day he just managed to tumble across the boundary in the late evening into a forest. Tired and hungry he looked for shelter and, in the distance, spotted a hut, bravely he walked over begging for food, a cross old lay came out and gave him some uncooked lentils asking him to cook it for himself, pointing to a fireplace he could light. With immense difficulty he managed to cook the lentil and was about to get it off the fireplace when a deer being chased by a wild animal stepped on it and overturned the dish In utter despair and exhausted he lamented loudly and that woke him up. He found himself in the royal bed with Sunayana fanning him, extremely anxious for his well-being. He was struck, he knew not what was real. For many an hour and day, he would not eat or sleep and kept repeating, "Is this true or is that true?' The ministers could do nothing and were distraught despairing for the well-being of their beloved king when through sheer good fortune the Sage Ashtavakra was passing through the capital, and they beseeched him to save their king. He came to the palace and neared the lamenting king, 'Is this true or is that true?' Ashtavakra quietly whispered, 'Neither was that true nor is this true!' Suddenly Knowledge dawned on King Janaka, and he became the disciple of Ashtavakra and that is another story.....and so is *Maya!*

**Nasidiya Sukta – Rig Veda**

***Om Nasad aasin no sad aasit tadaanim***

At the time, there was neither existence nor emptiness.

***Naasid rajo no vyomaa paro yat***

There was no world below nor space above

***Kim aavariyah kuha kasya sharman***

What was covered? Where?

For whom could there be happiness?

***Ambhah kim aasid gahana, gabhiram***

Was there only water, mysterious and deep?

***Na mrutyur aasid amritam na tarhi***

***Na raatrya ahna aasit praketah***

There was no sign of night or day. There was neither death nor immortality then.

***Aanid avaatam svadhyaa tad ekam***

Though there was no air the One breathed by the power of *Mayaa*.

***Tasmaad dhyaayannaparah kim canaasa***

Other than That nothing else existed.

***Tama aasit tamasaa gulham agre***

In the beginning was but darkness covered by darkness.

***Apraketam salilam sarvam aa idam***

All this was like unfathomable water

***Tucchyenaabvapihitam yad aasit***

That which was completely covered by darkness

***Tapasas tan mahinaajayataikam***

Emerged as the universe by the power of creation

***Kaams tad agre samavartaadhi***

First, desire arose

***Manaso retah prathamam yad aasit***

As the primordial seed for the minds of all.

***Sato bandhin asati niravindan***

To discover the link between the unmanifest worlds

***Hridi pratishyaa kavayo manisha***

The sages searched wisely within their hearts  
***Tirashcino vitato rashmir eshaam***  
 Everything quickly spread out the rays of light  
***Adah svid aasid upari svid aasit***  
 What could be below? What could be above?  
***Retodhaa aasan mahimaana aasan***  
 There were living beings and material elements  
***Svadhha avastaat prayatih parastaat***  
 Objects like food were below and the beings who consumed them  
 above  
***Ko adhaa veda ka iha pracocat***  
 Who really knows? Who here can explain it?  
***Kuta ajaataa kuta iyam visrishtih***  
 From what and by whom whom was this world?  
***Arvaag devaa asya visarjanenaa***  
 Even the gods came after the world's creation  
***Athaa ko vaida yata aababhuva***  
 Then who knows whence it came?  
***Iyam virishir yata aababhuva***  
 He from whom this creation arose  
***Yadi vaa dadhe yadi vaa na***  
 Knows whether or not He is its creator  
***Yo asyaadhyaksgag parama vyoman***  
 The supreme ruler of the world, all pervasive and all-knowing  
***Sa anga veda yadi vaa na veda***  
 He indeed knows, if not no one knows.



## Om

To know Om is to know Ishvar, is to know the secret of creation, is to know Oneself. It is a daunting task to put on paper even a fraction of its significance, but an attempt must be made in the quest of Truth. Om has many synonyms in the attempt to explain it.

- **Pranava** literally means the primeval sound, the very first sound.
- **Omkara** denoting the first source, connoting the act of creation. The Bible says, 'and first there was sound,' science has proven that the first energy released is sound, the Big Bang!
- **Udgitha** meaning the "song, chant," a word found in Samveda which is also used as a name of the syllable.
- **Akshara** literally means imperishable, immutable and also the "letter of alphabet" or syllable.
- **Ek-akshara** - Brahma – the one letter that denotes Brahman.

Om is extolled in the Vedas and the Upanishads:

The *Aiteriya* Brahmana of Rig Veda section 5.32 suggests that the three components of Om (a+u+m) correspond to the three stages of cosmic creation and when it is chanted, it celebrates the creative power of the Universe.

The *Chandogya* Upanishad, one of the oldest Upanishads calls the syllable Om as Udgitha. It asserts the significance of Om thus: the essence of the earth is water, the essence of water are the plants, the essence of plants is man, the essence of man is speech, the essence of speech is the Rig Veda, the essence of Rig Veda is Sama Veda and the essence of Sama Veda is Udgitha – Om. According to the text, Rig (Ṛg) represents speech (vāk), and Sāman (Sāma) represents breath (prāṇa)."; they are pairs and love each other and mate, to produce song - the highest song is Om. (Chandogya 1.1). It is the symbol of awe

and reverence, of threefold knowledge because the Adhvaryu invokes it, the Hota recites it and the Udgatr sings it. (these are the priests conducting a Yajna). Chandogya in its first two sections tells us that Om is that which inspires the good in each person and it further links Om to the Highest Self, the three forms of knowledge, Om is Brahman, and Om is all this observed world.

In the *Kathopanishad*, Nachiketa asks Yamaraj: ‘what is that which is beyond virtue and sin, beyond dharma and adharma?’ And Yamaraj answers in the briefest way “OM”. Ch. 1 Canto 2 mantra 15.

The *Mandukya* Upanishad is entirely on the Significance of Om. It should be taught by a competent teacher for the mysteries to be unravelled and Om the melody of the Universe to be heard.

*Bhagwad Gita* extols Om as the symbol of the indestructible impersonal Brahman.

Krishna to Arjuna in Bhagwad Gita

Ch 9. Shloka 17.

**पिताहमस्य जगतो माता धाता पितामहः ।**

**वेद्यं पवित्रमोङ्कार ऋक्साम यजुरेव च ॥ 17॥**

*Of this universe, I am the Father; I am also the Mother, the Sustainer, and the Grandsire. I am the purifier, the goal of knowledge, **the sacred syllable Om**. I am the Rig Veda, Sāma Veda, and the Yajur Veda.*

Ch.17 Shloka 24.

**तस्माद् ॐ इत्युदाहृत्य यज्ञदानतपःक्रियाः ।**

**प्रवर्तन्ते विधानोक्ताः सततं ब्रह्मवादिनाम् ॥ 24॥**

*Therefore, uttering Om, the acts of Yajna, dana, and tapas as enjoined in the scriptures are always begun by those who study the Brahman.*

The significance of Om is similarly highlighted in the above verse emphasises the importance of Om during prayers, charity, and meditative practices.

Ch.8 Shloka 13.

**ओमित्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन् ।**

**यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम् ॥ 13 ॥**

*At the moment of leaving this body if the aspirant can **chant Om** and dwelling on Me in My absolute aspect, he is sure to attain the supreme goal.*

Om iti ek aksharam Brahma - just one sound which is Om - the most sacred mantra of Vedas. It is the Nirguna as well as Saguna Brahma it is the path and the goal. Mandukya Upanishad - is dedicated to explaining it - only 12 shlokas in it.

A- cosmic waker (Vaishvanar)

U -the cosmic dreamer (Tejas)

M- Cosmic deep sleep (Pragnya) - the source where manifestation arises and merges.

The silence following is the Turiya avastha. Remembering Me through Om one who drops his Ego or his body (Prateek sadhana- Om) attains the Ultimate goal.

Every sound, mantra has a deity - devas and when we chant with devotion the deva reveals the Truth. Om signifies the Ultimate Truth and that is why it is central to all our practices. It is said that only a

monk should keep reciting Om as it leads to a sense of complete non-attachment – Vairagya and a householder may end up as a monk! The householder is given a suitable mantra by the Guru which may have the syllable Om in it, while not repeating Om alone.

Shri Krishna, throughout the Bhagwad Gita teaches us the significance of Om - Om to start anything, Om to end anything, even at the time of our passing!

Yoga Sutra of Patanjali 1.27 links Om to Yaga practice, as follows:

**तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः ॥२७॥**

His word is Om.

Thus, the importance of Om is highlighted from the ancient times and is a symbol of Brahman, the Universe and the perfected spiritual man.

### **Symbolism of Om**



The symbol Om is well recognised however the significance of it hardly known. It comprises of curves, crescent and a dot. Each aspect of the visual form of Om signifies a particular state of reality.

The large lower curve marks the normal waking state (*jagrat*) in this condition the mind identifies with the physical body and perceives the world through the senses. The one so identifying is here called Vaishvanara/ Vishva.

The upper curve indicates the unconscious state, or that of deep sleep (*sushupti*). This is a state of total unawareness, withdrawn from both the physical and mental activities. The one existent in this state is called Pragnya.

The middle curve denotes the dream state (*Swapna*). The dream state is where a person explores the subconscious which has stored within fears, desires, hopes and these manifest in an imaginary world. Here the identity is called Tejas.

The dot is a symbol of enlightenment (*turiya*). In this state, a person becomes harmonised with the Absolute, recognising that all of creation is the One Reality.

The crescent represents Maya, which separates the three curves from the dot. Maya is the ignorance which binds the individual soul.

The syllable Om is a composite of A – U – M. A is the first letter of the alphabet as also the first possible syllable that can be pronounced, M is the last possible consonant to be pronounced by the vocal apparatus. As can be seen A starts at the diaphragm and M is pronounced with the lips closed. So, it is like saying the A to Z is encompassed by this symbol. It also represents the following holy trinities:

- *The three states of consciousness*
- *The three deities Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.*
- *The three worlds – earth, atmosphere and ether.*
- *The three aspects of time – past, present and future.*

## **Practice of Omkara:**

Om encompasses all of creation, and its merciful energy can be attained by any who seek it, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or whichever faith they follow.

After taking in a deep breath, the chanting of Om (Aum) begins at the solar plexus chakra, near the diaphragm, where the “A” of the syllable is emphasized. As the sound progresses, “U” sustains the mantra through the heart, throat, and third eye chakras, until it reaches the crown. The sound dissolves at the crown chakra, at which point the mantra has developed into its last part, the “M.”

It's most beneficial to find a quiet place where you can focus without being disturbed. Keeping your spine straight, begin chanting, starting with the “A,” holding the “U” a little longer as it progresses through the chakras, and then ending on the “M,” as the exhale of your breath ends. Chanting in a strong but not loud voice for at least 15 minutes is generally ideal if you want to truly get something substantial out of your meditative practice.

Ultimately, regardless of technique, chanting Om is about connecting to the Divine. As long as your intention is sincere, everything else will fall into place.

In recent times it is claimed that NASA has recorded the sound of the Universe, and it is Om. This may sound like science fiction but in fact our Rishis had heard it in their state of Turiya, and it has been revealed to us so that we may attain the same state and transcend suffering due to ignorance.

***So, Om Om Om! It is the alpha and omega of creation. It is the symbol of daily existence - the three states of waking, dreaming and deep***

*sleep, it is also the gateway to the fourth, Turiya - just a bindu (dot). Turiya is not a state as are the other three it is the dimensionless point beyond time and space the NOW, which defies definition and can only be indicated.*

*In conclusion one can only gape in awe at the mastery of our ancient sages who have so clearly lit the pathway to liberation, through such intense inner exploration that to us seems so daunting, in our present-day life. The way out of Maya (ignorance) is Om.*

## Ishvara

Ishvara is praised by Pushpadanta thus in the following verse:

असितगिरिसमं स्यात् कज्जलं सिन्धुपात्रे  
सुरतरु-वर-शाखा लेखनी पत्रमुर्वी।  
लिखति यदि गृहीत्वा शारदा सर्वकालं  
तदपि तव गुणानामीश पारं न याति ॥३२॥

O Lord, if the black mountain be ink, the ocean the inkpot, the branch of the stout wish-fulfilling tree a pen, the earth the writing leaf, and if taking these the Goddess of Learning writes for eternity, even then the limit of Your virtues will not be reached. (32)

By Pushpadantta the Gandharva devotee of Shiva

Pushpadanta was a Gandharva (गंधर्व), a celestial musician. Along with the kinnar (nymphs), yaksha (archangels), apsara (celestial dancers) etc., gandharvas are beings which are said to live in the skies and in the atmosphere, in contact with the higher plane: that of the Gods. They are not necessarily spiritually realised, but are superior to humans.

Pushpadanta (literally, Flower-Teethed) was a divine musician of such standing, in the court of Lord Indra (King of the Gods). Pushpadanta was also a devotee of Lord Shiva and a lover of flowers.

Once he happened to see a beautiful garden adorned with charming flowers. It was King Chitraratha's royal garden, who was also a devotee of Lord Shiva. The King used to offer flowers from his palatial garden as a symbol of his devotion to Lord Shiva.



Pushpadanta was so awestruck by the beauty of the garden, that he could not control his emotions and picked up the flowers from the garden. Every day he tried to stop himself but failed and picked up the flowers. As a result, King Chitraratha was left with no flowers to complete his prayers to Lord Shiva.

The King did all he could to address the issue. But Pushpadanta had divine powers to be invisible and hence, the king could not find the culprit. Left with no ideas to solve this problem, the king spread bilva leaves or bilipatra (बिलीपत्र - AEGLE MARMELOS tree leaves, which are considered to be sacred offerings to Lord Shiva) in his garden.

Pushpadanta was unaware of this and unknowingly stepped on the bilva leaves. This infuriated Lord Shiva, and he punished Pushpadanta by taking away his divine powers.

He was shocked, but being a blessed devotee, he realized why that happened. In order to seek forgiveness and please Lord Shiva, Pushpadant composed a stotra (song of praise) in which he elaborated at length upon Shiva's greatness as a prayer. Lord Shiva, was pleased with his prayers, absolved him and returned his divine powers. This very prayer became well known as the 'Shiva Mahima Stotra'.

"Anyone who recites this hymn with a pure heart and devotion will be blessed with fame (कीर्ति), wealth (धन), long life (आयु) and many children (सुत) in this mortal world and will attain Kailas (Shiva's abode) after death. Benefit of singing Shiv mahima stotra is far greater than either the benefit of spiritual initiation (दीक्षा), charity (दान), austerity (तप), pilgrimage (तीर्थ), knowledge of the scriptures (ज्ञान), or the performance of ceremonial sacrifice (यज्ञ-याग)."

Here we can only try to understand the **concept of Ishvara**- in no way is the human intellect at all equipped to know Ishvara.

Let us begin with understanding the verb root first – Isha means capable of /owner/ chief/ Lord and Vara means beautiful/ choice wish/ blessing/ suitor- one who solicits a girl in marriage. The composite word, Ishvara literally means God / Supreme Being / Ruler of one's choice.

It is used as an epithet of Lord Shiva and attached to all temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, variously known Mahakaleshwar, Sadhakeshwar/ Sidheshwar/ Jageshwar/ Vishveshwar and so on. The Shaivites worship Shiva as the Lord of the Universe and to most Hindus Ishvara is synonymous with Shiva. Yet to Vaishnavites it is synonymous with Vishnu and in traditional Bhakti movements, Ishvara is one or more deities of an individual's preference (Ishta Devata).

In other sectarian movements such as Arya Samaj and Brahmoism, Ishvara takes the form of a monotheistic God. In Buddhism it is used as part of the compound 'Avalokiteshvara' The compassionate God who listens to the cries of the suffering in this world. In Shaktism – the feminine Ishvari is used.

Now to the concept in Advaita Vedanta where Reality is non-dual where would this concept of Ishvara fit? Samkhya does not admit of a God as per Kapila Muni the originator of the philosophy – this however, is a dualistic theory and admits of two realities Prakriti and Purusha. Later the Yoga system while accepting Samkhya for the most part introduced an ultimate deity, Ishvara. In pure Advaita also it is accepted as part of their theory of creation.

*Para Brahman (Pure Awareness) Paramarthika sat- absolute  
Existence*

|

*Ishvara*

*Parabrahmana with Maya the illusory power. The seed of creation.  
The Kaaran Sharira or Causal body of the Universe.*

|

*Hiranyagrabha*

*Ishvara with Cosmic Intelligence – Buddhi also arising from Maya  
Collective consciousness the zone of synchronicity and serendipity.  
Sukshma sharira or Subtle body of the Universe all potentiality  
including the 19 tatvas in a seedling form.*

|

*Virat*

*Hiranyagarbha plus Individual Buddhi/ Ahamkara / Physical realm of  
Universe- the Sthool or Gross body of the Universe.*

### **Who then is Ishvara?**

#### **Saguna Ishvara- Personal God with form for the embodied one.**

Janmâdyasya yatah (janma, aadi asya yatah) The one from whom  
birth etc. (continuation, dissolution) ensue.

Sa Ishvarah anirvachaniya-premasvarupah- The Lord is of the Nature  
of inexpressible (anirvachaniya) love.

#### **Nirguna Ishvara? -Satchidananda Brahman.**

So then are there two Gods? The Neti, Neti (not this, not this) of the  
advaitins - The Existence consciousness Bliss (infinite fulfilment)  
Satchidananda One and the Saguna Ishvara. No, it is the same – the  
Personal and the Impersonal are two sides of the same Reality.

To use a simile often used in Advaita – Brahman can be likened to clay  
from which myriad forms and names arise- the mouse of clay and

Ganesha of clay are, One but totally different in their name form and function. This brings to mind a story. There once was a brahmin who had a Ganesha and the vehicle of Shri Ganesh the mouse made of gold. As it happened the brahmin needed to sell this treasure to make ends meet. When he went to the jeweller, he was aghast when he was being paid per gram, the same for both the Ganesha and the mouse! He argued but surely Ganesha 's worth is much more! The Bhakta who has a body naturally relates to a God with form and name and the Ishvara then fulfils His role by granting the Bhakta his desires. Thus, Ishvara is the Highest Form(manifestation) of the Absolute Reality as given in the chart above.

**In the Brahma Sutras-** one of the Prasthantrayis (the three foundational scriptures of Sanatana Dharma the other two being the Upanishads and Bhagwad Gita), Vyaas had said that 'none will get the power of creating, ruling, and dissolve the Universe because that belongs to Ishvara alone.' This Sutra which appears in the fourth pada of the fourth chapter.

This aphorism is easily used to show how it is never possible for a Jiva (subordinate soul) to have the total power and independence of Ishvara- by purely Dualistic (Dvaitin) commentators such as Madhvacharya.

In explaining this aphorism Ramanujam (Visishta advaita – is ultimate unity of the total) says that there is a doubt whether all the powers of Ishvara are included in the liberated soul or simply that the glory of liberation consists only in the direct perception of Ishvara and not attaining the power of ruling the universe. This is proved from the scriptural text, "From whom all these things are born, by which all that are born live, unto whom they, departing, return — ask about it. That is Brahman.' If this quality of ruling the universe be a quality common even to the liberated, then this text would not apply as a definition of

Brahman defining Him through His rulership of the universe. Thus, Ramanujam was able to keep the distance clear between the personal soul and Personal God.

Shankara comments on the same sutra as follows: 'Those who by worshipping the qualified Brahman attain conjunction with the Supreme Ruler, while simultaneously preserving their own mind- is their glory limited or unlimited? Their glory should be unlimited because of the scriptural injunctions which say 'to them all the gods offer worship, their desires are fulfilled in all the worlds etc.'

To this once again the answer is they get all the powers i.e. siddhis such becoming Mahima (large) Garima (heavy) anima (tiny)etc. -8 such powers are described, but not that of ruling the Universe regards creation, sustenance and dissolution which belong only to Ishvara. This is so as they still have their own minds and whereas one may desire to create another may want the dissolution of the Universe and so on. The only way to avoid such a conflict is to subordinate their will to the will of Ishvara.

Therefore, the conclusion is that the wills of the liberated are dependent on the will of the Supreme Ruler- Ishvara.

Shankara:

Ref: The complete works of Swami Vivekanand simplified by author:

"We shall now try to understand what Acharya Shankara has to say on the point from the Advaita standpoint. We shall see how the Advaita system maintains all the hopes and aspirations of the dualist intact, and at the same time propounds its own solution of the problem in consonance with the high destiny of divine humanity. Those who aspire to retain their individual mind even after liberation and to remain distinct will have ample opportunity of realising their

aspirations and enjoying the blessing of the qualified Brahman. These are they who have been spoken of in the *Bhâgavata Purâna* thus: "O king, such are the glorious qualities of the Lord that the sages whose only pleasure is in the Self, and from whom all fetters have fallen off, even they love the Omnipresent with the love that is for love's sake." These are they who are spoken of by the Sâmkhyas as getting merged in nature in this cycle, so that, after attaining perfection, they may come out in the next as lords of world-systems. But none of these ever becomes equal to Ishvara.

Those who attain to the advaita state where there is neither creation, nor created, nor creator, where there is neither knower, nor knowable, nor knowledge, where there is neither *I*, nor *thou*, nor *he*, where there is neither subject, nor object, nor relation, "there, who is seen by whom?" — such persons have gone beyond everything to "where words cannot go nor mind", gone to that which the Shrutis declare as "Not this, not this." But for those who cannot, or will not reach this state, there will inevitably remain the triune vision of the one undifferentiated Brahman as nature, soul, and the interpenetrating sustainer of both — Ishvara.

So, when Prahlâda forgot himself, he found neither the universe nor its cause; all was to him one Infinite, undifferentiated by name and form; but as soon as he remembered that he was Prahlada, there was the universe before him and with it the Lord of the universe — "the Repository of an infinite number of blessed qualities". So it was with the blessed Gopis. So long as they had lost sense of their own personal identity and individuality, they were all Krishnas, and when they began again to think of Him as the One to be worshipped, then they were Gopis again, and immediately

तासामाविरभूच्छौरिः स्मयमानमुखाम्बुजः।

पीताम्बरधरः स्त्रग्वी साक्षान्मन्मथमन्मथः॥

*(Bhagavata) — "Unto them appeared Krishna with a smile on His lotus face, clad in yellow robes and having garlands on, the embodied conqueror (in beauty) of the god of love."*

Bhakti, then, can be directed towards Brahman, only in His personal aspect. क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषामव्यक्तासक्तचेतसाम् — "The way is more difficult for those whose mind is attached to the Absolute!" Bhakti has to float smoothly with the current of our nature. True it is that we cannot have; any idea of the Brahman, which is not anthropomorphic, but is it not equally true of everything we know? The greatest psychologist the world has ever known, *Bhagavan Kapila, demonstrated ages ago that human consciousness is one of the elements in the make-up of all the objects of our perception and conception, internal as well as external. Beginning with our bodies and going up to Ishvara, we may see that every object of our perception is this consciousness plus something else, whatever that may be; and this unavoidable mixture is what we ordinarily think of as reality. Indeed, it is, and ever will be, all of the reality that is possible for the human mind to know.* Therefore, to say that Ishvara is unreal, because He is anthropomorphic, is sheer nonsense. It sounds very much like the occidentals squabble on idealism and realism, which fearful-looking quarrel has for its foundation a mere play on the word "real". The idea of Ishvara covers all the ground ever denoted and connoted by the word real, and Ishvara is as real as anything else in the universe; and after all, the word real means nothing more than what has now been pointed out. Such is our philosophical conception of Ishvara." Ref: The complete works of Swami Vivekanand simplified by author.

### **To further explain the Advaita's stand on Ishvara:**

Acharya Shankara in **Atma Bodh** explains there are three levels of existence or Sat:

Paramarthika sat- The Absolute Brahman without attributes, formless, pure awareness, immutable, imperishable the substratum of all that is manifest.

Pratibhasika sat- the reality in our dreams which is as real when we witness the dream as any other.

Vyavaharika sat- the relative reality which is also eternal (BG. Discourse 15 shloka1) but is constantly changing- never the same- this manifest universe. At this level of reality Ishvara is the Supreme Being with all the characteristics described earlier which we as individuals can never attain. Liberation at this level simply means the perception of this Saguna Brahman and thereby realising sansar as His divine Leela. Here we have a reconciliation of the Advaita standpoint as well as the dualist one, however, the dualist considers this as the only standpoint. For the dualist the Saguna Brahman is all there is and we as atmans are His subordinates, also enjoying the magnificence of creation. The advaitin also sees two at the level of the Vyavaharika sat but says this manifestation and me myself as well are only an appearance due to the power of Maya which is an inherent one in Brahman.

There are many examples of realised beings of the school of Advaita who worshipped the Saguna Brahman in their daily life such as Ramana Maharshi, Nisargadatta Maharaj did Aarti daily, even Ramakrishna who was an exemplary devotee of Ma Kaali was an advaitin at heart- he could see no difference between Her and him and is known to have been putting flowers on his own head while



worshipping the Deity! Swami Vivekanand says of himself that he is an advaitin on the outside and a bhakta on the inside whereas the opposite is true of Shri Ramakrishna.

Why even Acharya Shankara the greatest of the Advaita Vedantins one has ever known has composed the most beautiful verses on Govinda – Bhaja Govindam, on Ma Ganga and Shiva. He has said Brahma satyam jagat mithya- meaning the universe is an appearance on the truth which is Brahman- nowhere should it be misconstrued as non-existent. There are many stories in the Puranas of how Shiva wanted to participate in Shri Krishna's raas Leela. What is there to stop the Brahman from revelling in His own creation.

Note from Swami Sarvapriyanand on the question how can we worship a God if we and God are one?

Ishwara in Vedanta - Brahman is real from the absolute point of view, but if I worship Ishvara, I am doing it at the practical level, vyavaharika level- Brahman is at a paramarthika level and so worshipping Him at the practical level is in order. Even if you are a committed non-dualist- do you not eat, walk, talk, exercise-? you are acting at the level of the relative and therefore reality of Non duality does not contradict the reality of the experience of the relative like the sky is really colourless but it is blue in appearance. Non duality is reality, but appearance is dual and so at the level of duality Ishwara is real. The difference is philosophical not real in the dualism but the non-dualist worships Ishvara as an appearance – form and name – while knowing all the time that the two are one. It is not harmful to feel this way; it is not harmful and in fact helpful. Yet if one can go directly to Brahman it is rare, to by-pass Ishvara is difficult. The appearance of duality can coexist with appearance- that is what Brahma satya jagat mithya means. Our mistake is that we stop at the duality, it is real only at the vyavaharika level.

Pandit used to come to a nondualist and debate with him all the time. One day nondualist told him – wo to gaiya bhi janti hai ki dvait hai kuch naya batao!(even the cow knows there are two say something new) Another Pandit came to the same nondualist and said he agreed that Nirguna is satya. Now the nondualist shot back- aur Saguna kya tera chacha hai? (what then is Saguna your paternal uncle?) Look at the enlightened beings.

Ramana- saw no contradiction- His devotion to Arunachala was unparalleled – Madhur bhava.

Bodhaat praag dvaitam mohaaya praapte manishayaa bhaktiartham kalpam dvaitamadvaitaadapi Sundaram. Before enlightenment duality traps you into delusion, after enlightenment duality imagined for the sake of love- bhakti, is more beautiful than nonduality! Bhakti is now an expression of enlightenment!

### **Bhagwad Gita**

Ishwara is mentioned in the following discourses:

Discourse 15 shloka 15, 17

सर्वस्य चाहं हृदि सन्निविष्टो

मत्तः स्मृतिर्ज्ञानमपोहनं च ।

वेदैश्च सर्वैरहमेव वेद्यो

वेदान्तकृद्वेदविदेव चाहम् || 15||

*It is I who remain seated in the heart of all creatures as the controller of all; and it is I who am the source of memory, knowledge and ratiocentive faculty. Again, I am the only object worth knowing through the Vedas; I alone am the origin of Vedanta and knower of the Vedas too.*

उत्तमः पुरुषस्त्वन्यः परमात्मेत्युदाहृतः ।

यो लोकत्रयमाविश्य बिभर्त्यव्यय ईश्वरः || 17||

*Yet, the Supreme Person is other than these, who, having encompassed all the three worlds, upholds and maintains all, and has been spoken of as the imperishable Lord and the Supreme spirit.*

Discourse 18 shloka 61

**ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति ।**

**भ्रामयन्सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारूढानि मायया ॥ 61 ॥**

*Take refuge in Him alone with all your being, Arjuna. By His mere Grace you will attain supreme peace and the eternal abode.*

In the Bhagwad Gita the Lord says Knowing Me, meditating on Me, surrendering to Me alone the devotee will attain liberation and merge in Me, in several places. Shankara considers this ‘Me’ to denote the Nirguna Brahman. However, Shankara also admits that intense devotion to the Saguna Brahman also leads to Samadhi.

In the Yoga sutras: Ishvarapranidhaan

**Yoga Sutra 1.23,**

**ईश्वरप्रणिधानाद्वा ॥ १.२३ ॥**

**ईश्वर-प्रणिधानात्, वा॥**

*Samadhi is attained by devotion to Ishwara.*

Here is Patanjali the Master of Yoga telling us surrender to Ishvara leads to Samadhi. Swami Veda in his magnum opus and also personally used to say- he loved this sutra as he found it pierced the veil of ignorance most easily. Vyasa in his commentary asks – Does Samadhi become imminent by this fivefold method (upaya) alone? Is there some other way (upaya) for its attainment or not? The practice of the presence of Ishvara (pranidhaan) is a specific form of devotion (bhakti-vishesha) Through this practice Ishvara is won over and turns towards the yogi, and when the yogi merely directs his thought (abhi-Dhyana) towards Him, Ishvara favours him with grace. Also, merely by the yogi’s turning his thought towards Ishvara, his attainment of Samadhi

as well as the fruits of Samadhi come closer, become imminent (aasannatara)

The fivefold upaya is given in sutra 20 shradhaa: faith, virya: strength, smriti: mindfulness, remembrance, samaadhi: meditation, prajnya: awakening of wisdom, samprajnya. These have to be practised as well and in the ultimate stage only Ishvara prannidhaan— practice of the presence of Ishvara will suffice.

If we can dedicate our lives to serving the God that dwells within all other beings, human and non-human alike, we will move beyond all feelings of separateness. If we can say without reservation, *“I give You myself: my body, my mind and my heart, to do with as You best see fit,”* then we will be freed from the stress, anxiety, self-doubt and negative karma that arises from our reliance upon our egos to determine which actions we take in our lives.

### **In the Upanishads:**

Taittiriya Upanishad teaches: यो वेद निहितं गुहायां परमे व्योमन्...He who realizes the One residing in the cave of the intellect attains liberation. Shankara has stated in several places that only because this chaitanyam is available in oneself that one is able to wrongly think oneself to be kartaa (doer), bhoktaa (experiencer), vijnaataa (knower), mantaa (thinker), shrotaa (listener), drashtaa (seer), etc. All these are possible only because this chaitanya saannidhyam (nearness of consciousness) is there in the individual. Such a possibility is not there in the inert objects. Surely this chatianya is not the Saguna Ishvara. For Shankara has strongly argued in the antaryaami case that it is the chaitanyam alone that is the same as the Jiva's true nature that is called the antaryaami, for Shankara reasons, there cannot be two chaitanyams in a jiva. Here Ishvara is taken as the shuddha chaitanyam and not the Saguna Brahma.

To summarise:

*What I have understood from Advaita Vedanta is there is only the one Reality of Pure Consciousness that is indestructible, immutable, beyond Time and space and all else is Maya- an appearance albeit very much existent. While this understanding still stands, I have now understood from my study on the concept of Ishvara, who I felt seemed to be only existent as an impersonal consciousness during my study of Advaita Vedanta, suddenly that same Brahman is lit up within as my very own Krishna and Shiva! My Lord is as real as the impersonal Brahman of Advaita and so while practising all that Patanjali teaches ultimately surrender to that personal Deity Ishvara pranidhaan, within my heart will surely lead me unto Him. This gladdened my heart, and I felt an immense reconciliation of the REALITY of both the Personal Deity and the Impersonal Pure Consciousness.*

Let us conclude with the story Swami Tadamanaanda tells us of the three schools of thought- Dvaita (Madhvacharya), Vishishtadvaita (Ramanuja) and Advaita (Shankaracharya). Dvaita as we know believes in Ishvara as the Supreme power and we humans as separate and in various relationships such as that of a servant, beloved, parent, child etc. Vishishtadvaita believes we are all a part of Ishvara, who is greater than the sum of all parts, Advaita postulates a single Reality. So three monks one of each school of thought went to the shore of the ocean and gazed at the ocean. The first monk said, "Indeed my Guru Madhvacharya is right – there are two- the wave and the ocean." The second monk said, "My Guru Ramanuja was a hundred percent right – see, each wave is but a part of the ocean, but the ocean is vaster than them all." The third monk was silent and after a while when asked what he thought replied "What Ocean? What wave? I see only water" needless to say he was a disciple of Shankaracharya.

## Freewill - do we have it?

This is a question which has troubled the very intelligent and the not so intelligent I think equally! The answer that has so far eluded us is now getting clearer both through scientific experiments and Vedantic explanations in simple straightforward language.

This is an attempt to synthesise both our scientific evidence with eternal Vedantic truths.

It is important to define free will before we get started. To have '**Free will**' conveys to us the meaning that we have **absolute freedom** to decide to do what we want to - think, speak or do.

This is obviously not the case. We are answerable to the rules of behaviour in the society in which we live! In fact if we could trace every thought, word and action we have, so called, "**freely**" performed we will find that it had a preceding cause or conditioning which makes us think, speak and act the way we do! It is a result of both internal and external circumstances and experiences that lead us to behave in any particular manner.

### ***Western philosophy***

Psychologist Daniel M. Wegner in his book "The illusion of free will" states that 'The experience of will is the way our minds portray their operations to us, not their actual operation. Because we have thoughts of what we will do, we can develop causal theories relating those thoughts to our actions on the basis of priority, consistency, and exclusivity. We come to think of these prior thoughts as intentions, and we develop the sense that the intentions have causal force even though they are actually just previews of what we may do', which means that the experience of freewill is merely an epiphenomenon (not related causally). This hypothesis cannot explain the experiences

of pain and pleasure which motivate actions for reward and evolutionary growth. This is termed “universal determinism” postulating total absence of free will. Yet the exact opposite view “indeterminism” also holds no water for it states that all we do is at random.

On the other hand, James William has said “the whole feeling of reality, the whole sting and excitement of our voluntary life, depends on our sense that in it things are *really being decided* from one moment to another, and that it is not the dull rattling off of a chain that was forged innumerable ages ago.” James himself was inclined to a spiritual solution and yet others have argued that nature itself in its fundamental functioning does **not** seem to be governed in a deterministic manner. Others again have argued that the almost infinite complexity of processes in the human brain offers us something as good as free will, even if it is not quite the real thing.

It seems as though opinions and rationales differ in the two views while both accept there is no total freedom. There is yet a third opinion where in modern psychologists have included experiential notions into psychology as functional elements (rather than as accompanying epiphenomena). This means abandoning (at least for the time being) the attempt to explain human behaviour exclusively in terms of ultimately physical and chemical processes. Dennet has suggested the presence of homunculi (little human beings inside human beings used to explain the latter’s behaviour) to explain how complex cognitive maps and goal-seeking are carried out. Deacon suggests everything (in Dennet’s suggestion) depends on mental processes being a cumulative effect of the interactions of tiny mindless robots which is **not** a tenable proposition.

From the above discussion a fair summary would be to say that Western philosophy/psychology has moved from totally deterministic

(every event is the result of a previous one and there is no free will) to one which is now inclined to include experiential notions in our psychology which play a functional role in decision making.

Let us examine some scientific data which seems to demonstrate the presence of a third element not just physical or psychological but something (consciousness) beyond, which is involved in any action. The nature of consciousness remains one of the main unsolved questions in neurobiology. Although recent advances suggest that sooner or later, we will be able to understand the neural mechanisms underlying awareness, it seems very difficult to understand how neural activity becomes a subjective experience, the so-called ***hard-problem of consciousness***. A term coined by David Chalmers.

#### **Scientific evidence:**

Dr. Quantum - Alan Wolfgang / Benjamin Libet- neuroscientist

- A certain number of neurones need to be recruited for any experience to be cognised
- It is found that the response to an event such as stepping over a hot coal of fire, when blindfolded, appears 300 milliseconds prior to the thought arising that “my foot has stepped on the burning coal of fire.”
- Which signifies that the Ego which says my foot, is an “after thought” and the response occurred earlier through Awareness that pervades all.
- Another experiment conducted in which lights flashed on a screen and the volunteer was asked to press a button if he did not like the light, without just deciding to press every time. It was found that the button was pressed prior to the light appearing on the screen which meant that the volunteer somehow had prior knowledge of the light he did not like



without being conscious of it. However, the ego took possession of the idea and said, "I don't like this light".

- Both the above experiments suggest the ego which says "I like, I do" appears after awareness has already made the decision.

Another experiment was when Libet asked the subject to signal the moment when he felt the urge to flick his wrist, while measuring the potentials in the brain. Libet found that the **unconscious** brain activity leading up to the **conscious** decision by the subject to flick their wrist began approximately half a second **before** the subject consciously felt that they had decided to move. Libet's findings suggest that decisions made by a subject are first being made on a subconscious level and only afterward being translated into a "conscious decision", and that the subject's belief that it occurred at the behest of their will was only due to their retrospective perspective of the event.

**Yet if the brain is anaesthetised no reaction can take place! Now the paradox is how can we block a response which depends on awareness and occurs prior to the neuronal recruitment which occurs later? Huh?**

It indicates that events are predetermined. That awareness somehow controls the events of the future. Magic? Totally liberating from ***the "I" that masquerades as the doer and the determining factor of events while it truly simply is a recording system absolutely essential for memory. It therefore revises all events to be able to regurgitate the info when questioned and gives us the impression of a separate self.*** It is in fact a necessary faculty of this body mind complex, meant for self-preservation and to transact in society. Awareness is not localised to the body.

## Quantum mechanics

By the double slit experiment, it has been shown that so called particles and waves are interchangeable depending on the presence of an observer. As soon as an observer is inserted into the experiment the waves behave as particles. That indicates Consciousness/Awareness is the determining factor that crystalises the events for physical perception.

### ***Indian Philosophy:***

The ***Vaisheshika system*** of philosophy has seriously tried to explain human behaviour, it conceives of a soul which has properties other than those of the senses as follows in a logical sequence: (described in Padaarthadharmasangrah)

- Buddhi - Knowledge
- Sukha - pleasure
- Dukha - pain
- Iccha - desire
- Dvesha – aversion
- Prayatna - effort
- Dharma – virtue
- Adharma - sin
- Sanskaras – subliminal impressions.

The order of this enumeration is not arbitrary. Knowledge of an object – usually perception – precedes the experience of pleasure or pain connected with that object; this in its turn gives rise to desire and aversion respectively; next in line follows effort that seeks to obtain or avoid that object; as a result, virtue and sin come into being, as well as subliminal impressions. The very presence of a desire means pleasure had been experienced on its gratification. The system holds therefore that the soul is eternal and takes birth again and again to satisfy

desires. For how would a newborn babe know how to latch on to the mother's breast if it had not experienced the same before? Thus, determinism seen in this way takes nothing away from the freedom to act according to one's feelings, because these form a part of its fundamental notions. ***Nyaya-Vaishesika psychology, then, is the kind of psychology in which the conflict between conscious will and determinism does not arise, because even if we think of it in deterministic terms, this does not deprive humans of the possibility to act in accordance with their will.***

**Charvaak** is an explicitly materialistic philosophy in which mental activity is merely an epiphenomenon and therefore plays no role in the activity of living beings.

The **Ajivikas** used the term Niyati to emphasise the fatalistic aspect of their doctrine. The existence of Niyati does not deny the role of deeds; quite on the contrary, it describes how karmic retribution works according to the adherents of this school of thought.

### ***Bhagwad Gita:***

Discourse 3 shloka 27 Shri Krishna tells Arjuna Prakruteh kriyamanani.... It is Prakruti that does, it is the deluded ego that says, "I do" "I do." In the discourse 3 shloka 28, Shri Krishna tells Arjuna the wise know that it is only the gunas (the strands with which Maya /Prakruti weaves the fabric of creation) that work among the gunas and thus the wise do not get entangled in them. There are three gunas (qualities, attributes, properties) which govern our senses and mind. Satva (clear, calm and serene), Rajas (action, go getter, ambitious) and Tamas (lethargy, ignorance, delusion). The permutation combination and proportion of these qualities determine our inclination towards good and spiritual pursuits. The only freedom we may have is to increase the proportion and tilt the balance towards Satva so that

sadhana becomes easier and the clarity of purpose is ensured. That is the extent of free will. Through karma yoga the Buddhi can be purified and through Jnana yoga ignorance removed and delusion destroyed - the same can also be attained by uninterrupted devotion and total surrender taking refuge in the Lord Himself.

In Discourse 4 Shloka 18 Shri Krishna explains the true nature of what inaction in action is, and action in inaction, which applies to the enlightened being, in the same chapter Shloka 34 / 35 Shri Krishna says, what can restraint do, the senses will do their designated function. Shri Krishna then goes on to say that it is only by getting over the pairs of opposites that one can reach the Truth- that is the extent of free we may be able to exercise if guided properly. This implies that we have the freedom to do so.

In Discourse 6 shloka 6 Shri Krishna says Man uplifts himself by his own effort and similarly degrades himself, he is his own friend and his own enemy.

Once again Shri Krishna in Discourse 18 Shloka 61 says, God resides in the hearts of all beings and through his power of Maya makes them revolve as though mounted on a machine by the momentum of their own karma. This indicates that the law of Karma is ordained by the Lord through His power of Maya and it operates according to the karma of each living being which the being is free to do, indicating that none can escape the law.

**In summary the Bhagwad Gita says even though this Universe which includes our body, mind and intellect BMI is made from the three gunas and five elements (Prithvi-earth, Aap- water, Teja- Fire, Vaayu-air, Aakaash- space) and these impose restrictions depending on their proportions, permutation and combination - yet man has the freedom to alter it and seek the TRUTH.**

**Advaita Vedanta** is that system of Hindu Philosophy very much in vogue today as it seems to satisfy the curiosity of the human intellect better than other branches which expect a certain degree of blind faith or acceptance. Advaita talks of three levels of Reality:

1. Pratibhasika sat: that is the projection of consciousness in the dream state.
2. Vyavaharika sat: the experience of reality in the waking consciousness – the empirical truth.
3. Paramarthika sat: the experience of the fourth or Turiya which is not a state of consciousness it is consciousness - Absolute Consciousness.

Most of us identify with the body/mind complex and this misleads us into the belief that the **only** truth is the Vyavaharika sat. We take this to be the unalterable ground of solid reality even though we also observe a continuous alteration in its form and character! In this context alone is the question of free will valid. Here Advaita Vedanta explains a particular term – **Samskara** the lurking craving (**Raag**) which forms when a desire has been previously gratified, this is equally applicable to aversion (**Dvesha**) – the desire to avoid what was previously found to be painful. A **samskara** when often indulged in, forms a habit pattern, a tendency to repeat. A **samskara** which lies dormant in the psyche of man raising its head when the appropriate situation presents itself. These are carried over many births through the medium of the (subtle body) **sukshma sharir** which is made of subtle elements. Now to revert to the question of free will - these **samskaras** tend to limit our choice and we are never quite free to choose with gay or abandon as we are too conditioned and fall into a rut or groove. Besides this another term is used, called **Vasanas - or desires** – these are of three types: *Deha*- Body- to preserve the body at all cost and to gratify desires through this body- one of the causes of rebirth, the second is *Loka* – Fame - the desire to be appreciated by others, in the world etc., and the third is *Shashtra Vasana* - to study, to

study scriptures etc. All these factors end up in our free will being increasingly restricted by them. This applies to the Empirical reality and can never be connected to the Absolute Reality where there is only freedom and hence the question of free will does not arise. Let us examine another tenet of Advaita Vedanta which says Jagat mithya – that is this world is an appearance and the underlying substratum as well as the appearance, in reality, is only Brahman. This then would imply that the feeling of free will within this empirical – Vyavaharika sat – is merely an illusion, an appearance, and yet as it is none other Brahman the illusion is real! **So much for free will.**

The theory of **Karma** would fall flat on its face but for the admission of free will at least on the Vyavaharika level of reality. How else could any being so caught up in this maze ever find a way out? The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says that, as we act, so we become; a person doing good becomes good, one doing evil becomes evil. This stands true at the empirical level where most of us identify with the body and mind as self. The limit to exercising a totally free choice however is in any case a myth for it is limited by our previous samskaras and gunas.

“Accordingly, if we are identified with the body, we will seem to have free will and be subject to the law of karma. From the standpoint of absolute reality, there is only the Self, the ultimate sense of “I.” There is no action because there are not two things; thus the “actor-action-acted upon” triad does not exist. Consequently, the very notion of free will is meaningless. Enlightenment entails the realization that karma relates to the body-mind and not to the real Self. Another helpful way to think about it is in terms of the extent that we are in the present and directing our attention. If we are miles away, we inevitably do things in a habitual mechanical manner. On the other hand, if we are alert, there is an opportunity for the discriminating faculty of the mind to choose between various possible courses of action, depending on

which action we perceive as most appropriate. Although this act of choosing may still be mechanical in the sense that it is determined by what we have learned in the past, the nature of the action is clearly quite different. In stillness, other factors, such as morality, can also influence the outcome. Discrimination, as opposed to habit, becomes the driving force. Therefore, the guidance of karma yoga is that we should be in the present, with a still mind, so that discrimination (**viveka**) may operate and make the correct “free” choice. The key technique in Advaita is to speak to us initially about our actual experience in the world, and at our present level of understanding. As this understanding grows, these explanations are superseded by increasingly subtle ones. The process is called **adhyaropa-apavada**: the provisional, erroneous explanation is later rescinded. Ultimately, it is acknowledged that there is no real-world existing separate from Brahman. As the Chhandogya Upanishad tells us: **sarvam khalvidam brahma**, all this (world) verily is Brahman.” says **Dennis Waite**.

### ***What Sages say:***

**Shri Raman Maharshi**- ‘Only the Divine will is free. The only freedom man has is to strive for and acquire jnana’ (knowledge). Through knowledge comes free will. The freedom to either accept your destiny (prarabdha) or to struggle with it, leading to further entanglements.

The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their past deeds. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try how hard you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to stop it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent. **Source:** <https://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/ramana-maharshi/at-arunachala/>

What for then does the body come into existence? It is designed for doing the various things marked out for execution in this life. The whole programme is chalked out. "Not an atom moves except by His Will" expresses the same truth, whether you say, "Does not move except by His Will" or "Does not move except by karma". As for freedom for man, *he is always free not to identify himself with the body and not to be affected by the pleasures or pains consequent on the body's activities.* (**Source:** *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 4-1-46 Afternoon)

Free-will and destiny are ever-existent. Destiny is the result of past action; it concerns the body. Let the body act as may suit it. Why are you concerned with it? Why do you pay attention to it? Free-will and Destiny last as long as the body lasts. But wisdom (jnana) transcends both. The Self is beyond knowledge and ignorance. Should anything happen, it happens as the result of one's past actions, of divine will and of other factors. (**Source:** *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 193)

Whose will is it? 'It is mine', you may say. You are beyond will and fate. Abide as that and you transcend them both. That is the meaning of conquering destiny by will. Fate can be conquered. Fate is the result of past actions. By association with the wise, the bad tendencies are conquered. One's experiences are then viewed in their proper perspective.

I exist now. I am the enjoyer. I enjoy fruits of action. I was in the past and shall be in the future. Who is this 'I'? Finding this 'I' to be pure Consciousness beyond action and enjoyment, freedom and happiness are gained. There is then no effort, for the Self is perfect and there remains nothing more to gain.



So long as there is individuality, one is the enjoyer and doer. But if it is lost, the divine Will prevails and guides the course of events. The individual is perceptible to others who cannot perceive divine force. Restrictions and discipline are for other individuals and not for the liberated.

Free-will is implied in the scriptural injunctions to be good. It implies overcoming fate. It is done by wisdom. The fire of wisdom consumes all actions. Wisdom is acquired by association with the wise, or rather, its mental atmosphere. (**Source:** *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 209)

### ***Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa***

#### **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Chapter 9, Advice to the Brahmos**

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is God alone who does everything. You may say that in that case man may commit sin. But that is not true. If a man is firmly convinced that God alone is the Doer and that he himself is nothing, then he will never take a false step. It is God alone who has planted in man's mind what the 'Englishman' calls free will, People who have not realized God would become engaged in more and more sinful actions if God had not planted in them the notion of free will. Sin would have increased if God had not planted in them the notion of free will. Sin would have increased if God had not made the sinner feel that he alone was responsible for his sin. **People who have realized God are aware that free will is a mere appearance. In reality man is the machine and God is the Operator; man is the carriage and God its Driver.**"

**The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Chapter 18, M at Dakshineswar (II)**  
The Younger Naren: "Sir, have we any free will?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Just try to find out who this 'I' is? While you are searching for 'I', 'He' comes out. 'I am the machine, and He is the Operator.' Have you heard of a mechanical toy that goes into a store with a letter in its hand. You are like that toy. God alone is the Doer. Do your duties in the world as if you were the doer but knowing all that time that God alone is the Doer and you are the instrument."

### **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Chapter 42 Car Festival at Balaram's House –**

**Free will is an illusion that is implanted** in us to enable us to take responsibility for our actions and prevent committing sin. Actually past, present and future are all laid out for all of us.

Modern Sages

#### ***Francis Lucille:***

Determinism is the view that everything is predetermined inexorably, and unavoidably that events presently happen are dependent on what happened in the past - but with this view the question arises when did it all begin? Whereas Preordained - is not the same thing – there is one cause in it which is unique in it, which is beyond time, and which produces this illusion of time and all this scenery, **in this the future is not predetermined it is preordained - which means the order comes from this place which is beyond time. But we cannot predict what is going to happen because there is a level of freedom in this place which is beyond time, which can always surprise.** Cosmos is not deterministic; it is preordained which even at an individual level should be interpreted as not being fatalistic - "everything is decided by fate so let me do nothing." We would then just be victims of a malicious God. Everything that happens is not cast in stone or set forever, we have to be open because **we are at both ends you know**

– we are at the receiving end and it's like you have received a package from Amazon and you don't remember you ordered it! You constantly order and because of Alzheimer's you constantly forget.

### **Swami Tatadmanand:**

To answer the question since everything around us happens by His will then if I commit a sin it's all His fault. Our experience shows that of course we do have free will, but experiences do not prove anything as being accurate – e.g. the sun does not set but we experience this every evening.

Philosophers explain free will is not a cause-and-effect event – decisions are also mental events which have been preceded by a cause. We may not be aware of the pre-existing cause, e.g. moisture in the air. So, choosing a spouse, buying a car etc., all have a pre-existing predisposition of which we are not aware. Modern neuroscience supports this view; however, we are much more than what neuroscience suggests. We are not biological robots - the hard problem of consciousness (term used to define the subjective nature of experience) still eludes scientists. Objects such as neurons, and neurotransmitters can be measured but not the experience of consciousness.

Vedanta says Pure consciousness is your true nature- it has no free will it only reveals the activity of the mind. Free will is therefore a mental quality and it is central to the theory of Karma. Only deliberate wilfully performed actions produce karma. About God's will- not a leaf stirs without God's will. Human type of free will is totally different from God's. He is not an influential relative. According to Vedanta God's will is manifested by the laws of Nature, wind blows, objects fall down, earth orbits the sun. His will is not fickle unlike ours- we change our mind as we like, He does not. God's will is that you have free will, so if you choose to do something wrong it means it is your fault. But you

are not absolutely free e.g. when emotions overpower you then you are not in control. *Duryodhana - janami dharmam na cha me pravrutti janaami adharm na cha me niVrutti*. For being totally free, one would have to rise above these forces. The way would be meditation and the stillness of mind.

## **Karma**

The doctrine of karma is based on adrishta karma (unseen karma), it cannot be observed and hence impossible to disprove, therefore, it falls into the category of belief. It is a valuable asset to explain events which seem unreasonable or random e.g. a birth defect. This does not offer comfort but the Adrishta (unseen) phala explains it and helps lessen the parent's resentment and sorrow. It also answers the question why do bad things happen to good people? And helps us to be patient and resilient. The doctrine is fair because it applies equally to all people like the law of gravity. Drishta phala is that which immediately seen e.g. you do a good deed and a 'feel good' ensues. Karma can be of three types:

1. Prarabdha is what is to be experienced in this life and is predetermined.
2. Sanchit is that which is in the storehouse and may or may not be experienced depending on whether we recognise our True Nature or not.
3. Agami also called Kriyamana - the present thought, speech and action done which determines the future events which may or may not be experienced in this life, may get added to Sanchit.

The reason this is discussed here is to explain the framework within which man is free to exercise his discriminatory power and use free will to act. While his tendencies carried from many past lives

determine his inclinations, they do not bind him to act in that way - so if he is guided right, he has the freedom to take the right course towards his spiritual destiny. In fact, Shri Ramana has said: “the only freedom man is granted is to choose to recognise his True Nature.” This reminds one of the terms defining actions one could take - ***Shreyas (good or worthy) and Preyas (pleasing)*** given in Kathopanishad - where the young lad of eight chooses Shreyas over Preyas and eventually ends up getting both.

Bhagwad Gita Discourse 6 shloka 43, In answer to Arjuna what becomes of the sadhaka (spiritual aspirant) should his physical death happen prior to Self-Realisation? Shri Krishna states - the sadhaka automatically regains his tendencies and starts his journey exactly where he left it, continuing his practice and being born in a congenial atmosphere.

***In conclusion:***

1. Western psychology initially propounded a totally deterministic function of mind based on the cause-and-effect theory. Thus, every action leads to the next and there is no basis for the assumption that we have ***free will***, the experience of having a free will is merely an epiphenomenon. It is only recently that the experiential notions are part of the function of decision making. This despite scientific evidence to the contrary. These scientific experiments are limited to simple exercises and hence interpreted as not conclusive.
2. The mainstream Indian Philosophy did not consider this as a point to debate for the theory of Karma, the concepts of sanskaras, vasanas, gunas which all left no scope for total freedom of will. The experience of being endowed with the faculty of choice – free will held true only within a given frame

work and applied to the empirical (vyavaharika) reality only. The ***Absolute is freedom Itself and*** therefore this question does not apply. The will of Ishwara (God) is not to be confused with the human will, it manifests as the immutable laws of nature in this most orderly Cosmos.

3. My own experience and understanding is that the Advaita view makes perfect sense. It would seem futile to exist in this Vyavaharika reality world were it not for the possibility of evolving which could not happen without choice at some level. Then again, we can see that even when every effort is made to achieve a certain result, the result is not guaranteed. Many forces come into action for any outcome and most often one hears people attributing failure to fate! The point to remember is fate is the product we have ourselves manufactured, albeit in the past. When one learns Titiksha - forbearance, and Vipassana - the ability to see clearly, the dilemma resolves – if we plant the seed of a Neem tree (***Azadirachta indica***) we cannot expect a Mango fruit! As you sow so shall you reap, for which the season and time are to be awaited and anticipated.

And yet at all times remaining aware of AWARENESS which is beyond time, space and causation. Vyavaharika sat, free will and all the Knowledge of it is merely an appearance – does one send to gallows the murderer appearing in a dream, once one awakens? This question is applicable to the one who has awakened to his true Nature - his sanchita karma cannot be offloaded onto him because – he as a person ceases to exist and hence the karma is burnt to ashes in the **knowledge of the Self**.

#### **Afterword on Free will**

Do we have free will? No!

Define free will - freedom to do what we want, when we want, how we want, why we want, wherever we want.

Remember it is a relative world.

Readiness to receive this.

Refuting is not the point.

1. We had no freedom in choice for being born, to die, to marry the guy we did.
2. Life is preprogramed and preordained starting from the genes that will express in us.
3. Any decision we take is only apparently our own. The metaphor of hot water which borrows heat from the fire and has the property of scalding comes to mind.
4. Situations arise like the unfolding of the rose bud
5. We cannot even choose the virus that will infect me or you or him. It all depends on one's immunity.
6. Can we do anything to improve our immunity - no our actions are dependent on the endowment of Gunas. We all undergo suffering which moulds us, again we have no choice. Gunas form a plait at any one time only two strands are seen. There can be no action with just a single strand. It is always a permutation and combination for karma to happen. At any given moment one or the other Guna is predominant
7. So then what about the murderer? Karma follows the Karta.
8. Actual implementation and the will to do are not the same thing. Agreed - but what gives you the will to do something is the point. Your preprogramming nothing else. Raaga and Dvesha make you do what you do. So called free will then is not free at all - if anger is 3 inches and the free will is 2 inches what can be done? If you reverse, it can be counterproductive too - so called control freaks. Make the problem smaller - pratipaksha Bhavana, the bhavana

that is opposed to what you feel, - realise that the other is suffering as well, **develop compassion**. e.g. if someone has wronged us - we forgive the person for the following reasons - firstly our peace of mind, secondly realising we too make mistakes and finally by highlighting the good points in the other person we can overlook and forgive.

9. Scientifically, experiments have proven that action takes place prior to the registration that I have acted.
10. Krishna in the shlokas given, has told Arjuna whether you like it or not, you will fight because your Prakruti will make you, only an Ahamkara Vimudha (egoistic fool) feels I do. Yantraa rudha ni maayaya. BG Discourse. 18 shloka 59/60/6.
11. Then can we do **Sadhana at all? Yes that is all you can do like Ramana says**. Rumi illustrates the dynamics and traps of the above-mentioned journey of life by likening our wants and needs to a leaShloka One can live either enslaved forever by one's wants and needs, by struggling to meet or get rid of them. Or one can conduct oneself in a manner to become free.
12. Chaitanya (The Pure Consciousness) is not the you, you think you are!!
13. You yourself have so conditioned yourself that the boundaries are set.
14. However, this you is not the you, you think you are.
15. Why is it that so many, so many, so many know the path to liberation but few, few, few ever succeed? Because they do not let go - in the true sense. They so sincerely believe they can do it by themselves - this false ego.
16. It is a Master design by none other than Maya that makes you think you can do anything. If then you ask should I stop meditating? Well try doing that, you'll automatically do what you were going to.
17. This world is illusory so having free will cannot be the truth.



Yet as given above – It is not a robotic existence – we are free within a framework and can cross the boundaries if we heed the call of the Divine

हम हैं कौन?

हम हैं ही कौन, जो समझते अपने को स्वतंत्र . . ?

बंधे हैं देखो

रिशतों के धागों से कस के,

बंधे हैं देखो

परवरिश के पेंचों से,

बंधे हैं देखो

धर्म, जाति के गाठों से,

बंधे हैं देखो

स्त्री पुरुष के नातों से,

बंधे हैं देखो

अपने मतभेद से जम के,

बंधे हैं देखो

अनगिनत कर्मों से

और तो और बंधे हैं देखो

स्व-स्वरूप के अज्ञान से,

बंधे हैं देखो

इस शरीर और मन की उपाधि से,

बंधे हैं देखो

लोक, देह, शास्त्र, वासना से,

हम हैं ही कौन, जो समझते अपने को स्वतंत्र - ?

भ्रम है ये, मिथ्या है, मिथ्या जानों!

अर्थ है इसका सरल

स्व-स्वरूप है निर्मल,

अव्यय, अक्षर, अनंत,

सत्य और स्वतंत्र

After all this one is always free to believe what one wants, although what happens is as per your program.

## Gunas

### Definition and etymology

Gunas can be translated as: quality, property, peculiarity, attribute. Guṇa (Sanskrit: गुण) is a concept in Hinduism which can be translated as "quality, peculiarity, attribute, property."

In Shankara's commentary on the Bhagwad Gita, Discourse 14 Shloka 5, he states: Guna is a technical term, *it does not mean a property, attribute or quality such as colour, as opposed to the substance in which it is said to inhere.*

There is no separate existence of a guna, and the inherent attribute of a substance is what is meant here. The Gunas here are so called because they are dependent here on another – namely Kshetrajnya (the in dweller brahman), the gunas are only forms of avidya and they bind fast *'as it were'* the Kshetrajnya. Born of the Lord's Maaya they bind fast *'as it were'* the indestructible Self. The objection to this is that the embodied one is not tainted (Discourse 13 Shloka 31) how then, on the contrary it is said here that the gunas bind him? The objection is already met by qualifying the statement by *'as it were.'*

The concept is originally notable as a feature of Samkhya philosophy. The gunas are now a key concept in nearly all schools of Hindu philosophy. There are three gunas, according to this worldview, that have always been and continue to be present in all things and beings in the world.

These three gunas are called: sattva , rajas and tamas. All three gunas are present in everyone and everything in manifestation. The proportion, however, differs and that is the diversity we experience.

In some contexts, it may mean "a subdivision, species, kind, quality", or an operational principle or tendency of something or someone. In human behaviour studies, Guna means personality, innate nature and psychological attributes of an individual. The interplay, of the permutations and combinations of these gunas determines the nature of a person and predicts to some degree (because these can keep changing) the progress he/she can make.

Like all Sanskrit technical terms, guṇa can be difficult to summarize in a single word. **Its original and common meaning is a thread, implying the original materials that weave together to make up reality.** The usual, but approximate translation in common usage is "quality".

### **The three Types**

**Sattva:** is the quality of balance, harmony, goodness, purity, universalism, holism, construction, creativity, positivity, peacefulness, and virtue

**Rajas:** is the quality of passion, activity, neither good nor bad and sometimes either, self-centeredness, egoism, individualization, drivenness, movement, and dynamism.

**Tamas:** is the quality of imbalance, disorder, chaos, anxiety, impurity, destruction, delusion, negativity, dullness or inactivity, apathy, inertia or lethargy, violence, viciousness, and ignorance.

According to Samkhya school, no one and nothing is either purely Sattvik or purely Rajasik or purely Tamasik. One's nature and behaviour constitute a complex interplay of all the three gunas, in varying degrees. In some, the conduct is Rajasik with significant influence of Sattvik guna; in some it is Rajasik with significant influence

of Tamasik guna, and so on. The balance of Gunas of everything and everyone can change and does. However, in Indian worldview, change in one quality faces inertia from other two qualities. Change needs internal or external influence or reinforcement, as knowledge and force to transform. The force to change comes from the Rajas guna, the Sattva guna empowers one towards harmonious and constructive change, while Tamas guna checks or retards the process. In Indian mythology, Vishnu is envisioned with more Sattva, Brahma with more Rajas, and Shiva seen with all three Gunas.

### **Bhagavad Gita - my favourite shlokas on Gunas**

Bhagavad Gita illustrates various items and actions by their three Guna. For example, three types of charity are discussed, and what makes charity Sattvic, Rajasic or Tamasic. Similarly, food, relationships, knowledge and actions are detailed in terms of the three Guna.

Chapters 3, 7, 13, 14, 17 and 18 of Bhagavad Gita discuss Guna.

Chapter 3 Shloka 27:

**प्रकृतेः क्रियमाणानि गुणैः कर्माणि सर्वशः ।**

**अहङ्कारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते ॥ 27॥**

*In fact, all actions are being performed by the modes of Prakriti. The fool, whose mind is deluded by egoism thinks I am the doer.*

Chapter 3 Shloka 28:

**तत्त्ववित्तु महाबाहो गुणकर्मविभागयोः ।**

**गुणा गुणेषु वर्तन्त इति मत्वा न सज्जते ॥ 28॥**

*However, he who has true insight into the respective spheres of Gunas and their actions, holding that it is the Gunas that*

*move among Gunas (objects of perception) does not get attached to them.*

Chapter 7 Shloka 12, and 13:

ये चैव सात्त्विका भावा राजसास्तामसाश्च ये ।  
मत्त एवेति तान्विद्धि न त्वहं तेषु ते मयि ॥ 12॥  
त्रिभिर्गुणमयैर्भावैरेभिः सर्वमिदं जगत् ।  
मोहितं नाभिजानाति मामेभ्यः परमव्ययम् ॥ 13॥

*Discuss that whatever is born of the Gunas all evolve from Him alone but He is not in them., and how the whole creation is deluded by these gunas.*

दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया ।  
मामेव ये प्रपद्यन्ते मायामेतां तरन्ति ते ॥ 14॥

*For this most wonderful Maaya of Mine, consisting of the three Gunas, is extremely difficult to breakthrough; those however, who constantly adore Me alone, are able to cross it.*

Chapter 13 Shloka 23:

उपद्रष्टानुमन्ता च भर्ता भोक्ता महेश्वरः ।  
परमात्मेति चाप्युक्तो देहेऽस्मिन्पुरुषः परः ॥ 23॥

*He who thus knows the Purusha and Prakriti together with the Gunas – even though performing his duties in every way, is not born again.*

Chapter 14 Shlokas 5-18 The whole of Chapter 14 is an elaboration of what the three Gunas signify, and what are the characteristics of the one who has gone beyond the Gunas. The title of the Chapter itself is Gunatrayavibhagayogo – The yoga of the division of the three Gunas.

Shloka 5:

सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसम्भवाः ।  
निबध्नन्ति महाबाहो देहे देहिनमव्ययम् ॥ 5॥

*Satva, Rajas, Tamas – these three Gunas born of Nature tie down the imperishable soul to the body, Arjuna.*

Chapter 17 Shloka 1

अर्जुन उवाच ।

ये शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य यजन्ते श्रद्धयान्विताः ।

तेषां निष्ठा तु का कृष्ण सत्त्वमाहो रजस्तमः ॥ १ ॥

*Arjuna asks: where do those who worship Gods etc. without following the injunctions of the scriptures stand in the classification of the gunas?*

Shri Krishna refers to the three Guna – sattvic, rajasic and tamasic – as innate nature (psychology or personality of an individual). Sattvic guna is one driven by what is pure, truth, compassionate, without craving, doing the right because it is right, positive and good. Tamasic guna is one driven by what is impure, dark, destructive, aimed to hurt another, contemptuous, negative and vicious. Rajasic guna is one that is ego-driven, out of personal passion, active, ostentatious, seeking the approval of others.

Shri Krishna explains in detail firstly regarding the Shraddha which is innate in men defines their character and that determines who they worship - the Satvik worship Gods, Rajasic – demigods and spirits, and Tamasic worship and ghosts. He goes on to classify penance and austerity also into the three categories, those that do penance to get powers for mundane gains are rajasic, those that do for harming another or out of sheer obstinacy are tamasic and those who practice in moderation with only the goal of attaining the eternal are sattvic.

Then foods and their types - depending on one's likes and dislikes – succulent, nutritious, juicy which promote longevity - sattvic, those that like pungent and dry bitter or sour over hot- rajasic lead to grief

and misery, and those that like putrid, raw meat and foods similar-tamasic leading to births in lower animals.

Then Shri Krishna elaborates on yagnya, tapa-penance, and daan - donation or gift. Each of these categories of action fall into the three gunas. Anything done with awareness of merits demerits - both long term and short term and that which benefits all, is sattvic. That which is for self-aggrandisement even at the cost of others and finally leads to misery although attractive to begin with, is rajasic. And finally that which harms oneself and others, done in stupor or procrastinated leading to lethargy and delusion, is tamasic.

In Chapters 18, for example:

नियतं सङ्गरहितमरागद्वेषतः कृतम् ।  
अफलप्रेप्सुना कर्म यत्तत्सात्त्विकमुच्यते ॥२३॥  
यत्तु कामेप्सुना कर्म साहंकारेण वा पुनः ।  
क्रियते बहुलायासं तद्राजसमुदाहृतम् ॥२४॥  
अनुबन्धं क्षयं हिंसामनपेक्ष्य च पौरुषम् ।  
मोहादारभ्यते कर्म यत्तत्तामसमुच्यते ॥२५॥

*Action that is virtuous, thought through, free from attachment, and without craving for results is considered Sattvic; Action that is driven purely by craving for pleasure, selfishness and much effort is Rajasic;*

*Action that is undertaken because of delusion, disregarding consequences, without considering loss or injury to others or self, is called Tamasic.*

— *Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 18, verses 23–25*

Similarly, knowledge that is attached to object of action, without concern for understanding the cause, without concern for purpose or significance, is Tamasic knowledge; knowledge that is segregated, that considers everything unconnected, individualistic and meaningless is



Rajasic; knowledge that sees one being in all beings, that seeks the whole, a unity in diversity, and similarities in the divided components is Sattvic.

## **Samkhya Concept**

**Guna in cosmology:** Creation can happen only due to the imbalance in the Gunas, and these are the three threads with which the fabric of the universe is woven.

## **Samkhya cosmology**

Samkhya combines the three guṇas with Primeval matter. This is termed as **Prakṛuti**. Gunas are present in all things and beings in the world, and it is their interplay that defines the physical and psychological character and nature. They i.e. Satva, Raja and Tamas guna serve as the fundamental operating principles or 'tendencies' of Prakṛuti. When any of the guna is out of balance in a being or object, the Samkhya school suggests that a pattern of evolution starts, affecting not only itself but its environment.

**Purusha** or consciousness is considered as separate from Prakṛiti and changeless. Without the presence of Purusha, Prakṛiti is jada (as if dead). I liken the effect of this combination - to the turbulence created in a 15-year-old girl (both body and mind) by the mere glance of a young man she has a crush on! So, Prakṛiti gets into action!

Samkhya proposes Purusha and Prakṛiti both of which form the basis of this manifest world - duality. *The fabric of duality is woven by Prakṛiti, with the three strands of the gunas. Note that even when a woman plaits her hair, she has to make three parts of it and at any given time only two are prominent, similarly for any movement Rajo*

*guna is essential, be it in any direction towards truth, compassion and spiritual well-being or downwards to mundane gratification of desires etc, as Tamo guna by itself will not move.*

So, two gunas at a time need to be prominent. This is true for the functioning of Prakruti. However, Purusha is the substratum – the Consciousness that pervades every tiny string of Prakruti and without which no creation would be possible. Prakruti and Purusha are not two separate principles even in the manifest universe - they are two aspects of the same ‘stuff’ which cannot be defined according to Advaita, but Samkhya holds them as two separate eternal realities.

Anything that can be defined comes into the purview of Prakruti. Thus, anything that can be conceptualised, perceived or dreamed of is all Prakruti.

To go beyond the Gunas would be the totally equanimous state - total stillness and silence and only Pure awareness, Purusha, is the goal of all manifestation.

It is because of the Sattva guna, the pull to evolving into a higher state exists and this is where the guidance of a Guru is necessary. The Guru will primarily encourage one to bolster the Sattva guna with right sadhana and only then can one develop the spiritual muscle to oust the delusion of ego!

Ego is an illusory entity that appears with the permutation and combination of the Gunas, if this can be seen through, one could watch the dizzying patterns in the kaleidoscope without becoming the particle that is in the pattern, at the mercy of the viewer!

This is the trigunatit or the sthitapradnya state spoken of by Shri Krishna.

Shri Krishna also guides us how to achieve it - Bhakti: hold onto the feet of the Lord with faith, acceptance, not expecting anything in return, Jnana: see through Maaya, Karma: see Purusha in all and serve all.

### **Scientific View- Modern String Theory**

Scientifically too it was the imbalance in the cooling of the gases that led to the formation of this Universe. In recent times there has been a search for the unified theory which would explain the basis of all so-called matter!

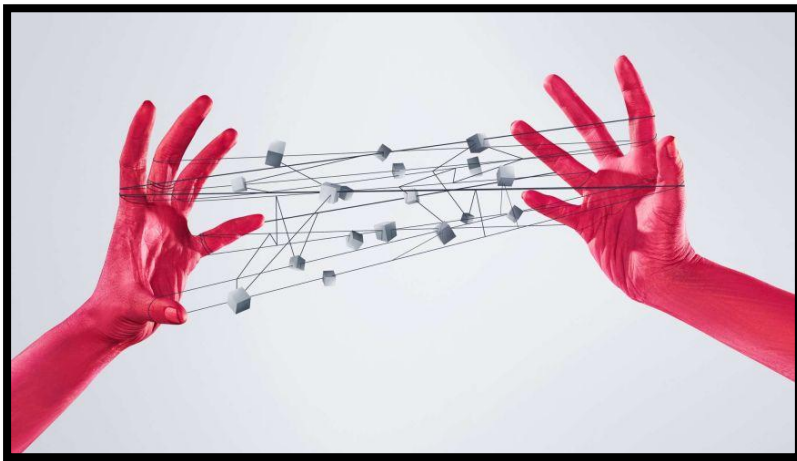
The search for Grand Unified Theory is not new, and many have tried and failed. Einstein was searching for a way to unify gravity and electromagnetism until his last days. Vibrating strings each playing a cosmic note, is the basis of the string theory which was born in the post-war explosion in particle physics which led to the discovery that the universe appeared to be built of: quarks, leptons and force - carrying bosons.

This helped make sense of the ever-growing zoo of particles flung out of high-powered accelerators, but physicists asked whether the apparently fundamental quarks, leptons and bosons were themselves made of similar stuff?

Scrabbling within the mathematics, physicists started to find similarities in the particles, representing them as one-dimensional loops of *stringy stuff*. Different vibrations of this stringy stuff correspond to each of the fundamental particles; one note played on a fundamental string is an electron, another note is a quark, another is a photon, the particle of light. The strings themselves are not made

of anything smaller —they are the true fundamental pieces of the universe.

But the mathematics of string theory is a little strange, and in putting the pieces together, physicists needed to add more dimensions of space to make their theories work, many more than the three we experience in our everyday life. If string theory is correct, more convoluted mathematical trickery is required to hide these extra dimensions from us. String theorists are built of stern stuff and working with complex vibrations in multiple dimensions didn't daunt them. With its simplicity as the underlying idea that can explain everything in the universe, string theory has proven very seductive. Cosmology since ancient times according to the Rishis has always



indicated that the first energy on the Universe was Naad – Sound. I can just imagine the sound of these tiniest of strings vibrating at different frequencies creating different material particles, making a symphony which only the Gods could hear and then creation happening with imperfections occurring everywhere.

## Science meets the Sages

**Gunas are three in number like the strings and many dimensions as already shown in the Yoga Vasishtha.**

Yoga Vasishtha tells us about the interlacing dimensions and the infinite possibilities to each manifest human in these various dimensions which pass through each other. This is the first ever record of the possibility of Multiverses, our sages revealed it all. We know scientifically that our range of appreciating sound or light is in a certain frequency because that is what the brain we have can compute. But obviously that is not the only reality. According to Kashmir Shaivism the Universe began as the out-winking of Shiva's eyes not by evolution but by gradual reduction in the powers expressed and the in-winking will spell the dissolution of the Universe which in fact gets reabsorbed so to say only to re-manifest.

*As Swami Vivekanand has said 'where science and our spiritual heritage are at variance trust what the ancient Rishis have revealed.'*

## Why one needs to know?

Since all of Prakruti is a play of the Gunas, one can take a look through a whole new perspective and get a panoramic view. This helps in forgiving oneself and others. For essentially, thought, word and action happen through the play of the Gunas. Like a movie playing before oneself.

One can grasp the concept of being the witness - Purusha in this Leela. Even in the concept is a hidden liberation although it does not absolve one from the effect of karma. For the conceptual knowledge to become experiential is the aim of existence.

The significant finding is that we can transform one guna to the other and avoid the detrimental guna, by simply changing the frequency of vibration of the string, this necessitates the use of the power of resolve - Sankalp shakti. Once this is known we can resolutely direct our mind to stay in Sattva guna which is the clear, pleasant, calm state necessary for the revelation of our true identity to happen. This then is Nirvana or liberation from the burdensome pseudo identity of ego.

### **To conclude**

It is amazing how the Rishis experienced this knowledge from inside out. Even the terminology seems similar – Naad – Sound - Big Bang! Guna- string. Three types, corresponding to the string theory which also proposes three strings which strike different notes, and the melody of the Universe comes into existence! The Yoga Vasishtha, such an ancient text talks about multiverses! It helps us to know that it's the imperfection that brings the Universe into existence – that is Karma - Visarg and we conclude with Ch. 8 Shloka 3

**श्रीभगवानुवाच ।**

**अक्षरं ब्रह्म परमं स्वभावोऽध्यात्ममुच्यते ।**

**भूतभावोद्भवकरो विसर्गः कर्मसञ्जितः ॥ ३ ॥**

*Shri Bhagwan said: The Supreme Indestructible is Brahma, one's own Self (the individual soul) is called Adhyatma; and the Primal resolve of God, (Visarg) which brings forth the existence of beings, is called Karma (action) and this depends on the Gunas!*

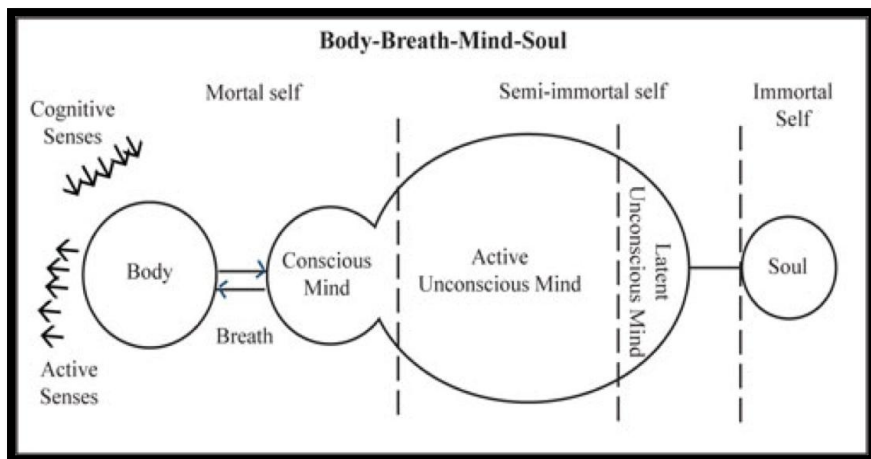
## Rebirth and Reincarnation

Every religion postulates an 'afterlife' for otherwise religion would have no significance per say. Most religions believe in a soul. Jainism and Buddhism do not and yet they postulate the same karma theory and rebirth. The question, what takes rebirth is to be understood and what happens at the time of death.

The Sanatana Dharma is based on the concept of Karma, Punarjanma (rebirth) and Moksha. Rebirth implies being born again and reincarnation means taking a body of flesh again. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the two terms, and it is worth understanding them. Rebirth happens every single moment as we shall see and can happen into other realms not necessarily of the flesh, whereas reincarnation is taking birth in the flesh (carnal) which implies this world and manifestation, some believe that the body taken may be of a different species other than human in case the karma so deems it necessary.

Modern research on the subject is also presented here, not that any validation is required, but just for the sake of completion. The concept of rebirth dates to the Vedas - the oldest of which is the Rigveda and the Yajurveda as well as the Atharvaveda. \* Here we mainly focus on the shlokas from the Bhagwad Gita where Shri Krishna expounds this truth with the authority of the Enlightened being and the Lord Himself.

Having said that we will need to consider what it is that reincarnates, and is reborn - as in, takes a new body. We will also need to understand once again the doctrine of karma and moksha (liberation). For this let us begin with the diagram Swami Rama has given for clarity of understanding.



From this diagram we can see the bodies that we have are mainly three. The Sthool Sharir or gross body which is the mortal self, wherein the body, breath and cognitive mind all perish at the time of death. The Sukshma Sharir which is the semi-mortal (also called Astral) part of us comprising the active unconscious and the latent unconscious mind; these two house our memories, samskaras and karmic bonds of this life as well as the past lives. It also carries the subtle-sense impression and the prana, it is the software for the coming birth. This subtle body is also made up of the subtle five elements and as such falls under the category of matter - Anatma. And finally, the Karan Sharir which is the total ignorance body, called the Causal Sharir as it is the cause of the delusion - but it is also a body of total rest and bliss as in deep sleep. All three bodies are pervaded by pure consciousness which is immanent in the manifest and unmanifest and beyond. What this composite of three bodies forms, is termed a Jeevatma for it has the same Pure Consciousness which pervades the entire manifest and unmanifest Universe but due to the ignorance of this truth, gets encapsulated in ignorance as it were, covered by the veil of Maaya, and samsara begins. There are varied opinions about the 'Atma';



Jainism and Buddhism do not accept any such entity. Most other religions do. Thus, the encapsulated consciousness (Jeevatma) is in every respect the same as the all-pervading One (Paramatma) and to speak of its movement from one realm to the other seems incongruous, yet this is so merely in appearance due to the illusion it suffers of being a separate entity. This Jeevatma then enters a cycle of birth and death in this human form carrying with it, conditionings and desires i.e. samskaras and vasanas. Samsara means an aimless wandering through death and birth in different realms which leads us to the concept of Moksha or Liberation from the same and thereby an end to suffering.

The Jeevatma passes from this Bhulok at the time of death into either seven heavenly realms depending on his worthiness or the seven hellish realms depending on his unworthiness and at the end of completing a stay of appropriate length comes back into this Bhulok to fulfil his desires and pay his karmic debts until he realizes he is not this conglomerate at all – he is the Atma. All of this happens by the law of Karma which is as accurate as the law of gravity and therefore no God is required to dispense justice and bestow favours! It simply follows the pattern and to that extent there is no free will possible. The only free will we can exercise is towards knowing the Truth and aspiring for Moksha.

Let us study rebirth through all the references given to it by Shri Krishna in the Bhagwad Gita. The translation is not ad verbatim as it felt better to let the meaning flow into the context.

## Chapter 2

न त्वेवाहं जातु नासं न त्वं नेमे जनाधिपा ।  
न चैव न भविष्यामः सर्वे वयमतः परम् ॥ 12 ॥

देहिनोऽस्मिन्यथा देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा ।  
तथा देहान्तरप्राप्तिर्धीरस्तत्र न मुह्यति ॥ 13 ॥

Shri Krishna starts with saying in shloka 12 and 13, 'there was never any time when these kings were not and there never will be, and just like this body goes through phases of infancy, childhood, youth, and old age so also the soul takes another body after death. The wise man does not get deluded by these transformations.'

Shri Krishna then expounds the True Nature of who we are. That which is immutable, imperishable and beyond time and space. In Shlokas 20 and 22 Shri Krishna says, the soul never dies and therefore it is never born, for it is unborn, eternal, and primeval. It is not slain when the body is slain. The famous and oft quoted shloka is:

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय  
नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।  
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा  
न्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥ 22 ॥

*As a man shedding worn out garments, takes other new ones,  
likewise the embodied soul casting off worn out bodies, enters into  
others that are new.*

Two other shlokas further bring this truth home:

जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च ।  
तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥ 27 ॥  
अव्यक्तादीनि भूतानि व्यक्तमध्यानि भारत ।  
अव्यक्तनिधनान्येव तत्र का परिदेवना ॥ 28 ॥

Shri Krishna says for the one who is born, death is certain as also for the one who dies birth is certain. The being is not manifest before or after death and it is only in the interim between the two that he becomes manifest and therefore available to our senses, so what cause is there to grieve?

In Chapter 4, Shloka 5 he categorically states, 'I know our past incarnations whereas Arjuna you do not remember.'

बहूनि मे व्यतीतानि जन्मानि तव चार्जुन ।  
तान्यहं वेद सर्वाणि न त्वं वेत्थ परन्तप ॥ ५ ॥

This happens because our memory is clouded with desires, likes and dislikes as also the Gunas. Shri Krishna is beyond these foibles of the Jeevatma. In fact, the Prakruti is under his control.

In chapter 6 Shri Krishna answers an important question Arjuna raises on the behalf of us all who are striving towards self-realisation but may leave the body before attainment. Shri Krishna assures us that such a soul starts exactly where he left off in his previous birth. That same earnestness which has formed a deep impression (samskara) will come up and he will continue his efforts till he attains.

तत्र तं बुद्धिसंयोगं लभते पौर्वदेहिकम् ।  
यतते च ततो भूयः संसिद्धौ कुरुनन्दन ॥ ४३ ॥

Kurunandan (Arjuna), he automatically regains in that birth the latencies of even-mindedness of his previous birth; and through that he strives harder than ever for perfection in the form of God realisation.

In Chapter 7, he says:

दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया ।  
मामेव ये प्रपद्यन्ते मायामेतां तरन्ति ते ॥ 14 ॥

Here, Shri Krishna admits this Maya of mine with Her gunas is indeed difficult to conquer, only the one who adores Me is able to cross it. Shri Krishna has explained in detail many pathways to cross this ocean of Samsara, the easiest of which is surrender to the Lord.

बहूनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानवान्मां प्रपद्यते ।  
वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः ॥ 19 ॥

*It is hard to find a being who can see me as the inner dweller of all and only after many lifetimes does this Truth become evident to him.*

So, it is rare indeed to find One who sees the inner essence of all beings as that same One Pure Consciousness. However, one can quite easily understand intellectually because it is evident to us that the same consciousness must dwell in all for the order and synchronicity we experience in our day-to-day life.

वेदाहं समतीतानि वर्तमानानि चार्जुन ।  
भविष्याणि च भूतानि मां तु वेद न कश्चन ॥ 26 ॥

*To me the past present and future are evident simultaneously and nothing needs to be known. No one who is not one with Me can know this.*

It is only when our consciousness merges in That Pure Awareness that we go beyond Time and space thus all becomes known to us simultaneously, like if one held the reel of a movie in the hand

scrolled to see any part of it, not until then. Once that happens and only then can one escape the wheel of karma and attain liberation.

In Chapter 8, Shri Krishna says:

अन्तकाले च मामेव स्मरन्मुक्त्वा कलेवरम् ।  
यः प्रयाति स मद्भावं याति नास्त्यत्र संशयः ॥ 5 ॥  
यं यं वापि स्मरन्भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कलेवरम् ।  
तं तमेवैति कौन्तेय सदा तद्भावभावितः ॥ 6 ॥

*The one who remembers me at the moment of leaving this body verily merges with Me about that there is no doubt.*

This here is a very significant pointer to our habit pattern, this cycle of birth and death has become such a habit that even when we have the intellectual understanding, we are quite unable to shake off the yoke of Maaya which lies heavily on our neck. To reverse this, we have to repeatedly beseech the Lord and let no other desire get hold of the mind through many, many, years of practice so that at the moment of passing we may never forget the Lord. Or else out of sheer habit we might think of our profession or loved ones, and sure one comes right back to experience more of the same for that is your innermost desire. So, keep vigilant, “for verily oh son of Kunti the being attains to that which he contemplates at the moment of death,” says Shri Krishna.

मामुपेत्य पुनर्जन्म दुःखालयमशाश्वतम् ।  
नाप्नुवन्ति महात्मानः संसिद्धिं परमां गताः ॥ 15 ॥  
*Once the great soul has come to Me he is no longer reborn in this  
samsara of suffering and goes to the Ultimate abode.*

Here Shri Krishna is giving us an indication that there are many levels of realms to which a man might ascend after death but after the

allotted period of time he has once again to return to the Bhulok to pay his karmic debts and fulfil his desires, once again making new ones! In the following shloka Shri Krishna says even if beings ascend right up to the Brahma loka, due to their good karma they will still have to be reborn.

आब्रह्मभुवनाल्लोकाः पुनरावर्तिनोऽर्जुन ।  
मामुपेत्य तु कौन्तेय पुनर्जन्म न विद्यते ॥ 16॥

The different lokas described are:

In the Puranas, and also in the Atharvaveda, there are fourteen worlds, seven higher ones (vyahrtis) and seven lower ones (patalas):

- viz. bhuu, bhuvas, svar, mahas, janas, tapas, and satya or Brahma loka above, and
- atala, vitala, sutala, rasaataala, talatala, mahaatala, paatala loka and naraka below.

It seems logical to have these levels of realms for it would be unwise to have all degrees of good in one place and all degrees of wicked in another, for after all there are some extremely virtuous and noble beings and others not so. There is even a saying in English - 'I'm in the seventh heaven!'

यत्र काले त्वनावृत्तिमावृत्तिं चैव योगिनः ।  
प्रयाता यान्ति तं कालं वक्ष्यामि भरतर्षभ ॥ 23॥  
अग्निर्ज्योतिरहः शुक्लः षण्मासा उत्तरायणम् ।  
तत्र प्रयाता गच्छन्ति ब्रह्म ब्रह्मविदो जनाः ॥ 24॥  
धूमो रात्रिस्तथा कृष्णः षण्मासा दक्षिणायनम् ।

तत्र चान्द्रमसं ज्योतिर्योगी प्राप्य निवर्तते ॥ 25 ॥

शुक्लकृष्णे गती ह्येते जगतः शाश्वते मते ।

एकया यात्यनावृत्तिमन्ययावर्तते पुनः ॥ 26 ॥

*I shall now describe to you the different paths of passing away from this world, O best of the Bharatas, one of which leads to liberation and the other leads to rebirth. Those who know the Supreme Brahman, and who depart from this world, during the six months of the sun's northern course, the bright fortnight of the moon, and the bright part of the day, attain the supreme destination. The practitioners of Vedic rituals, who pass away during the six months of the sun's southern course, the dark fortnight of the moon, the time of smoke, the night, attain the celestial abodes. After enjoying celestial pleasures, they again return to the earth. These two, bright and dark paths, always exist in this world. The way of light leads to liberation and the way of darkness leads to rebirth.*

In Ch 9, Shri Krishna says:

सर्वभूतानि कौन्तेय प्रकृतिं यान्ति मामिकाम् ।

कल्पक्षये पुनस्तानि कल्पादौ विसृजाम्यहम् ॥ 7 ॥

प्रकृतिं स्वामवष्टभ्य विसृजामि पुनः पुनः ।

भूतग्राममिमं कृत्स्नमवशं प्रकृतेर्वशात् ॥ 8 ॥

*All beings enter me at the end of time (kalpa) and at the beginning of the next cycle I send them forth again and again according to their nature and under the spell of Maaya they again enter at the point they were absorbed in their journey, O Son of Kunti!*

Here Shri Krishna is giving an indication of the Cosmic cycle, and we know scientifically that the Universe began through a Big Bang nearly 15 billion years ago and it is in a state of continuous expansion. It is predicted that either the expansion will result in a disintegration, or it

may just collapse. This is what Shri Krishna is indicating - in the beginning it was thought that the intense pull of gravity at the edge of a black hole sucks matter in which then disappears leaving no information behind, now however, it is known that the information can be retrieved. Shri Krishna says this entire cosmos enters Him and He sends it forth in the exact manner it had entered to start the cycle once again from exactly where it had stopped.

मयाध्यक्षेण प्रकृतिः सूयते सचराचरम् ।  
हेतुनानेन कौन्तेय जगद्विपरिवर्तते ॥ 10॥

*Prakriti brings forth this Universe under my aegis all sentient and unsentient beings and in this manner the wheel of samsara is set in motion.*

In Ch 13, Shri Krishna says:

महाभूतान्यङ्ककारो बुद्धिरव्यक्त मेव च ।  
इन्द्रियाणि दशैकं च पञ्च चेन्द्रियगोचराः ॥ 6॥  
इच्छा द्वेषः सुखं दुःखं सङ्घातश्चेतना धृतिः ।  
एतत्क्षेत्रं समासेन सविकारमुदाहृतम् ॥ 7॥

The above two shlokas are selected for they indicate what this Jeevatma is a composite of, we will then be clear as to what, how and why beings come forth and fulfil their destiny according to their karma and what ultimate redemption entails. The five elements, (earth, water, fire, wind and sky), ego, intellect, five senses of cognition and five of action, and the five sense objects form the field (kshetra), along with desire, aversion, happiness, sorrow and body, consciousness and firmness or perseverance. This is the conglomerate which is here termed the field where the Knower of the field (Kshetrajnya) dwells and experiences this manifestation.



यथा सर्वगतं सौक्ष्म्यादाकाशं नोपलिप्यते ।

सर्वत्रावस्थितो देहे तथात्मा नोपलिप्यते ॥ 33 ॥

*Like the subtlest of the subtle sky is not touched by other elements similarly the in dweller- Atma is not touched by all the coverings and is ever free.*

यथा प्रकाशयत्येकः कृत्स्नं लोकमिमं रविः ।

क्षेत्रं क्षेत्री तथा कृत्स्नं प्रकाशयति भारत ॥ 34 ॥

*It is this Pure Awareness the Kshetraajnya who makes everything known in this manifestation even as the Sun illumines all of Nature.*

क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञयोरेवमन्तरं ज्ञानचक्षुषा ।

भूतप्रकृतिमोक्षं च ये विदुर्यान्ति ते परम् ॥ 35 ॥

*Those wise beings who perceive this truth of the Kshetra and Kshetraajnya with the eyes of wisdom those wise beings get liberated and attain the Supreme.*

As we can see it is the veil drawn over our Pure consciousness which deludes us into believing that we are this body and mind with its desires and likes and dislikes and then gather a momentum from the same which drives further into the cycle of birth and death.

In Ch 14, Shri Krishna further expounds:

गुणानेतानतीत्य त्रीन्देही देहसमुद्भवान् ।

जन्ममृत्युजरादुःखैर्विमुक्तोऽमृतमश्नुते ॥ 20 ॥

This chapter talks about the three gunas Satva Rajas and Tamas which bind the Jeevatma in different ways to this body mind identification and samsara. Satva with happiness, Rajas with greed and Tamas with indolence and stupor. 'Having transcended the three Gunas which

have caused the body, and freed from birth, death and all kinds of sorrow, the embodied soul attains supreme bliss.' It then seems like a prerequisite to attain Supreme eternal bliss and liberation from sorrow, to transcend the Gunas. This happens when we let go of the identity to body and mind.

In Ch 15 he further adds:

ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सनातनः ।

मनःषष्ठानीन्द्रियाणि प्रकृतिस्थानि कर्षति ॥ 7 ॥

*The eternal Jivatma in this body is a fragment of my own self; and it is that alone which draws around itself the mind and five senses, which abide in Prakriti.*

The mind, five senses, body all abide in Prakriti means they are formed of, from and in Prakriti – Primordial power of manifestation. The Jivatma however is the Pure consciousness in essence My own Self which enlivens Prakriti and provides the observer to the observation of the manifest Universe through the instrument of body, mind, senses also supplied by Prakriti.

शरीरं यदवाप्नोति यच्चाप्युत्क्रामतीश्वरः ।

गृहीत्वैतानि संयाति वायुर्गन्धानिवाशयात् ॥ 8 ॥

*Even as the wind wafts scents from their seat so too Jivatama which is the controller of the body etc. taking the mind and the senses from the body which it leaves behind, forthwith migrates to the body which it acquires.*

So, this is what happens at death: the Jivatma leaves the body in the Sukshma sharir which comprises the mind, the senses (desires for objects -not the ear, nose, eyes) just like the wind wafts with the fragrance of a flower from one place to another.

श्रोत्रं चक्षुः स्पर्शनं च रसनं घ्राणमेव च ।

अधिष्ठाय मनश्चायं विषयानुपसेवते ॥ 9॥

*It is while dwelling in the senses of hearing sight touch taste and smell, as well as in the mind that the Jivatma enjoys the objects of senses.*

उत्तमः पुरुषस्त्वन्यः परमात्मेत्युदाहृतः ।

यो लोकत्रयमाविश्य बिभर्त्यव्यय ईश्वरः ॥ 17॥

*Yet, the supreme person is other than these, who, having encompassed all the three worlds, upholds and maintains all, and has been spoken of as the imperishable Lord and the Supreme spirit.*

यस्मात्क्षरमतीतोऽहमक्षरादपि चोत्तमः ।

अतोऽस्मि लोके वेदे च प्रथितः पुरुषोत्तमः ॥ 18॥

*Since I am wholly beyond the perishable world of matter or Kshetra, and am superior even to the imperishable should, Jivatama, hence I am known as the Purushottama, the Supreme Self, in the world as well as in the Vedas.*

In Ch 16, he says:

तानहं द्विषतः क्रूरान्संसारेषु नराधमान् ।

क्षिपाम्यजस्रमशुभानासुरीष्वेव योनिषु ॥ 19॥

*Those haters, sinful, cruel and vilest among men, I cast again and again into demonical wombs in this world.*

आसुरीं योनिमापन्ना मूढा जन्मनि जन्मनि ।

मामप्राप्यैव कौन्तेय ततो यान्त्यधमां गतिम् ॥ 20॥

*Failing to reach me, Arjuna, those stupid persons are born life after life in demonic wombs and then verily sink down to a still lower plane.*

To summarise what the Bhagwad Gita is telling us:

We are the Atma – Pure consciousness in truth not different from Eternal, immutable, all-pervading pure Awareness, covered with the veil of Maaya – body, mind, senses, five elements, desires, likes, dislikes, woven with the three threads of the Gunas. It is the enjoyer and observer of this Leela of the Gunas and Prakruti while it inhabits the body.

What is born must necessarily die and what dies takes birth again -this is only a part of Prakruti which is in an eternal state of change or mutation.

What dies is this body and the Jivatma leaves with the mind, senses and samskaras and vasanas like the wind wafts over with the fragrance of flowers.

This cycle of birth and death is indeed hard to escape as this Maya of mine, is difficult to overcome. The one who is a jnani and knows the inner dweller as one in all, holds on to the feet of the Lord and even the one who is able to remember Him at the time of leaving this body, or the one who transcends the three Gunas is liberated from this cycle of birth, death and sorrow. The one who can see through the Kshetra and Ksetrajnya play abides in Supreme Bliss.

Those that believe only in the reality of this material form and possess demoniacal qualities they fall into lower forms of life and go to the lower realms of existence.

The Lord is above and beyond this entire Leela and is therefore called Purushottama.

It is with this understanding that we now realise, death is the death of the physical body, the person inside does not die - if you ask how do we know there is someone there after death then ask how do we know there is no one? The subtle body goes on to other realms with the memories and samskaras – tendencies carried over. The awareness is immortal and all pervading, it does not come or go anywhere.

In the latter part of the last century Ian Stevenson, who was a psychiatrist and deeply interested in perceptual studies, undertook research into stories which little children (between age 2 and 5 years) told of their former lives. He collected 3000 cases which could not have in any way been concocted or manipulated, which proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that there was no other explanation to such verified stories except rebirth. He has written many books, one of which is titled the Biology of Reincarnation, wherein he cites 200 cases which show the stigma on the physical body of the child recounting his past birth e.g. Gunshot wounds and birth marks. He could continue his research only thanks to a huge donation made by Chester Carlston, the inventor of Xerox technology, whose wife, Dorris, was interested in Hinduism and Zen Buddhism; they made huge donations towards Zen monasteries and he even had a zen name Daitokuin Zenshin Carlson Koji.

Brian Weiss came to believe through his efforts to understand phobias and phobias. Under the spell of hypnosis one of his early patients Christine slipped into what she termed her past life. The story goes on from there how she got over her phobia. The book Many lives Many Masters gives many such case histories. He himself is now a staunch believer in God after being an agnostic.

Raymond Moody also a physician and psychiatrist collected over eight hundred cases of near-death experiences which seemed quite alike and described different realms in the afterlife.

Our body it is estimated has 68 trillion cells of which only 30 trillion are our cells the rest are bugs (bacteria etc.)! So, what is it we call “me”? This reminds me of the great Das Bodh shloka in which one is reminded what we call our home is inhabited by cockroaches, lizards and many insects who all feel it is their home! So how can we assume ownership? Besides it is estimated that the gastric mucosa is renewed every five days, the liver every one month the red blood cells every 120 days and so on. Death and birth are happening every moment in this body; it is not a onetime event. What happens at the time of death we have seen above. Rebirth then takes place in other realms and finally once again at a suitable and appropriate time and place we reincarnate in this samsara to start again. Yoga Vasishtha even explains the existence of a multiverse i.e. Universes in Universes with different dimensions as their norm. It is not surprising that this knowledge existed since time immemorial.

**\* Rigveda 1.24.1-2:**

Question: Whom do we consider the purest? Who is the most enlightened one in entire world. Who provides us mother and father again in the world after gifting us ultimate bliss or Mukti?

Answer: The self-enlightening, eternal, ever-free Ishwar alone is most pure. He alone provides us mother and father again in the world after gifting us ultimate bliss or Mukti.

**Yajurveda 19.47:**

There are two paths for the soul. One path Pitriyan provides birth again and again through union of father and mother, good and bad deeds, happiness and sorrow. The other path of Devayana frees the soul from cycle of birth and death and provides bliss of salvation. The

whole world reverberates with both these paths. And after both, the soul again takes birth as progeny of father and mother.

### **Atharvaveda 5.1.2:**

One who conducts noble actions obtains noble lives in next births with strong body and sharp intellect. Those who conduct bad deeds get birth in lower species. To experience the fruits of past actions is natural trait of soul. After death, the soul resides in Vayu, Jala, Aushadhi etc and again enters the womb to take next birth.

All of the above is just a tip of the iceberg of knowledge which our Rishis received in the depth of their meditations and to us does not seem unbelievable at all.

So, to conclude rebirth happens every moment and at the time of death the Jivatma leaves in the sukshma sharir is born into subtler realms and at the appropriate time when it finds the right milieu wherein its karma will fructify it takes birth in this Bhulok. The whole of the Bhagwad Gita is a practicum on how to be liberated from this cycle which ends in sorrow, disease, old age and death!

## About the Author

Dr. Shirin Venkat, a distinguished obstetrician and gynecologist, has dedicated over 45 years to women's health. Graduating as a gold medalist from Grant Medical College, Mumbai, she further honed her expertise in England, earning an FRCOG. Throughout her career, she has worked in high-volume obstetric centers in Dubai and Mumbai, managing over 10,000 deliveries annually and developing significant expertise in high-risk pregnancies.



Beyond her professional achievements, Dr. Shirin has been a passionate advocate for maternal health. She spearheaded initiatives like the SuPrabha Ganga Yatra (SGY) and Hara Narmade Yatra (HNY), raising awareness about maternal mortality. Her dedication to this cause led her to meet esteemed figures such as Hon. President APJ Abdul Kalam and Hon. President Pratibha Patil at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Raised by a deeply spiritual mother, Dr. Shirin's early travels across India to meet Enlightened Masters profoundly influenced her spiritual journey. She remains committed to her spiritual practices, integrating them seamlessly with her professional life. As a disciple of Swami Rama and later Swami Veda Bharati, she emphasizes the importance of spirituality in achieving a balanced life.

Dr. Shirin's contributions extend to literature and media. She has authored several books, including:

1. Holistic Motherhood (available for free download on <https://www.jaypeedigital.com/book/9789352500444> )



2. Jeevansar Kathamrut (available for free download on <https://iire.in/Books.aspx> )
3. Your Questions Answered
4. Shiv Goraksha by Mrunalini Joshi Translated into English (available for free download on <https://iire.in/Books.aspx> )
5. Essays on Ancient Wisdom (available for free download on <https://iire.in/Books.aspx> )

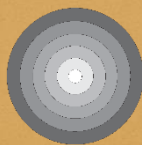
Additionally, she shares insights on her YouTube channel.

Dr. Shirin strongly believes that integrating spirituality with professional pursuits leads to a more fulfilling and balanced life.

**Key Highlights:**

- Over 45 years of experience as an obstetrician and gynecologist.
- Gold medalist from Grant Medical College, Mumbai; FRCOG from England.
- Expertise in high-risk pregnancies, working in Dubai and Mumbai.
- Advocate for maternal health awareness, leading initiatives like SGY and HNY.
- Disciple of Swami Rama and Swami Veda Bharati.
- Authored several books on women's health and spirituality, available for free download.
- Active YouTube channels share spiritual and professional insights.





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