

In the first half year of the school, we learned about the meaning of “Dharma”. Now we are going to learn about “Vedanta Philosophy”.

Student: What is “Vedanta Philosophy”?

Teacher: I am glad that after you learned the meaning of “Dharma”, you have curiosity to learn more about the subjects related to “Dharma”. Earlier, one person asks me the same question “What is *Vedanta*?” It reminds me of a story.

Once a great teacher of Vedanta was invited by a group of people to give talk on Vedanta. When he arrived at the lecture hall he asked the audience, “Do you know what I am going to tell you?” The people all said, “No.” “Then I shall not say anything to you, because you have no background.” Saying this, the teacher left the hall. The following week he was again invited by the people, but the leaders of the group planned in advance. They told the audience to say yes if the teacher asked the same question. The teacher was escorted to the hall, and sure enough, he asked the same question. This time the audience replied, “Yes.” Immediately the teacher said, You know everything then, so I have nothing to say,” and he left. Again the leaders made a plan for the teacher’s next visit and asked half of the audience to say yes and the other half to say no. When the teacher came for the third time he repeated the same question, “Do you know what I am going to tell you?” and the audience responded as they had been instructed. Then the teacher said, “Those who have said no, please learn from those who have said yes.” Without another word he left. The people were puzzled and did not know what to do. They finally decided that the next time they would simply remain silent. After repeated requests the teacher came once more and asked the same question. This time he did not get any answer. He noticed that the whole audience was absorbed in deep silence, and he knew that this was the right time to talk to them about Vedanta.

Now let us understand the meaning of “What is Vedanta?” It has very vast meaning but it can be summarized as under:

Vedanta is the culmination of knowledge, the sacred wisdom of the Hindu sages, the transcendental experience of the seers of Truth. It is the essence, or conclusion, of the Vedas. As the Upanishads come at the end of the Vedas, so it is called *Vedanta*. Literally, *Veda* means knowledge and *anta* means end.

Now let us understand the philosophy of Vedanta. I am coming to your question. To understand the philosophy of Vedanta, we have to understand the tenets of Vedanta. There are five main tenets of Vedanta and they are as under:

1. *Brahman* is the ultimate reality
2. The universe is ever changing
3. Every person is potentially divine
4. How does one manifest the divinity within?
5. Truth is one and Universal

Let us discuss each tenet of the Vedanta Philosophy.

1. *Brahman* is the ultimate reality

*Brahman* is the ultimate reality, the one without a second. It is Sat- Existence, - Chit - Consciousness,-Ananda-Bliss, Absolute. It is beyond name and form, devoid of qualities, without beginning or end. It is the unchanging Truth, beyond space, time, and causation. But this vast, infinite *Brahman* manifests itself as the Universe and the individual beings through its inscrutable power of *maya*. Thus the one becomes many. When *Brahman* is associated with its *maya*, it is called God, or *Ishvara*.

Student: What is the meaning of Sat-Chit-Ananda?

Teacher: Very good question. One must understand the meaning of Sat-Chit-Ananda. This is our true nature and one must strive for it. Let us understand each word:

- a) **Sat**: Some people misunderstood the word "Sat" as truth or saying truth. The word Sat implies the meaning –"Being", "Existence" etc. Existence of real truth –That is "You are Divine." It implies that each person is "Divine" and has qualities of the "God." You are awakened soul and you are the Son of the God (Rajkumar of the King of Kings –GOD).
- b) **Chit**: Chit means Chetna (consciousness). You are consciousness and not the body. You are part of the super consciousness (God). Our real identity is in the form of Chetna (consciousness). You are dead without it.
- c) **Ananda**: It is called Bliss. It is different from the Joy, happiness, pleasure etc. The joy, happiness and pleasure are all related to the body (made of 5 elements –Earth, Water, Air, Fire and Ether). Bliss (Ananda) is related to consciousness or Aatma (Soul).

Student: *Brahman* is the ultimate reality, unchanging truth beyond space, time and causation. Can you please explain the meaning of Absolute Truth, beyond space, time and causation?

Teacher: Sure, my dear student. You have more eagerness to know the truth of the God.

To understand the Absolute Truth that is beyond space, time and causation, one must know that there is only one GOD who manifests multiple in the form of Universe. God is infinite and become finite when it become multiple in the form of all the things in Universe. How has the Infinite, the Absolute, become the finite? In order to illustrate it, please see below a chart:

Here is the Absolute (a), and this is the Universe (b). The absolute has become the Universe. By this is meant not only the material world, but the mental world, the spiritual world- heavens and earths, and in fact , everything that exists. Mind is the name of change, and body the name of another change, and so on, an all these changes compose our universe. This Absolute (a) has become the universe (b) by coming through time, space, and causation (c). This is the central idea of Advaita (non-duality). Time, space and causation are like the glass through which the Absolute is seen, and when it is seen on the lower side, it appears as the universe.

(a) The Absolute
(c) Time Space Causation
(b) The Universe

Now the question is: What are time, space, and causation? Advaita means non-duality-there are not two, but one. Yet we see that here is proposition that the Absolute is manifesting itself as many, through the veil of time, space, and causation. Therefore it seems that here are two: The Absolute and *maya*, the sum total of time, space, and causation. It seems apparently very convincing that there are two. To have two, we must have two absolute, independent existences which cannot be caused. But time, space, and causation cannot be said to be independent existences. In the first place, time is entirely a dependent existence; it changes with every change of our mind. Sometimes in a dream one imagines that one has lived several years; at other times several months have passed as one second. So time is entirely dependent on our state of mind. Secondly, the idea of time sometimes vanishes altogether. So with space. We cannot know what space is. Yet it is there, indefinable, and cannot exist separate from anything else. So with causation.

The whole of this universe, therefore, is, as it were, a peculiar form [of the Absolute]. The absolute is the ocean, while you and I, and suns and stars, and everything else are various waves of that ocean. And what makes the waves different? Only the form - and that form is time, space, and causation, which are all entirely dependent on the wave. As soon as the waves goes they vanish. As soon as the individual gives up this *maya* it vanishes for him and he becomes free.

### What is Maya?

**Student:** Sir, it is very interesting. However, if you can throw some light on word "*maya*". What is "*maya*"?

**Teacher: Maya (मयत् or māyā):** In philosophy the word origin of *maya* is derived from the Sanskrit roots 'ma' ("not") and 'ya', meaning "that". So the meaning of Maya is "that is not" but which appears to be real. Maya is held to be an illusion in philosophy & it is said to be a veil of the true Self - the Universal Spirit known as Brahman. Maya is a subtle force that creates the grand illusion that the phenomenal world that we see is real.

Maya is said to be neither true nor untrue. Since Universal Spirit (Brahman) is the only truth so Maya cannot be true. Since Maya causes the material world to be seen, it cannot be untrue also. Hence, Maya is described as indescribable. She has two principle functions - one is to veil the Universal Spirit

(Brahman) and obscure and conceal it from our consciousness. The other is to present and promulgate the material world and the veil of duality instead of the Universal Spirit (Brahman).

In the darkness, just like a rope is confused for a snake & this illusion gets destroyed when true knowledge of the rope is perceived in the light. Similarly, in the darkness of the night, a pole may be mistaken for a ghost. As the darkness is removed, the ghost disappears; only the pole remains as reality. Similarly, Maya's illusion gets destroyed for a person when he/she perceives Brahman with transcendental knowledge & light. When the light of Universal Spirit (Brahman) falls on Maya, it disappears.

### Vivekananda on Maya



This universe is maya - Vivekananda

Maya is used incorrectly to denote illusion or delusion. - **Vivekananda**

### Ramakrishna Parmahansa on Maya



Ramakrishna acknowledged the power of **Maya** in life. He was all love and reverence for maya, perceiving in it a mysterious and majestic expression of Divinity. To him Maya was God.

In the guru Ramakrishna's experience, **Maya** was divine. Ramakrishna gave it a spiritual status, seeing in it the manifestation of Chit and Ananda." Ramakrishna had a "vision of the divine **Maya**, the inscrutable Power of God, by which the universe is created and sustained."

According to Ramakrishna, **Maya** projects and withdraws the world.

Further, "**Maya** . . . is the Mother of the Universe, identical with the Brahman of Vedanta and with the Atman of Yoga.

Ramakrishna discovered that **maya** operates in the relative world in two ways and he termed these "avidyamaya" and "vidyamaya." Avidyamaya sustains lower planes, but vidyamaya is enlightening, including qualities like kindness. Vidyamaya elevates a man to a better consciousness. With the help of vidyamaya he then gets free of **maya**, if only for a while. The two aspects of **maya** are two forces of creation.

Ramakrishna said further: "When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive - neither creating nor preserving nor destroying - I call Him Brahman or Purusha . . . When I think of Him as active - creating, preserving, and destroying - I call Him Sakti or Maya or Prakriti, the Personal God.

To Ramakrishna **maya** itself was God - everything was God - [**maya**] was one of the faces of [the Godhead].

As per Ramakrishna: **Maya** cannot be distinguished from the supreme [Godhead]

As per Ramakrishna: The mighty weaver (**Maya**) is none other than the Divine Mother.

As per Ramakrishna: **Maya** releases from bondage.

"I tell you the truth: there is nothing wrong in your being in the world." - Ramakrishna

### Lord Krishna in Bhagwat Gita details about the 'Maya' in its various chapters.



*"yavat sanjayate kincit  
sattvam sthava-jangamam  
kshetra-kshetrajna-samyogat  
tad viddhi bharatarsabha"* ([Bhaqwat Gita: Chapter Thirteen verse 27](#))

"Sri Krishna said: O Arjuna, Wherever a being is born, whether unmoving or moving, know that it is from the union between the field and the knower of the field. (Purusha is the knower of the field; Prakriti is the field; Shiva is another name for the knower of the field and Shakti is the field; Spirit is another name for the knower of the field and Matter (Prakriti) is the field).

*"prakrityaiva cha karmani  
kriyamanani sarvasah  
yah pasyati tathatmanam  
akartaram sa pasyati"* ([Bhaqwat Gita: Chapter Thirteen verse 30](#))

"Sri Krishna said: O Arjuna, One who can see that all activities are performed by the nature (Maya) alone and sees that the self does nothing, actually sees." (The Self is the silent witness).

*"ishvarah sarva-bhutanam  
hrd-dese 'rjuna tishthati  
bhramayan sarva-bhutani  
yantrarudhani mayaya"* ([Bhaqwat Gita: Chapter Eighteen verse 61](#))

"Sri Krishna said: O Arjuna, The Supreme God is situated in everyone's heart, and moves them to act by his divine Maya, who are seated as on a machine, made of the material energy."

***What is Maya?***

***“Brahma satyam jagat mithya” Shankaracharya***

Translation: “Brahman is the Reality, the universe is an illusion Relatively Real”

- World is Mithya.
- Mithya has no equivalent English word.
- Mithya incorrectly translated as ‘Illusion’
- If the world is illusion then there is no need to worry about ethics and welfare of others. Wrong translation!
- Mithya can at best be translated as “Relatively real”
- Any object that undergoes change is only relatively real. Real is something that is unchangeable and Brahman alone is that reality.

**The universe is ever changing**



- Buddhist metaphor of circle of fire.
- Rapidly waving a fire wand in circle creates illusion of a circle.
- Existence of universe is like existence of this circle of fire.
- Buddhist found “Shunyata”(void) beyond this impermanent world.
- Vedantin found Brahman beyond this changing world.

Vedanta view - You do need “Fire Wand” to make this circle of fire.

## **Every person is potentially divine**

- Who are you?
- What is soul Atma?
- Wrong to translate Atma to Soul. Soul is a western concept that has different meaning than Atma.
- Atma reincarnates while western concept of soul does not reincarnate.
- Atma is divine while western concept of soul is not divine.
- Let's not mix up the two to avoid the confusion.

We believe in the concept of Atma and not soul.

## **What is Atma?**

- Ears are needed for hearing.
- But ears alone are not enough. Without the sense organ inside your brain, you cannot hear. Sensations from ears must reach sense organ in brain.
- Even that is not enough. If you are engrossed in reading, & bell rings and you do not hear anything.
- Your mind must be attached to this sensation. Beyond ears and sense organ, you need mind.
- Even that is not enough. Mind is just a carrier. There must be a reaction from within to complete the perception of hearing. Mind presents the information to intellect and intellect makes decision using the help of memory and from that comes the reaction.
- Even that is not enough!!
- Everything is continuously changing as discussed earlier. We are also continuously changing. So what is it that gives unity to the changing whole of our being?

**All these perceptions/impressions must be gathered, unified, coordinated, and completed upon something which is stationary like how a screen of movie theater must be stationary to unify the moving rays of light to show meaningful movie.**

**And that is what we call as "Atma"**

**Beyond Mind and intellect, we have ruler of our body and that is our Atma.**

## Divinity of Atma

- Atma is stationary with respect to continuously changing world.
- So Atma must necessarily be stationary with respect to space and time.
- Atma must be beyond space and time.
- That which is beyond space and time must necessarily be infinite.
- We know that Brahman is divine and infinite.
- There cannot be two infinities. (Simple mathematical law) Part of an infinite is infinite in nature.
- So our Atma must necessarily be identical in nature to Brahman!
- Our Atma is Divine as well! Its just that due to nature of Maya we assume ourselves to be a mere body.
- We have mirror in front of us that is dusty and prevents us from viewing our true nature. Clean the dust and know yourself to be infinite, unchanging, real, master of this universe.
- Self-realization(Moksha) is realizing the fact that we are not body but infinite Brahman, Sat-Chit-Anand.
- We are potentially divine.
- Our goal in life is to manifest this divinity by doing good deeds.
- **4 Mahavakyas of Vedant**
- 1. **tat tvam asi (Saam Veda)** "That Thou Art" or "You are that(Brahman)"
- 2. **aham brahmāsmi (Yajur Veda)**- "I am Brahman", or "I am Divine
- 3. **prajñānam brahma (Rig Veda)** - "Prajña is Brahman", or "Brahman is Prajña"
- 4. **ayam ātmā brahma (Atharva Veda)** - "I am this Self (Atman) that is Brahman"
- **We are divine in nature!!!**

## Can we realize our true nature?

- Is it possible to realize in this life that our true nature is divine and identical to that of Brahman?
- Answer is YES, we can! There is nothing in Vedanta that cannot be experimented and verified just as how science conducts experiments.



- Science is used purely for external world. Its methods are called third person empiricism i.e. third person can verify the results of the experiment.
- Adhyatma-Vidya (Inner science) is used for our inner world. Its methods are called first person empiricism i.e. person who conducts the experiments is the only one who experiences the result.
- Latest trend in neuroscience uses the techniques of inner science. Boundaries between inner/external science is being bridged.

### YOGA

- Yoga means union with divine.
- Swami Vivekananda provided 4 different YOGA techniques to realize our true nature
  - Gyan(Jnana) Yoga(Path of Knowledge)
  - Raaj Yoga (Path of Meditation)
  - Karma Yoga (Path of Action)
  - Bhakti Yoga (Path of Devotion)
- They are not mutually exclusive. Practice one or more of all of these 4 YOGAs based on your own tendencies and gunas.

### Jnana Yoga

- This is path of Knowledge.
- Sravan: Listening/reading Vedantic knowledge
- Manan: Reflecting on the Vedantic knowledge
- Viveka: Capacity to differentiate between real and unreal.

**“Neti Neti”** (Not this, Not this) method.

Anything that you perceive that is not real(unchanging) must be rejected. Keep repeating that until you arrive at real(Brahman)

### Raaj Yoga

- This is path of Meditation.

- Patanjali's Yoga Sutra provide 8 step method(Ashtang Yoga) to realize the truth

1. Yama (Ahimsa, Satya, etc)
2. Niyama (Santosha, Svadhyaya etc)
3. Asana(Discipline of body, postures)
4. Pranayama(Control of life force)
5. Pratyahara(Withdrawal of senses from objects)
6. Dharana(Concentration)
7. Dhyana (Undisturbed flow of thought)
8. Samadhi (Merging with oneness)

## **Karma Yoga**

- This is path of Action.
- Any action that takes you towards realizing your divine nature is good
- Any action that takes you away from realizing your divine nature is bad
- Do good to others.
- Why should we be good to others?

Atma in you is identical in nature to Brahman.

Atma in others is identical in nature to Brahman as well.

We all are connected by a divine connection.

The apparent difference is because of Maya.

Helping others is helping yourself and the entire universe.

- Actions must be unselfish.

Selfish action binds you to the Maya.

Unselfish action frees you from the Maya.

- Bhagvad Gita provides solution – Do not let personal gain (fruits of action) to be the purpose of your action.

- Work for the work's sake.
- No matter what you work on(job, study, play etc), mind should be focused on the action alone. Do not think about the end result of the work.

## Bhakti Yoga

- This is path of Devotion or Path of Love.
- Bhakti-Yoga is a real, genuine search for the divine, a search beginning, continuing, and ending in love.
- The advantage of Bhakti Yoga is that it is the easiest and the most natural way to reach the great divine
- Divinity can manifest itself in multiple forms in this universe. All the Avatars and Ishta Devtas are nothing but manifestation of this divinity. Bhakti involves worshipping this Saguna Bramhan or personal god/Ishta Devta.
- The most beautiful thing about Bhakti Yoga is that it involves personal relationship with the divine in various forms such as Master-servant, parent-child, friend-friend, Beloved-lover etc
- More natural for humans to follow Bhakti Yoga that is grounded in Love and Devotion
- Personal ego dissolves in the love for the god and all bondages are broken with this material world & one unites with the divinity.

- **Nine forms of Bhakti**

(1) *śravaṇa* ("listening" to the scriptural stories),

(2) *kīrtana* ("praising," group singing)

(3) *smarana* ("remembering" god)

(4) *pāda-sevana* (rendering service), (5) *arcana* (worshiping an image), (6) *vandana*(paying homage)

(7) *dāsya* (servitude),

(8) *sākhya* (friendship),

(9) *ātma-nivedana*(complete surrender of the self)

## Truth is one and Universal

Two most important virtues that we learn from Vedanta

- **Be unselfish:** Helping other is same as helping yourself and the entire universe. And it is the most natural thing to do.
- **Be fearless:** Our real nature is that of Brahman. So fear from what? Destroy all thoughts that weaken your mind.
- **“Ekam Sat, Viprah Bahudha Vadanti”**

– Rig Veda

- Meaning that which exists is One, sages call it by various names.
- Advait Vedanta is one interpretation of Vedas. It is not the only one. Shankaracharya and Vivekananda promoted this thought.
- Other Rishis interpreted Vedanta in slightly different ways like Vishistadvaita Vedant, Shuddha Advaita Vedant etc
- But divinity of Atma is recognized in all those interpretation.

## Truth is one and Universal

### Indra’s Net



- ❖ *Metaphor for the cosmology and reality of this universe from Atharva Veda*
- ❖ *Indra’s net spreads in all direction and is infinite*
- ❖ *Each node of the net is a jewel*
- ❖ *Every jewel reflects all other jewels of the net*

- ❖ *No jewel exists independent of the other jewels of the net*
  - *Most profound concept of interconnectedness of universe*
  - *Each of us is a jewel within this net*
  - *Each of us reflects entire universe within ourselves*
  - *Principle of Bandhu - Each of us is intricately connected to others*
- ***Ekam Sat, Viprah Bahudha Vadanti***

– *Rig Veda*

- Truth is one!
- Truth claims are many!!
- Truth can be described in many ways hence many Truth Claims.
- Vedanta is a Truth Claim based on Vedas and experiences of Rishis both ancient and modern.
- Buddhists, Jains, Christians, Muslims all have their own truth claim based on their unique experiences.
- Truth is not a property of one religion and Truth Claims can be contradictory.
- Declaring my Truth Claim to be the only Truth and disrespect for others is called fanaticism.
- Real inter-faith/inter-religion relation stands on the pillar of mutual respect for each other.