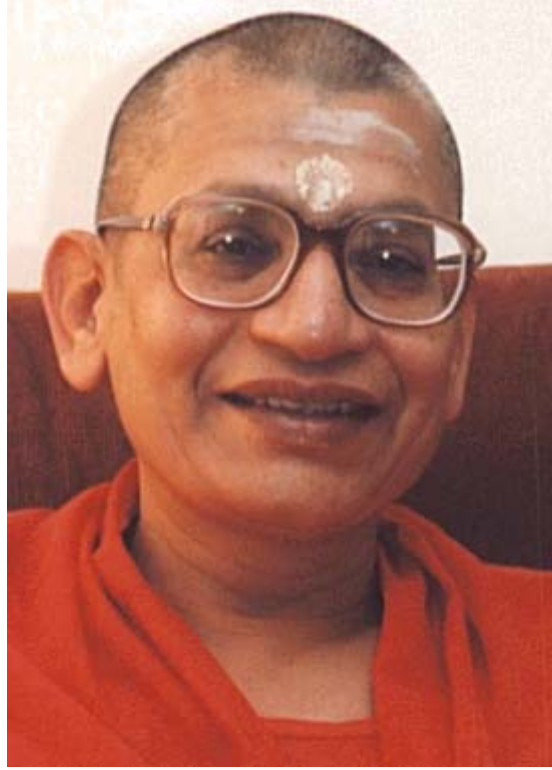


Vision of Vedānta



Satsang

with

Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

<http://www.arshavidya.org>

Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati

Sri Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati, a disciple of Sri Swami Dayananda Saraswati, is an outstanding teacher of Vedānta. He expounds Vedānta with a simplicity and directness that make it easy to assimilate. Having studied and worked in the United States prior to becoming a *sannyāsi*, Swami Vidadatmananda is familiar with the lifestyles of India as well as the West. With this insight, he reaches out to students across both cultures, with equal ease.

Swamiji is traditional in his teaching and preserves the entirety of the age-old wisdom of the Upaniṣads. He takes a contemporary approach in his lectures, which enables the student to relate to his teaching and imbibe this knowledge without effort.

Swami Vidadatmananda is the resident teacher at *Tattvatirtha*, which is situated in the western outskirts of Ahmedabad in Gujarat. As the name suggests, it is a center for learning the *tattva*, or truth, as revealed in the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā. Apart from English, Swamiji teaches and writes in Gujarati as well. He also conducts management seminars with a view to illustrate the relevance of Vedānta in modern management.

Swamiji visits the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam at Saylorsburg, PA, every year, to conduct Vedānta classes and camps from spring through summer. At this time, he also travels all over the US and Canada delivering lectures.

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Human Pursuits

Question

What is the purpose of human life?

Answer

Every human being always wants something or the other. The purpose of human life becomes evident when we examine what it is that we want. Even though every desire seems to be different from every other, when we examine each of them, we find that there is only one desire that is behind all the desires. This is the desire to be free. Every living being wants freedom. Nobody wants to be dependent, nobody wants bondage, nobody wants helplessness, nobody wants to be compelled and nobody wants to be controlled by someone else. This is the common desire behind all desires. There cannot be any living being that wants to be controlled. The human being can articulate what he or she wants, and it is, 'I don't want to be dependent'. Dependence is unhappiness: *sarvaṃ paravaśaṃ duḥkham, sarvamātmāvaśaṃ sukham* [Manu Smṛti, 4-1], being free and in control of myself (*ātmavaśam*) is happiness.

Whenever I see myself as being dependent, being bound, being limited, in control of someone else, and thus helpless, I become unhappy. There is a lot of helplessness in our lives. There are many things that I want to do, but cannot. There are many things that I do not want to see happen, but they do happen. Thus I find that I am a helpless being. My attempt is to become free from this sense of helplessness, this bondage. However, the manner in which I am trying to become free may not be right.

The purpose of human life is to become free. Behind every desire, there is the desire to be free. When I feel bound in some way, say, in not having enough money, I go after money. If I feel that I do not have enough power, I go after more power. So wherever I feel a lack, which makes me feel bound, I go after it. Everybody is pursuing freedom and nothing else, while not knowing what this freedom is and where it is to be found. We often invite bondage in pursuit of freedom.

Everything that gives me some freedom, comes at a price. Every solution brings some other problems along with it. There is no such thing as absolute freedom or pure

gain. There is some loss involved in every gain. Sometimes the price I pay is even more than what I gain. When we realize this, our search for freedom becomes more directed. The freedom has to be sought from within myself, rather than outside myself. While I think that the world makes me helpless, it is in fact my own impulses that make me helpless. My likes and dislikes impel me and make me helpless. When this is understood, the process of seeking freedom becomes a process of seeking freedom from my own inner impulses in terms of my likes and dislikes. *Karma yoga* and *jñāna yoga* are the means towards this end. The first freedom is to be obtained from likes and dislikes. The final freedom is to be free from the ego, the sense of individuality, which is a product of ignorance. It finally comes about by recognizing that I am always free. True freedom is recognizing that freedom is my very nature. I take myself to be bound, but that is a notion and not the truth about myself. Ultimately, freedom is to be gained by knowing that I am always free.

Question

Why did the Lord create this world? What is the purpose of creation?

Answer

This is how the creation is explained. One Lord becomes many. So, what is it that existed before creation? “*Sadeva somya idam agre āsīt ekam eva advitīyam*: O dear boy, in the beginning (before its creation) this whole universe was *sat*, one without a second” [Chāndōgyōpaniṣad, 6-2-1]. The Upaniṣad says, this universe before its creation was *sat*, *brahman*, one without a second. Before the creation of the universe, one secondless *brahman* was all there was! It really means that *brahman* had no resources to create this universe. For creation to take place, one requires some resources. For example, the pot-maker requires clay, the material cause, and the potter’s wheel, the instrumental cause. *Brahman* has no resources to create this universe. Still there is a desire, “May I become many”. Hence, the One became many, which means that the One *appeared* as many. What we call ‘creation of the universe’ is nothing but one Lord appearing as the universe. Therefore, the creation is nothing but an appearance. If creation were real, we would have to search for a cause. However, what is the cause for something that is not real? Where there is a rope, I see a snake. If the snake were real, then there could be a

question as to why and how the rope became the snake. But the snake is just a projection, there is only an appearance of the snake. Therefore, there is no question as to why the rope became a snake. Similarly, in as much as the creation is not real, the question ‘why’ has no meaning.

Such an answer may not satisfy some of us, but this is the answer. Another answer that can be given is that God desired, and therefore there is creation. The Upaniṣad says that the Lord, in the beginning of creation, desired, “*saḥ akāmayata bahu syām prajayeya iti: May I become many. May I be born*” [Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 2-6]. What prompted the first desire?

Let us take the example of waking up in the morning. What wakes me up from the sleep? Is it the alarm clock that wakes me up? But one may wake up without the alarm clock or one may not wake up even with an alarm clock. So there is something that wakes me up. It is the unfinished agenda that wakes me up. When I go to sleep at night, some agenda remains unfinished. My unfinished and unfulfilled desires that require to be fulfilled, wake me up. Similarly also, what we call the dissolution can be considered as the whole universe sleeping, and what we call the creation is when the sleeping universe wakes up. Thus the model for the creation is somewhat similar to our daily experience of sleeping and waking up.

What happens when I go to sleep? It is not that I become nonexistent in sleep. I continue to exist, but my personality becomes un-manifest. All my desires, memories, complexes, are still there; they merge into the causal state. The effect merging into the cause is called dissolution. The cause, manifesting as the effect, is called creation. This is how Vedānta explains creation.

The cause manifesting as the effect, like a lump of gold manifesting as ornaments is creation, and the ornaments melting back as the lump of gold is dissolution. Therefore, what we call creation is like waking up from sleep and the cause for waking up are the desires, the combined desires of all the living beings. Hence, the first desire that occurred at the beginning of the creation is the sum total of all the desires of all the living beings. Those desires unfold as the creation goes on. Then the purpose of the creation is to provide all the living beings with an appropriate field in order to fulfill their desires, in

order to do whatever they want to do. That is why we find that in this creation there is provision for all the living beings. Whatever any living being requires is all provided for. That is one way to look at the purpose of the creation, i.e., to provide a field of action for all living beings.

Question

What is the definition of happiness?

Answer

Happiness is subjective. When I am happy, I know that I am happy. I do not need verification from some one else that I am happy. I am happy when I am pleased with myself. Unhappiness is when I am not pleased with myself. When am I pleased with myself? When I find myself to be acceptable to me. When I find myself not acceptable to myself, then I am not pleased with myself, and I am unhappy.

When do I find myself unacceptable to me? When do I not like myself? I do not like myself when I am the greedy self, the angry self, the hating self, the reacting self or the helpless self. I do not like myself whenever reactions such as *kāma* (desire), *krodha* (anger), and *lobha* (greed) arise in me, or when my *rāga-dveṣas* or likes and dislikes appear. Whenever any of these impulses arise in me, I do not like myself. I do not like the angry I, or the greedy I, or the desiring I. Whenever any of these feelings arises, I do not like myself.

When do I like myself? It is when I find myself to be loving, giving, charitable, compassionate and free. Therefore, whenever there is the feeling of freedom, loving and giving in my mind, I find myself likeable and acceptable. So by definition, happiness is in ‘being pleased with myself’. I am pleased with myself when I am a good person, a kind person, when I am reaching out, charitable, kind and loving. Thus happiness is in kindness, charity, compassion, love etc. I feel good when I go out of my way to help somebody, even though it may involve some inconvenience or some exertion or pain.

Whenever we do something good, we feel good about ourselves. Something in me may tell me, “It does not matter. Tell him a lie. You will benefit by the untruth and also get away with it”. But I resist that temptation and tell the truth, which means that I

may lose an advantage that I might have had, but I feel good about myself. I feel good that I could overcome my own temptation and greed and assert honesty or truthfulness. Whenever we act in an honest or truthful manner, whenever we are able to follow the values, we respect ourselves. We respect the truthful self, the honest self, the self that follows the values. Happiness comes when I follow the values. When I do that, I am able to live up to my expectations. Everybody expects himself or herself to be an honest person, a loving and kind person. Therefore when I find myself acting in accordance with these values, I am happy and pleased with myself.

Question

How can I not be attached to happiness?

Answer

We are already attached to happiness. Happiness is our very nature. Therefore to desire happiness is not willful. When we say, “Do not get attached to happiness”, we mean, “Do not get attached to the means of happiness coming from some source other than within you”. When happiness comes from something or somebody, then that somebody can also make you unhappy. Somebody can make me happy by becoming agreeable to me, thus creating the feeling in me that I am acceptable. By accepting me, that person creates happiness in me. Then it is quite possible that the same person may not accept me. If this happens, the same person also becomes the source of unhappiness. This is what is meant by attachment.

Be as objective to happiness that comes from outside as you are to unhappiness that comes from outside. If something can make me happy, that can also make me unhappy. Therefore I have to discover the happiness from myself. That does not mean I have to become indifferent to the world. Detachment does not mean I become indifferent to the world. It means not making demands on the world. That is what becoming free from attachment means. I have to slowly become a non-demanding person. That will help me to own up what I have. When I make demands, I disown what I already have. When I make a demand for happiness from someone, I have already concluded that I am not that happiness. But that is not a right conclusion. Try to give up demands as much as

you can. That will set the ground for discovering from within, what it is that you are seeking from elsewhere.

Dharma

Question

What is the meaning of the word *dharma*?

Answer

The word *dharma* is derived from the root, *dhṛ*, which means, to sustain or to uphold. By definition, ‘*dharayati iti dharmah*’, that which upholds is called *dharma*. But then, that which is upheld is also called *dharma*, as in ‘*dhriyate iti dharmah*’. When *dharma* is perceived as that which upholds, it is, in a sense, what we seek. When perceived as that which is upheld by us, as in a way of life, it may be seen as the means. What is to be achieved in life, is called *dharma* and the means of achieving it is also called *dharma*. Thus the word *dharma* can be interpreted both, as being an end, as well as the means.

What is it that sustains everything? The ultimate cause of the whole universe is *asti bhāti priyam* or *sat cit ānanda* or *satyam jñānam anantam brahma*. This is the essential goal or *dharma*. Life is therefore lived, in keeping with this fundamental law of *dharma*, which recognizes that everything is *brahman*. The cause upholds the effect, and *brahman* being the material cause of the universe, nothing is apart from *brahman*, just as a pot can never be apart from clay that upholds it. This is the fundamental law. As *satyam jñānam anantam*, He is the fundamental law itself because He is everything. Thus, when we say that there is an order in the universe, the ultimate order is *brahman* in as much as *brahman*, through *māya*, manifests as this universe.

This order is the law that upholds the functioning of the entire universe. We appreciate the manifest form of this order in terms of omniscience, in terms of fairness or justice and in terms of keeping everything together. This is the *saguṇa brahman*. Following this law in our life would be living a life of *dharma*. That is why the fundamental values of *yama* (restraint) viz., *ahimsā* (non-injury), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacarya* (celibacy), *aparigraha* (non-hoarding), *amānitvam* (absence of pride), *adambhitvam* (absence of pretence) etc.,¹ are taught. All of them mean only one thing. If you analyze them, they are the recognition of *brahman*. For instance, when

¹ See *Bhagavad Gītā* verses 13-7 to 13-11.

you analyze non-violence, or truthfulness, you find that they culminate in the order of life that sustains the entire universe and keeps it in harmony. This ultimate truth is *brahman*. So the harmony that obtains in the universe is the meaning of *dharma*, or of any value. Therefore when we lead a life, which is in keeping with the values, it becomes a life, which is in keeping with the fundamental law of life and there is harmony.

There is harmony where there is *dharma* and there is disharmony where there is violation of *dharma*. Harmony is our being, true to our own nature. The *satyam*, *jñānam*, *anātman* is not out there; it is our own Self. So living a life of *dharma* is living a life in harmony with our own nature. Whenever we violate *dharma*, we are violating harmony and in this way violating ourselves, and it becomes stressful. Any stress can be traced to violation of *dharma*, which is a violation of fundamental harmony. The answer to all stress management is to live a life in keeping with *dharma*.

It is not easy to live a life in keeping with *dharma* or the values, if the goal itself is not in keeping with *dharma*. To let go of many things that *adharma* can bring us, is not easy! The goal must be *dharma*, and then alone is it possible to live by the means, which is *dharma*. It is possible to live a life of *dharma* only if the goal is *brahman*, the Lord, the Self, wholeness, or *mokṣa*.

Compromising our values can often appear to be quite beneficial. By compromising truth or by violating somebody, you can perhaps benefit in terms of the material gains of *artha* and *kāma*, or wealth, prosperity, name, fame etc. Therefore in order for us to follow the values, it becomes necessary to overcome temptations of these benefits. There is a natural temptation for wealth and there is a natural temptation for recognition. These are acquired values. Growing up, we observe our society valuing these values, and therefore we also place a value upon these things. If these remain the goal of our life, it is very difficult to follow *dharma*.

Ideally, one can follow *dharma* when *mokṣa* is the goal of life. Then, there is no difficulty in letting go of anything. All that it amounts to is *neti neti*; let go, let go. In living a life in keeping with *dharma*, we cultivate the values of *viveka* (discrimination),

vairāgya (dispassion) and *śamādi-ṣaṭka sampatti*². If *brahman* or *dharma* is the goal, and if *prāptasya prāptih*, meaning acquiring that which is already acquired, is my goal, it is clear to me that nothing else need be acquired. Only then do I realize the value of following these values.

Tyāgenaike amrtatvam ānaśuh [Kaivalyopanishad, 3], it is by *tyāga* or renunciation that immortality is gained. Immortality is my nature, which however is concealed by false notions. It is concealed by the likes and dislikes owing to these false notions, and by the temptations born of likes and dislikes. Giving up the temptations is the giving up likes and dislikes and false notions. It is the uncovering or removing of the veil, which covers my true Self. Life should become a process, of letting go of that which is an obstruction to my owning up to my true Self. Therefore life should become a process of letting go of these obstructions. On the other hand, when life becomes a process of acquiring, we keep on acquiring more obstructions.

As the whole scheme of what Vedānta teaches becomes very clear, we develop an appreciation for the values and can live by them. Conflicts and stress will then disappear. Doing *prāṇāyāma* and *yoga* without this fundamental shift in values, does not help much. Stress is basically a spiritual problem, which is not centered on the non-Self; it is centered on the Self. Therefore there must be a spiritual solution. It is not a problem of some chemicals! We may live such a stressful life that it becomes a chemical problem or a pathological problem, but that is a different matter. Stress stems from not understanding the fundamentals of life, not understanding the goal of life, or even having wrong goals. If *artha* and *kāma*, wealth and prosperity, or name and fame are the goals, *dharma* gets compromised. This is why *dharma* is placed first among the *puruṣārthas*. They are *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. May you acquire *artha* and *kāma* on the basis of *dharma*! Therefore, *dharma* is a way of life.

The Vedas also teach you *viddhi* and *niṣedhas*, the do's and don'ts, which are essentially *dharma*. The Bhagavad Gītā begins with the word *dharma*³ and ends with the

² The 6 qualifications beginning with *śama* are: *śama* (control or mastery over the mind), *dama* (control of the external sense organs such as eyes, etc.), *uparama* or *uparati* (strict observance of one's own *dharma*), *titikṣā* (endurance of the pair of opposites such as heat and cold, pleasure and pain, etc.), *śraddhā* (faith in the words of the *guru* and in the Scriptures), and *samādhānam* (single-pointedness of mind).

³ *dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavah* [BG 1-1]

word *mama*⁴. Some people say that the Bhagavad Gītā teaches us *mama dharma* or my *dharma*. The Bhagavad Gītā, then, teaches us *dharma* in both senses: *brahma vidyā* and *yoga śāstra*. It teaches *brahma vidyā*, which is *dharma* in the sense of *satyam*, *jñānam*, *anatam brahma* and also *yoga śāstra*, which is *dharma* in terms of living a certain way of life. So the first *dharma* is a view of life, which is called *brahma vidyā* and the second *dharma* is a way of life, which is *yoga śāstra*.

Śrī Śaṅkarā says, in his introduction to the Bhagavad Gītā, “*dvividho hi vedokto dharmah, pravṛtti lakṣanaḥ, nivṛttilakṣaṇaśca*”. The Veda teaches us the two-fold *dharma*, one being *pravṛtti*, a life of activity, and the other being *nivṛtti*, or a life of renunciation or contemplation.

jñāna yogena sāṅkhyānām karmayogena yoginām

The pursuit of knowledge for the renunciates and the pursuit of action for those who pursue activity. [BG⁵ 3-3]

Sāṅkhya yoga means a life of contemplation. *Karma yoga* is the life of activity, or rather, a life of devotion leading ultimately to a life of contemplation. *Karma yoga* is not merely performing *karma*. *Karma*, when performed in the spirit of devotion, is *bhakti*. The first stage is *bhakti* and the second stage is *jñānam*.

May you look upon the universe as God! If you look upon the universe as God, then what is your relationship with the universe? I am a devotee, and God is the one to whom I am devoted. Therefore the relationship is such as between the *bhakta* and Bhagavān. *Sva karmanā tam abhyarcya* [BG 18-46], worship that Lord who is manifesting as the whole universe, through your own *karma*. This is how *karma yoga* becomes a worship of the Lord with a *bhāvanā* that the universe is nothing but the manifestation of Lord. The *bhāvanā* comes first. It is a certain attitude that we entertain in our minds. For example, we are told to look upon all women as mother. This is a *bhāvanā*. All women are not related to me as mother but I look upon them as mother. This *bhāvanā* must be in keeping with reality. So if the *bhāvanā* is that everything that exists is the Lord, this worship becomes a reality. Then it culminates into *jñānam*. You

⁴ *tatra śrī vijayao bhūtirdhrūvā nīrmatirmama* [BG 18-78]

⁵ BG = Bhagavad Gītā

can acquire this *jñānam* provided that you start with the right *bhāvanā* or attitude. The *yoga* of attitude leads to the *yoga* of knowledge.

Question

Is *dharma* absolute or does it need interpretation?

Answer

In any given situation we should do what we need to do. Let us take the example of Lord Rama. He is severely criticized for his abandonment of Sita. How do we explain this? It is said that, “*Ramo vigravān dharmah*’ (Rāmāyaṇa, 3-37-13), he is the embodiment of *dharma*, righteousness. How do we justify that? The answer is that Lord Rama had many roles to play, such as those of a king and also a husband. On the one hand, his subjects were criticizing him for keeping Sita in his home. Whether the criticism was right or wrong, this is how it was. On the other hand towards his wife he had his duty as husband. If he played the role of a husband knowing that his wife is chaste, and ignored what his subjects said, then he would not be pleasing them. “*Rañjanāt rājā*’, one who pleases his people, is called *rājā* or king. Thus, if he wanted to make his wife happy, he had to make his subjects unhappy, and if he wanted to make them happy instead, he had to make his wife unhappy. Thus, there were two conflicting demands upon him.

This happens to all of us. There are many conflicting demands in our life. For example, Pujya Swamiji is teaching a course to 100 students and a devotee invites him to give a talk for 2 days. Should he go or not? If he goes to deliver the talks, what happens to the students attending the course? If he doesn’t go, what happens to the devotees? One has to take a decision. This is where the interpretation of value comes in. Even though there are universal values, e.g., “I should not do unto others what I do not want done unto me”, these rules need to be interpreted in every situation. Practice of *dharma* always depends upon time, place and conditions.

Lord Rama interpreted that his duty as a king was more important than his duty as husband. You can fulfill the demand that you consider most important in a given situation. For example, when you are at work, your duty as an employee becomes more

important than your duty as father. When you come home, your duty as a father becomes more important than your duty as an employee. Thus you will have to determine what, in a given situation, the most important role for that situation is. There is no general rule about it. This is where we have to use our judgment. We can be wrong, but then we can learn. At least we would have tried to do our best and have been sincere. If we are sincere, in time, we will learn whether we were right or wrong, because the result will reveal it.

Question

But Lord Rama could have gone out and explained to his subjects!

Answer

Yes, he did that. It seems that he sent his emissaries around. Nobody is fond of abandoning his wife! Do not think that Lord Rama just abandoned his wife! He abandoned himself too. Nobody seems to see that. He never lived in the palace again. From that point on, he lived the life of an ascetic. If Sita lived the life of an ascetic, so did Lord Rama. He never enjoyed the pleasures of a king from that point on. The point here is that there are always conflicting demands upon a person.

Question

Can a person play two roles at the same time, in a given situation?

Answer

You cannot play two roles at the same time. You can play only one role at a time. You can play the other role the next moment. At each moment, however, you can play only one role. Therefore, you should use your judgment.

Question

Are you saying that *dharma* is relative and not universal?

Answer

Dharma is universal, but its practice is particular. Following *dharma* always requires us to take into account the particular conditions of time, place and situation. Therefore, there cannot be an absolute rule about what *dharma* means in a particular situation. *Satyam* or truthfulness is a universal *dharma*. But what truthfulness is will be

determined based on the situation. Non-violence is a universal value. But what non-violence is, in a given situation, will have to be determined based on the situation.

Question

Where do *vāsanas* come from?

Answer

Vāsanas are past impressions. Everything that I do creates an impression. When we do something over and over again, and often enough, it becomes a habit. We have inherited all kinds of habits from our past, such as habits of thinking, judging and concluding, as well as certain behaviors. A *vāsana* is all these tendencies or habits that have been inherited on account of our having done them repeatedly in the past. So what I do without any deliberation is a result of this *vāsana* or conditioning. Thus there is conditioned thinking, conditioned responses and conditioned actions. They are all *vāsanas*.

Question

Sometimes we are not able to change certain things however much we try. What is the way to get a grip over *vāsanas*?

Answer

Vāsanas manifest in our life as likes and dislikes, as *rāga-dveṣas*. Likes and dislikes are habitual. I like something habitually and I dislike something habitually. Following *dharma* or following universal values is a way to overcome this pressure of *vāsanas* or *rāga-dveṣas*. My tendencies or the habits of my past may compel me to act in a certain way. Before acting, I review and see whether this action is in keeping with the values or not. If it is not, I keep my tendencies under check. This is how we slowly restrain and subdue those tendencies, which may otherwise push us away from *dharma*. There may also be many tendencies in me, which propel me towards the path of *dharma*. I encourage such tendencies.

This is where we follow the guidelines given by the scriptures in terms of *dharma* or values. These values give us the guidelines as to what would be a proper way of acting in a given situation. For example, by my commitment to non-violence, I am

committed not to hurt others by my words, my actions or my thought. I try to follow this as much as I can. Nobody can follow these values in an absolute way, but we do have a commitment to follow them as best as we can.

Artha and Kāma

What do we want in our lives? If we were to ask children what they want to be when they grow up, some may say that they want to be doctors. Others may say that they want to be lawyers. Some may want to be engineers. Some child with more ambition may say that he would like to be the President of the country. Thus, each one of us wants to become something.

There may be a child who says, “I want to be a millionaire”. “For what purpose?” “I just want to be a millionaire.” “What will happen then?” “I will be happy.” If you ask the child who says he wants to be a doctor, “Why do you want to be a doctor?” “I can make a lot of money.” “Then what?” “I can have a big house.” “Then what?” “I can have a big car.” “So what will happen to you?” “Oh Swamiji, I will feel so happy.” Yet another child will say, “Swamiji, it would be wonderful if I could leave my mark in the pages of history.” “Why?” “I will feel so proud.” “Then what?” “I will feel so happy.”

If we keep asking this question, “Why do I want these various things, whether it is wealth, status, power or fame, in my life?”, if we persist with the question, “Why?” it reduces to one simple answer, which is, “I want to be happy.” The ultimate answer of every human being is simply, “I want to be happy”.

One day someone came along and said, “Swamiji, the other day you were appealing for funds. On the day of the anniversary, you gave a very good talk about fund raising. So, here is a million dollars.” A million dollars! That will take care of all the debts of the Gurukulam!! What makes this fellow so generous? He says further, “Swamiji, here is million dollars in cash. No receipts required. The only thing is that this is stolen money. The police are after it. You can keep it.” Am I going to keep that money? Do I want the money for the sake of the money? I don’t want a million dollars for the sake of a million dollars. I want it because I expect it to make me happy. If I recognize that it is going to make me unhappy, I don’t want it. I am not going to keep that money.

“Swamiji, this is a new house, you can occupy it”. “Wonderful! How is it that you are giving it to me?” “There is a ghost inside”. Do I want the house for the sake of the house?

“Swamiji, you wanted to be a CEO?” “Yes.” “You can be a CEO.” “Why are you so generous?” “The history is that whoever becomes the CEO here, will have a heart attack in six months.” It is such a stressful position that six months is all you need to get a heart attack! Why would I take that position?

What everyone is looking for, is the means of achieving happiness; or whatever one thinks, is the means of achieving happiness. Happiness is the one simple goal. Is there anybody who wants to be unhappy? I don't think so. “*Sukha-prāpti, duḥkka-nivṛtti*”, attainment of happiness and avoiding of pain or sorrow. All that I have been doing, and all that I will perhaps do in the future, will have one of these two objectives of either seeking happiness, or getting rid of unhappiness. Avoiding unhappiness is the same as seeking happiness.

Every human being is searching for something in life and that is “happiness.” Every pursuit, whatever it may be, is always motivated by a desire to be happy. We seek happiness through various material ends such as wealth, prosperity, name, fame, recognition and power. Our perception is that we are needy and therefore we look to the world to fulfill our various needs. As far as the physical needs go, we are dependent on the world for food, water etc. But here, we are talking about emotional needs. We find ourselves to be needy all the time and require somebody or something to make us feel secure and happy. We perceive that we are not happy or secure enough or self-sufficient and therefore have to become sufficient. But Vedānta provides an altogether different perception. Vedānta says “*tat tvam asi*” meaning, “Thou art that”, you already are that which you are striving to achieve. This means that we are already happy, secure, free. This may sound unbelievable but this is what the Bhagavad Gītā teaches us. And if we accept this vision, our lives will be entirely different. This is “intelligent living” or “living intelligently”.

Whatever we do is always based on our perception. We behave one way when we perceive ourselves as “rich”, and in a different way when we perceive ourselves as “needy”. To illustrate this, there is a story in the Mahābhārata. Lord Krishna wanted to test Duryodhana. So he went to his palace in the guise of a Brahmin and asked for 50

cartloads of dry firewood. Duryodhana sent his men to fetch the wood from the forest. They returned empty handed. They could not fetch dry wood because it had been raining for days together. Then the Brahmin went to Karṇa and asked for the same 50 cartloads of dry firewood. Karṇa got the same answer from his men. But he did not want to send the Brahmin empty handed. Karṇa asked the Brahmin to spend the night at his palace and said that in the morning, he would get him 50 cartloads of wood. The next morning Karṇa gave the Brahmin the 50 cartloads of dry firewood. The Brahmin was surprised. Karṇa had actually demolished his palace to provide the 50 cartloads of dry wood. Duryodhana was a rich person but was not rich within his self. His perception of himself was that he was not a very rich person. Whereas Karṇa was not a wealthy person in comparison to Duryodhana, but his perception of himself was that he was a very rich person. So, what we are is what we perceive ourselves to be. This is what Vedānta teaches us.

Vedānta says that we should act not out of need, but out of richness. The happiness that we want is within our own self. Our experience seems to tell us that happiness comes from the outside as when watching a movie, eating a pizza, driving a new car etc. But Vedānta tells us it is not so. Vedānta says that happiness comes from within us. When we get something that we want very badly, for that moment, our mind becomes free of all demands; the seeking ceases and we feel happy. Whenever we are happy, our mind is free from hankering and free from demands and needs. At that moment, we forget that we are needy. When we are happy, our perception that we are needy and insufficient goes away momentarily. It is the perception that we are needy, unhappy and insufficient that is an obstacle, and deprives us of happiness. The moment this conclusion is done away with, we are happy.

This does not imply that one has to suppress the desires. Nobody can give up desires because one does not have the freedom to give up desires. Every desire is always to become happy. Therefore, unless one becomes happy, there is no way one can become free from desire. Nobody can give up desires. Vedānta tells us to understand the desires. Vedānta only focuses attention on understanding. Each one of us is seeking happiness, and there is no other goal. So the next question is, where is this happiness?

Let us look at this story of two people traveling together in a train in India in the olden days. In those days, traveling from Madras to New Delhi would take two to three days. These two people were traveling in a first class coupé compartment. One of them was a very wealthy person carrying a lot of cash with him. The other person was a thief from Delhi, except that he was dressed as a gentleman and therefore nobody suspected that he was a thief. He had come to know beforehand that this rich man was going to travel from Madras to Delhi and had managed to get a seat in the same compartment. This rich man did not know who the other man was. The rich man had a briefcase. At one point, he took out a bundle of notes and started counting. The thief saw this from the corner of his eye and planned what to do. He was waiting for the night. The lights in the compartment were shut and both men went to sleep. Soon, the rich man started snoring. This was the opportunity the thief was waiting for. He quietly came down. He had all kinds of keys with him and pulled out the rich man's briefcase and opened it quickly. He found nothing inside the briefcase. He was surprised. He opened the other suitcases but could not find anything. Disappointed, he went back to his berth. The next afternoon, again, the rich fellow opened his briefcase and started counting. The thief was surprised. How come I could not find money in any of his luggage? That night, when the rich man was sleeping, the thief came down and checked not only the luggage but the sleeping person also. But he could not find the money. Disappointed again, he went back to his berth. The next morning the train had almost reached Delhi. The rich man pulled out his briefcase yet again and was counting the money. The thief introduced himself to the rich man, "I am a famous thief from Delhi. But you are my *guru!* I have been watching you counting money since last 2 days and I am traveling with you for the purpose of stealing that money from you. I don't want that money, but please tell me where did you hide that money at night? This is all I want to know." "That is a secret", said the rich man. "Please tell me that. Where did you hide that money?" "Well, under your pillow." A place where the thief would never have suspected that it would be. He had searched for it everywhere, never suspecting that what he was searching for was right under his own pillow! Similarly, human beings are searching for their happiness everywhere, not recognizing that it is within themselves.

Let me illustrate this with another, very old-fashioned story. This is the story of a person traveling from one village to another distant village on foot, and passing through a forest. At noon, he was thirsty and tired and wanted to rest for a while. He eventually found a beautiful spot. There was a very beautiful lake and he became very happy. He looked down the waters to wash his face and drink some water. But, as he looked down, he forgot his thirst and fatigue. He found a golden necklace in the water. He looked around to check if anybody was there. No one was around. He plunged into the water to procure the necklace. It was all the way at the bottom. When he got to it, the necklace seemed to come into his hand but he missed it. He came up for air and dived into the water again. He thought that he had got the necklace, but lost it again. This happened a number of times. After a while, tired and not knowing how to get the necklace out, he just sat down at the edge of the lake. At that time, another traveler happened to come by to the same spot. Now this fellow propositioned the new traveler, "Well there is something very important that I can tell you about, provided we have an understanding that we share it". "All right. What is it?" "Whatever we get, we will share equally, Ok?" "Yes." "Come here. Look down." He looked down. "Hey, there is a golden necklace there." "Yes. Let us get that necklace." "So why didn't you get it? Why are you waiting for me?" "I have been trying, but somehow I don't seem to get it. I go all the way down and think the necklace is in my hand, but it doesn't seem to come." "Are you sure you tried?" "Yes, of course." Then a thought occurred to this new traveler. Instead of looking down, he looked up. And what did he find? He found that a necklace was actually hanging from the tree above this lake and it was its reflection that was seen in the water. The other fellow had not realized that he was chasing after a reflection. He had unsuccessfully been making one attempt after another.

So what is required is not for one to merely persist in trying again and again. Perseverance is not always the solution. Sometimes you need to do something different. This is why, when the other traveler looked up, he realized what the problem was and where the mistake lay. Yes, once that was clear, they could get that necklace. In the same manner, we also seem to be diving repeatedly into the objects and achievements of the world and believe that we have happiness within our grasp, only to see it slip away.

What we learn here is that happiness is not somewhere out there. It is within oneself.
This is what Vedānta teaches us.

Mokṣa

Question

What is the definition of *mokṣa*?

Answer

Mokṣa is liberation or release. *Śruti* describes it as a total elimination of sorrow and the attainment of unsurpassable happiness. Fundamentally, unsurpassable happiness is my very nature, but this truth is veiled by sorrow. It is when this sorrow is removed, that my true nature is revealed. Thus, *mokṣa* may be seen as being a cessation of all sorrow accompanied by the attainment of a lasting happiness. This is what we want. We are only interested in *mokṣa*.

Question

Mokṣa is often described as freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Why should *mokṣa* be equated to the release from cycle of birth and death? What is so wrong about being born again?

Answer

Mokṣa is freedom from want or freedom from sorrow. Birth is a response to a certain need or want. It is said that your next birth is determined by your unfulfilled wants and needs as well as your final thoughts at the time of your death. Thus, being born implies being needy. Being born also means being identified with a physical body, which implies feeling limited and feeling bound. Thus birth and bondage go together. Therefore, the idea of freedom from the cycle of birth and death really means an attaining of freedom from this bondage, which is the sense of want and limitation. The main idea here is the acquiring of this wisdom. One who has discovered limitlessness cannot go back to feeling limited, cannot go back to being born limited. It is in this sense that *mokṣa* is said to be freedom from the cycle of birth and death.

Question

As limited beings in time and space, our language is limited and our thoughts are limited. How, then, do we begin to understand concepts like being ‘beyond space and time’?

Answer

You do not have to conceptualize it. You already know what limitation is and what limitedness is. The absence of limitation is what ‘being limitless’ means. Being ‘eternal’ means that you are free from the limitation of time. You do not have to imagine the concept of something being eternal. You only have to understand the absence of the limitation of time. Again, ‘all pervasive’ means the absence of the limitation of space. You do not have to visualize it, because in reality you yourself happen to be that. What you call eternal happens to be the nature of your own self. It does not need to be visualized. Withdraw your attention from that which is limited. This is what Vedānta teaches when it says ‘let go’ or ‘negate’. To discover the limitless, negate that which is limited and then what remains, is the limitless you.

Question

If I am *pūrṇa*, complete, and it is my nature, why was I ignorant in the first place? How does this ‘apparently imperfect’, emerge from the original perfect?

Answer

But ‘apparently imperfect’ means it is not imperfect.

Question

Yes, maybe only apparently so. But it is there and you cannot negate it.

Answer

You consider something to be imperfect because you have a certain notion of what perfection should be. In the absence of this notion, what is imperfect?

Question

When there is only oneness to begin with, why is there this apparent duality?

Answer

The answer is that it is the very nature of this oneness, this reality, to manifest itself as apparent duality. If in manifesting that way, it is affected in any way, or becomes less in any way, then this question may be valid. It is essentially *pūrṇa* and in being manifest, remains *pūrṇa*. It is this truth, which is obscured by our superimpositions and erroneous conclusions about who we are.

Ātma-svarupa

Question

Can you please summarize the first part of the teaching in the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā?

Answer

The Bhagavad Gītā addresses the fundamental human problem of grief and sadness in life. Only the human being has sadness and grief. We do not find animals grieving or sad or depressed, unless we make them so. We can train our animals or pets in such a manner that we can pass on to them our sadness! Otherwise, there is no sad cow or a depressed dog! These are the typical problems of the human beings, who are the most sophisticated, the most advanced, and the most sensitive creation. Since we are very sensitive, we are subject to unhappiness or sadness. That sensitivity is not there in others, and therefore they are free from sadness. We are self-conscious beings. We are sensitive to what we are and we are sensitive to the environment around us. This is what causes grief. Therefore, Lord Krishna begins his teaching in the first section of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā by revealing the true nature of the Self. He begins his teaching with the verse:

*aśocyānvanvaśocastvaṃ prajñāvādāṃśca bhāsase
gatāsūnagatāsūṃśca nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ*

You grieve for those who should not be grieved for. Yet you speak words of wisdom. The wise do not grieve for those who are living or for those who are no longer living. [BG 2-11]

“Oh Arjuna, you are talking the words of very learned people, *paṇḍitā*, and yet, you are grieving for those who do not deserve to be grieved for.” “Lord, what is wrong with talking like a *paṇḍitā*?” “The wise people, the *paṇḍitās*, are those who never grieve. There is no reason for grief in life at all.”

Right away, Lord Krishna introduces the teaching with the *paramārthik* (absolute) truth. He talks about the absolute reality, the Self. Thus he starts his discourse with *ātma-anātma-viveka*, the discrimination between the Self and the non-Self. Grief arises in our lives when we do not have this discrimination. He says:

na tvevāhaṃ jātu nāsam na tvam...

There was never a time that I did not exist, nor you... [BG 2-12]

“Hey Arjuna, there never was a time when I was not and you were not, and all these people were not. And there will never be a time when we all will not be.”

There is no birth and there is no death for the Self. The body is born and it dies. The Self is never born and it never dies. It is immortal. Therefore, whose death you are grieving for, Lord Krishna asks Arjuna. The death of Bhīṣma? The death of Droṇa? They are nothing but the Self or the *ātmā*, He explains, and they are not subject to death. They are immortal. Everybody is immortal.

Yes, there is birth and there is death, no doubt. But even when there is birth and death, there is something in all of us that is not born and that does not die. Lord Krishna says that each one of us is really a union of these two principles: the person and the personality, or the spirit and the matter, or the *ātmā* (Self) and the *anātmā* (non-Self). Where the birth is, where the death is and where the limitation is, is the non-Self. *Anātmā* is the medium through which the Self, consciousness expresses itself. What we call the personality or the body-mind-sense-complex is like a costume that an actor puts on. When the actor is acting as a beggar, he does not become a beggar. Similarly, when the person, the Self, is putting on this costume of the body-mind-sense-complex, he does not suffer from its limitations. All the limitations pertaining to birth and death, and the changes they entail, belong to the personality and not to the person who imparts sentiency to the personality.

We should know our own Self. Any grief, sadness and suffering in our lives, is not only on account of a lack of knowledge of our Self, but also on account of the mistaken and totally contradictory notion that we entertain about the Self! We are immortal, but we take ourselves to be mortal beings. We are of the nature of knowledge, but we take ourselves to be ignorant beings. We are of the nature of happiness or fullness but we take ourselves to be sad or unhappy. *Sat cit ānanda* is our nature. *Sat* means existence. *Cit* means knowledge. *Ānanda* means happiness or fullness. But we take ourselves to be totally contrary to what we actually are! We look upon ourselves as ignorant, sad, unhappy, mortal! This, however, we cannot accept, because it is totally

contrary to our true nature. We cannot accept what we find ourselves to be. This is the problem of the human being! This is what we call self non-acceptance. This is what causes grief. Therefore, in the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, Lord Krishna first teaches the nature of the Self.

*ya enam vetti hantāraṃ yaścainaṃ manyate hatam
ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṃ hanti na hanyate*

Both, the one who thinks this (Self) to be the killer and the one who thinks of it as the killed, do not know. This (Self) does not kill; nor is it killed. [BG 2-19]

*na jāyate mriyate vā kadācinnāyaṃ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yam purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre*

This (Self) is never born; nor does it die. It is not that having been, it ceases to exist again. This (Self) is unborn, eternal, undergoes no change whatsoever, and is ever new. When the body is destroyed, it is not destroyed. [BG 2-20]

nainaṃ chindanti śāstrāṇi nainaṃ dahati pāvakah

Weapons do not cut this (Self); nor does fire burn it. [BG 2-23]

Ātmā is never born and it does not die. It is unborn, eternal and indestructible, free from growth and decay and free from any change or modification. No weapons can destroy the Self. It is changeless and free from any modification.

Even *karṣṭva* or doership, and *bhokṣṭva* or enjoyership, are changes, and *ātmā* is free from those changes. Therefore, there is no doership or enjoyership in the Self. The Self does not perform any action, nor does it become subject to the action of somebody else. Therefore, there cannot be any guilt or hurt. When you perform an action, there may be guilt because you did something different from what you should have done or you did something that is not becoming of you. When you become the object of somebody else's action, you can be ill-treated and therefore, you can be hurt. Thus, when there is *karṣṭva* or doership, there is always a possibility of guilt, and when there is *bhokṣṭva* or enjoyership, there can be hurt. All of our grief is due to this hurt and guilt. The *ātmā* is free from both *karṣṭva* and *bhokṣṭva*. Therefore, there cannot be any guilt or hurt, and there cannot be sadness. This is the essence of the teaching of Lord Krishna in the 20 verses of Chapter 2, from verse 11 to 30. The *ātmā*, being immortal and

changeless, and free from doership and enjoyership, is not subject to any pain, any grief or any sadness. If we know the *ātmā* as such, there is no reason for *śoka* or grief in life.

avyakto'yamacintyo'yamavikāryo'yamucyate
tasmādevaṃ viditvainaṃ nānuśocitumarhasi

This (Self) is said to be unmanifest, not an object of thought, and not subject to change. Therefore, knowing this, you should not grieve [BG 2-25].

Lord Krishna says that if you know the Self as free from birth, death and changes, there is no reason to grieve at all. *Ātmā* is not the cause of grief, and the *anātmā* cannot be the reason for grief either. *Ātmā* being immortal is not subject to birth and death. Therefore, there cannot be grief, because the Self cannot be killed. The *anātmā* is going to die whether we like it or not.

jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyurdhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya ca
tasmādaparihārye'rthe na tvaṃ śociturmarhasi

Because, for that which is born, death is certain, and for that which dies, birth is certain, therefore, you should not grieve over that which can not be altered. [BG 2-27]

That which is born is surely going to die, and that which dies will be born again. This is something that we cannot help. Therefore, it is not proper for anyone to grieve for that which cannot be changed or that which cannot be helped. Thus Lord Krishna basically teaches the realities of life, the concept of the Self and the non-Self.

There are essentially two entities in life, the Self and the non-Self. There is the 'I', and there is everything other than the 'I'. The Self or I cannot be the cause of grief because the Self is ever free, ever full and immortal. Therefore *ātmā* cannot become the reason for grief. *Anātmā* should not become the reason for grief either. *Anātmā* or non-Self is subject to birth and death and we cannot change that reality. We cannot change its essential nature and when we cannot change it, we should gracefully accept it.

If I know this reality of 'I and everything other than I', there is no cause for grief at all. We cannot prevent the death or other changes of the body because it is destined to change and perish. Therefore, there is no point in grieving over the death of the body.

The Self can never die and therefore, there is also no reason to grieve for the Self. This is what is known as the ‘absolute nature’ of the Self.

Thus, in revealing the realities of life, the first section of the second chapter teaches that if we understand these realities, there is no reason for grief in our lives.

Question

Can you please explain the concept of the soul in Vedānta?

Answer

The personality is made up of the gross, the subtle and the causal body. When *ātmā* is identified with the subtle body, he is called the soul or the *jīvātmā*. At death, what departs from the gross body is the subtle body. Since the self is identified with the subtle body, it is the *jīvātmā* that departs from the gross body. All the memories are in the subtle body, not in the Self. The Self is always shining in its own light and giving sentience to this body-mind-sense complex. What happens is when I take myself to be the mind (which is in the subtle body), whatever impurities are there in my mind are as though my impurities. They do not actually contaminate the Self. But because of identification, I feel contaminated. That is why we need self-purification. Only when I come to know that my true Self is *puruṣa* or person, then there is no question of any birth for the soul. Yes, Self is shining in its own glory and is never affected. But only when we know that, do we have the benefit of that nature of the Self. Until then, due to this wrong identification, the process of birth and death goes on.

Question

Could you please elaborate on the concept of *ātmā* in Jainism and Buddhism?

Answer

According to Jainism, there are as many *ātmā*-s or self-s as there are living beings. So while we say that the Self is one, they say that everyone has their own *ātmā*. They believe that the self is tied down by ignorance and by *karma*, and therefore they seek to release it by annihilating all the *karma* or actions. In order to destroy the *karmas* that tie down the self, they perform many penances and a lot of worship etc. The self, once released, will rise up and go into its own realm. It will have a separate existence

even after it is liberated. Knowledge is important, but purification is considered more important. Vedānta teaches that the Self is beyond any kind of contamination. They say that the self is actually contaminated by *karma* and therefore needs to be released.

Buddhism is also based on the self. Only, they use different words. They say that the self is momentary. There is momentary consciousness. In Buddhism, the world is a creation of the mind. All that exists is *māyā* or *mithyā*. They withdraw their mind from the world, because it is *mithyā* and does not have any independent existence. The emphasis is on focusing on the self. Through detachment, the mind is relieved from every other occupation, to realize the self. The philosophy of Buddhism is not very far from that of Vedānta, except in details.

Both these traditions are derived from the Vedas. While in essence they are not different, Vedānta is much more sophisticated than either of them. Vedānta includes what they say, and much more.

Question

Can you please elaborate on *asti bhāti priyam*?

Answer

In the *prakaraṇa* text Dṛk-Dṛśya Vivekaḥ, a verse occurs, teaching *viveka* or discrimination between *dṛk*, the subject and *dṛśya*, the object:

asti bhāti priyaṃ rūpaṃ nāma cetyaṃśapañcakam

ādyatrayam brahmarūpaṃ jagadrūpam tato dvayam

The group of five constituents, “Exists, shines, attractive, form and name” pertain to all dealings in the world. The triad of first three is the nature of *brahman* and the pair of remaining two is that of world. [Dṛk-Dṛśya Vivekaḥ, 20]

In our lives, there is mixing up of the subject and the object. The text teaches us how we can recognize an object as an object and the subject as the subject. While talking about the truth of the universe, the author draws our attention to the fact that everything in the universe has five aspects. Everything has a name (*nāma*) and there is a form (*rūpa*) corresponding to the name. The thing is. It exists (*asti*). How do I say that a thing is or that it exists? I know it because it is an object of my awareness (*bhāti*). If it were not an

object of my awareness, I would not know that it exists. If I ask you whether I have horns on my head you will say that I don't, because you do not see them or because you are not aware of them. Thus existence and awareness (*asti* and *bhāti*) go together. The author also adds that everything in this universe is lovable, has attractiveness (*priyam*). There is love for existence and there is love for being and, therefore, there is love everywhere. Or let us say that everything has the capacity to be an object of love. Love and joy always go together. I love that which is a source of joy. Naturally I dislike that which is a source of unhappiness or pain. So both love and joy go together, which means that there is joy or happiness everywhere. Therefore, we have *asti bhāti priyam*, associated with every object, every name and form.

“But Swamiji, I do not see happiness everywhere. I see happiness in a few things but not in other things”. I do not see happiness in a given object, either because it is not there or because my mind is not tuned up to see that it is there. I may have pronounced *rāga-dveṣas* (likes and dislikes) in my mind and because of that, I have pre-conceived notions about where happiness is and where it is not, what happiness is and what it is not. If all these pre-conceived notions are dropped, and if my mind is open and free of any demand as to how a thing should be, there will be no difficulty in appreciating happiness everywhere. As the Taittirīya Upaniṣad says:

*ānando brahmeti vyajānāt, ānandādhyeva khalvimāni bhūtāni
jāyante, ānandena jātāni jīvanti, ānandam prayanti
abhisamviśantīti*

He knew *ānanda* as *brahman*; for from *ānanda*, indeed, all these beings originate; having been born, they are sustained by *ānanda*; they move towards and merge in *ānanda*. [Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 3-6]

This *mantra* says that all beings are born of *ānanda*, are sustained by *ānanda* and ultimately merge back into *ānanda* to become one with it. This is like saying that all pots are born of clay, are sustained by clay and go back to become one with clay. All pots are nothing but clay. Similarly, when it is said that everything is born of *ānanda*, is sustained by *ānanda* and goes back to become one with *ānanda*, it means that even now, everything is *ānanda*. Thus from what the Taittirīya Upaniṣad says, everything is nothing but the manifestation of *ānanda*.

How is it that I do not see it or feel it? Is it because it is not there? Some people insist that they can accept something only when they see it or experience it. Just because we do not see or experience something, does not mean it is not there. In case of seeing, I may have a problem with my eyes, some defect in my eyes, and therefore I do not see it. So even if something is there, I may not see it. If I remove that defect in my eyes, then I can see. Similarly, the mind is the instrument with which we experience happiness, and if we do not experience happiness it may not necessarily be because it is not there. Maybe my mind needs some tuning up. There is some problem in the mind, and it needs to be removed. The problem with mind is the presence of my various likes and dislikes, the *rāga-dveṣas*, attachments and demands. When they are removed my mind becomes accepting, non-demanding. Whenever I am non-demanding and am able to respect and accept a thing or a being as it is, I find that I enjoy it, whether it is a flower, a tree, a river, a lake, a dog or a person or anything. If I make a demand that it be different from what it is, I cannot enjoy it.

Asti means that a thing is. *Bhāti* means that it shines in my knowledge. *Priyam* means it is attractive. This is the truth that obtains in every name and form. The attractiveness part is not clear to us. It is not experienced. That ‘it is’, is an experience. That ‘it shines’, is also an experience. But to experience the attractiveness, I must give up my demand, or preconceived notion of what ‘attractiveness’ is. If I can see attractiveness only in a certain kind of a nose or a certain kind of eyes, I can see it only there and not elsewhere. But if I drop all my definitions of what attractiveness is, I can see it everywhere because it is everywhere. Happiness or love is everywhere. Everything has a potential capacity to make me happy. What I need to do is to invoke or explore that potential.

Every name and form is associated with *asti bhāti priyam*. It is, it shines, it is attractive, meaning it is dear and is a source of happiness. Every object is unique in that it has its own name and form. This means that every name and form is different from every other, but every object also has universality, in that everything is *asti bhāti priyam*. Let us look again, into the example of the pot. There is something that distinguishes one pot from the other, and that is its unique name and form or shape. But there is something universal in all the pots, namely clay. Similarly, in this world, there is something that

separates each object or being from another and this is, its particular name and form. On the other hand, there is also something that is universal, and this is *asti bhāti priyam*.

What is the relationship between the clay and the pot? The clay is the truth of the pot. In fact what we call pot, is nothing but the clay. The pot has no existence apart from the clay and therefore the pot is nothing but clay. Similarly, if *asti bhāti priyam* is the universal aspect of all objects, what does it mean? It means that the truth of all objects is nothing but *asti bhāti priyam*! This means that even when I perceive the object as a particular name and form, its underlying reality is *asti bhāti priyam*.

Everything is *priyam*; *ānanda*; wholeness; fullness or *brahman*. This is what it is. If I try to determine the truth of an object by progressively sub-dividing it into its building blocks, nothing seems to remain. But that is not so. We say that something does remain. What is it? It is the one who is investigating, is the one who remains! Similarly, where is the *asti bhāti priyam*, which is associated with every name and form? Is it out there? Where is it? It is the nature of the very subject who asks this question! With reference to the subject, the *asti bhāti priyam*, which is in the third person, will get transformed into the first person. It will be *asmi bhāmi priyam* instead. We have changed the case. As Pujya Swamiji would say, that “*brahman* is” is called the *parokṣa jñānam* or indirect knowledge. It gets transformed into “I am *brahman*”, which is *aparokṣa jñānam* or direct knowledge. To begin with, we recognize that the essence of everything is *asti bhāti priyam* or *saccidānanda*. Then we recognize that *saccidānanda* is indeed myself. A text called the Advaita Makaranda, opens with the verse:

ahamasmi sadā bhāmi kadācinnāhamapriyaḥ

brahmaivāhamataḥ siddhaṃ saccidānanda lakṣaṇam

Always I am. Always I shine. Never am I an object of dislike to myself. Therefore it is established that I am *brahman* which is of the nature of existence, awareness, and fullness. [Advaita Makaranda, 2]

Ahamasmi, I am always. *Sadā bhāmi*, I always shine in my consciousness. *Kadācinnāhamapriyaḥ*, I never dislike myself. I may dislike other things but as far as my love for myself is concerned, it is unconditional love. My love for other things is always conditional. But I never hate myself. I always love myself regardless of where I am or how I am, whether I am good or bad, rejected or accepted. Therefore where is this *asti*

bhāti priyam? It is in fact nothing but my own self. What does it mean? What am I seeing? If *asti bhāti priyam* is my nature and we say that all that there is, is *asti bhāti priyam*, what am I looking at? My own Self! What, then, is this creation? It is nothing but a projection of my own Self.

pūrṇamadah pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate

That creation is complete, and this self is also complete because this arises from that completeness. [*Śānti mantra* from Yajur Veda]

Adah, the self, is *pūrṇam* or complete. *Idam*, this creation, is also *pūrṇam* because *pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate*, or from *pūrṇam* arises *pūrṇam*. This creation, which is *pūrṇam*, has emerged from the Self. Therefore, recognize this *pūrṇatvam*, the completeness. Recognize that every name and form is in reality *asti bhāti priyam* and that *asti bhāti priyam* is the very nature of my self. *Pūrṇam eva avaśisyate*, whatever remains is also *pūrṇam*. There is no duality. *Ekam eva advitīyam*, [Chāndōgyōpaniṣad, 6-2-1] everything is one, without a second. *Asti bhāti priyam* is all that remains.

Question

Doesn't *sat* mean truth? The text of the Tattvabodha defines it differently. Why is it called existence?

Answer

Sat does mean truth. The definition of *sat* in the Tattvabodha is, '*trikālepi tiṣṭhati iti sat*', it is that which exists in all the three periods of time. So both definitions are right. What is the definition of truth? It is defined as, '*abāditham*' or that which cannot be negated. This is what we mean by saying that it obtains in all the three periods of time. It implies that it cannot be negated in the past, in the present or in the future. Therefore, they both mean the same.

In the Chāndōgyōpaniṣad, *sat* is used in the sense of the *jagatkāraṇam*, the very cause of creation. There the teacher begins his teaching by saying to Śvetaketu, "*sadeva somya idam agre āsīt ekam eva advitīyam*: O dear boy, in the beginning (before its creation) this whole universe was *sat*, one without a second [Chāndōgyōpaniṣad, 6-2-1]." If this universe was *sat* or existence before its creation, what is it now? Is it no longer

sat? No, even now it is *sat*. However, this *sat*, is now known as different names and forms.

In Ahmedabad, they sell all kinds of pots along the sidewalks during the time of *Diwali*. Before all these pots were created, they were just clay. Then what are they after their creation as pots? Are they any different from clay? No, they are still clay. But the clay is now known as all these pots and pans. The idea is that the clay, which was formally known only as clay, now obtains in the form of pots and pans. Similarly, the whole universe was *sat* before its creation, and continues to remain *sat*, even after. This *sat* obtains through all the various names and forms, in which form, we perceive the creation or the universe. No intrinsic change has taken place.

When the clay becomes the pot, no intrinsic change takes place in the clay. If you take any little particle from the pot and get it tested or analyzed, it will still be clay. However, if you want to remove the clay from the pot, the pot will cease to exist.

Why can the pot-maker not call his creations clay, instead of pots? This is because, if he tells us so, we would not understand that we are looking at clay. We imagine that we are looking at pots and pans. When are told that before creation all these pots and pans were clay, if we can visualize in our minds a huge lump of clay, we may have no difficulty in recognizing the very same clay existing in the pot. This enables us to understand that what we think of as a pot is really clay. The clay has not been negated even in being 'transformed' into a pot. When the pot breaks, it is its name and form that are negated. But regardless of whether the name and form is there or not, the clay was, the clay is and the clay will continue to be. You can negate the pot, but you can never negate the clay. The clay-ness of that pot can never be negated whether you break into pieces, make it into a powder or whatever. This is what we mean by saying that the clay cannot be negated.

Both definitions of *sat* thus amount to the same. The clay *is* in all three periods of time, before, during and after the creation of the pot. This is the same as saying that the clay is that which cannot be negated. The name and form by which the pot is known can change and therefore be negated. But the clay that *is* the pot cannot be negated. Truth being defined as that which cannot be negated, the truth of the pot, in the ultimate

analysis, is the clay, which informs it. Thus both *sat* and *satyam* are the same. *Satyam* or truth is that which cannot be negated. *Sat* is that which always persists. What cannot be negated is what persists. Or when we say it persists, it means that it cannot be negated. Thus we have these two words, *sat* and *satyam*.

In the Chāndōgyōpaniṣad, this concept is stated in the context of the clay and the pot, but it is true of all names and forms in this universe. What is creation, but names and forms? Before its creation, this whole universe was *sat*. Then what is it now? What the teacher is inviting us to do is negate names and forms in our own minds. Therefore, I visualize in my mind a state when this creation was not, and *sat* alone was. Thus I recognize *sat* without the clutter of names and forms, just as I recognize the clay without the clutter of names and forms. When I recognize clay as clay, I do not have difficulty in recognizing it even when it comes in different names and forms. Similarly all names and forms reduce to simple existence. When the names and forms disappear, their *is*-ness does not disappear. The *is*-ness can never be negated. But where is the *is*-ness? I do not see it there. It has disappeared there, but obtains in the person of the very observer.

Two lessons are taught in the Chāndōgyōpaniṣad. The first lesson is that when you recognize *sat* as *sat*, you can recognize *sat* in spite of the various names and forms. This is in the same manner as, when I recognize the clay, I recognize the clay in all the pots. Secondly, the teacher says that *sat* is the very substratum of the universe. “*Tat tvam asi Śvetaketu*”, “that is what you are Śvetaketu”. When *sat* sub-divides, no names and forms remain. It is not that *sat* disappears, because the very inquirer remains. Therefore where is *sat*? Who is *sat*? I am the *sat*. So this is how we get “*tat tvam asi*”. The teacher first reduces the whole universe to *sat* and then makes Śvetaketu recognize that *sat* is nothing but his own self.

In the Tattvabodha, it is defined in a simple way, as *trikālepi tiṣṭhati*, that which obtains in all the three periods of time. Although it says *trikāla* or three periods of time, we should also include the three states of creation, sustenance and dissolution, and the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. That which obtains in all these three, regardless of whatever changes take place in the form, is called *sat*. It also happens to be *satyam*. The meaning of the words *satyam* and *sat*, are ultimately one and the same.

There cannot be two truths. Truth by definition has to be one. Then alone can it be the truth of everything. Truth must necessarily be free from limitation; otherwise it cannot be the truth of everything. If truth were two, one truth would limit the other truth and therefore neither will be the truth of everything. Therefore, truth must necessarily be one only. This one truth is what modern scientists are in search of. Vedānta says that the truth is you, and this is the jump the scientists cannot make. A scientist sub-divides matter and says that it disappears and that there is energy. Ok. But still that energy is different from the scientist. For the Vedāntin, the so-called energy is nothing but the Self. Ultimately energy is nothing but the manifestation of consciousness or existence.

Question

Can you please elaborate on *avasthātrayam*?

Answer

Jāgrat (waking), *svapna* (dream) and *susupti* (sleep) are the three states of experience, known as *avasthātrayam*. Waking is *vyāvahārika sattā* or objective reality. It is *īśvara sṛṣṭi* or the projection of the Lord. Dream is *prātibhāsika sattā* or subjective reality. It is *jīva sṛṣṭi* or the projection of the individual.

Waking represents a higher degree of reality than the dream. There is continuity in the state of wakefulness, while there is no continuity in the state of dream. The waking world of yesterday is what I find to be there today too. But the dream of yesterday is not the dream of today. *Svakāle satyavat bhāti prabodhe satyāsat bhavet*, [Ātmabodha, 6] in its own time the dream appears real. It appears to be real as long as it continues, but is known to be unreal when one is awake. If we were aware of this apparent reality while in the dream, we may relate to it differently, but we do not have that awareness while in the dream state. Unfortunately, because we do not know that it is a dream and unreal, we seem to experience the same kind of pleasure and pain in dream as we experience while awake. Right now, even as I am talking to you, what is there to say that everything is not a dream? What we call waking is also not substantially different from dream.

What is a dream? It is a projection. How do we say that? Because it is negated. When I wake up in the morning, the whole world of my dream is negated, falsified. Therefore, we know that the dream is a projection. But waking is also not substantially different from dream. You may say that you saw the same house yesterday that you are seeing today and therefore this wakeful state is not a dream, not a projection. But you could well be saying similarly in a dream also! As far as the dreamer is concerned, he seems to experience the same kind of continuity in the dream, as we say we do, in our wakeful state. Therefore it points to a possibility that what we call waking, could also be a dream. By dream we mean something that can be negated; something that resolves into a higher reality. Negation means the resolving of a lower reality into a higher reality. Dream is a lower reality, resolving into waking, which is a higher reality. But then waking shows a pattern similar to the dream, and therefore, it shows a possibility that the waking can also resolve into a higher reality. Waking is the most important state because it is the state in which we can learn and grow. The other two states, namely dream and deep sleep, are also very important because they reveal something about us.

The dream state becomes an excellent example of understanding *mithyā*. *Mithyā* is that which depends upon something else for its existence. Nobody has any problem in understanding that the dream state is *mithyā*. Each one of us has had the experience of waking up in the morning, and to recognize that dream was not real. Everything that was in the dream is *mithyā*. In dream, there was the duality of subject and object, which is also *mithyā*. Hence, whenever there is the duality of subject and object, that state is *mithyā*. There is subject-object duality in waking, and hence, waking is also *mithyā*. Therefore the state of dream helps us to understand the reality of the wakeful state as also being *mithyā*. For this reason, dream is a very important experience. It also shows us how a lower reality gets resolved into a higher reality.

The deep-sleep state also is very important. After that experience, we feel well rested when we wake up in the morning. We say that we slept happily and that we did not know anything. This common experience goes to establish that there is an experience of happiness in the deep-sleep state. It shows us what our true nature could possibly be. If I experience happiness in deep-sleep state, where did that happiness come from? What desire was satisfied in deep sleep? What object of enjoyment did I have in my deep

sleep? None. The deep-sleep state marks the absence of all conventional, recognized sources of happiness. Happiness is very much there in deep sleep, even though there is no means of happiness. Where is it coming from? The only one who is there is myself and therefore the happiness that I experience in deep sleep must be my own nature! Therefore the experience of deep sleep shows us the possibility of the fact that happiness is our nature. It also tells us that to experience happiness, we should either be in deep sleep or we should create a condition similar to deep sleep.

How is it that I am happy in deep sleep? There is no subject-object distinction in deep sleep. There are no likes and dislikes. There are no worries and anxieties. “Swamiji, it is the nature of my mother to worry. If she has nothing to worry about, she will worry about why she has nothing to worry about!” Thus, if there is a worrier, he will be worried nonetheless. How is it that there are no worries and anxieties in the state of deep sleep? This is because the worrier, the person who gets anxious, is not there

What is the reason that I generally do not experience happiness in the waking state? It is because we always have some worry, anxiety, insecurity, fear, sorrow, sadness, grief etc. These afflictions are like a cloud that veil the sun of happiness. To be happy, we need not do anything but remove this cloud. For the sun to shine through, we don't have to do anything to the sun. All we need to do is to remove the cloud. Similarly, to be happy, all we need to do is to remove the cloud of unhappiness.

Where does all the unhappiness come from? It comes from our sense of individuality, the *ahankāra* or ego. This ego, which is the source of unhappiness, is absent in the state of deep sleep. What is there when unhappiness is absent? It is happiness. Unhappiness clouds happiness, and when this cloud of unhappiness is removed, what remains is happiness. Therefore we experience happiness in deep sleep because that tremendous burden of the ego, which obstructs the experience of happiness in the waking and the dream states, is not there. I carry the heavy cross of the ego on my shoulder in the waking and dream states. I just drop it in the deep-sleep state and am therefore totally relieved. Thus the deep sleep state tells us what our true nature is.

What is ego? The ego is the self, identified with this *upādhi*, this body-mind-sense complex. What is *ātmā*? *Ātmā* is the ego minus the identification with the body-

mind-sense complex. If we consciously become free from our identification with the body-mind-sense complex, we will own up to that happiness, that *ānanda*, which is our nature. But that *ānanda* becomes clear only when this ego, which obstructs it, is given up. This happens naturally in the deep-sleep state. We should practice this, consciously, in the waking state. This is what Vedānta teaches us through *avasthātrayam*.

Question

It is easy to understand that this tape recorder is in my consciousness, but to say that the tape recorder is Consciousness is a different matter. How is an inanimate object such as a cup, or a tape recorder, ‘Consciousness’?

Answer

We have a preconceived idea of what consciousness is! This confusion naturally arises if consciousness is taken to be a state or mode of mind, which is a specific manifestation of consciousness as opposed to universal Consciousness. By mode of mind, we mean the manifestation of consciousness, which is expressed through the medium of a specific object. In other words, when you have ‘tape recorder-consciousness’, the tape recorder is a particular mode that your mind is in, at that time. For example, ‘cup-consciousness’ or ‘pot-consciousness’, better known to us as *ghatākara vṛitti*, is also a specific or particular manifestation of consciousness. This is not what we mean by Consciousness.

Our description of Consciousness is that it is formless and does not have any attributes. When this Consciousness gets associated with or conditioned by a given name and form, such as a tape recorder, it becomes Consciousness with an attribute, which can then become the object of a mind’s awareness. The eyes and the mind cannot objectify Consciousness, which is formless. It can only be objectified when it is conditioned by a name and form. Thus when you say that you are conscious of a tape recorder, that is a specific, particularized manifestation of formless Consciousness or universal Consciousness.

Question

But when you say tape recorder *is* ‘Consciousness’, what exactly are you talking about?

Answer

Well, what we are saying is that Consciousness is intelligence. A tape recorder, a cup, or any object for that matter, is intelligence. Whatever exists, is the manifestation of this intelligence, this universal knowledge or omniscience. Because the cup, tree, tape recorder or any object is an intelligent creation, it reflects intelligence. Each and everything in the creation reflects intelligence. When we talk of Consciousness, it is this intelligence that we mean by it.

Question

So, this is how you define Consciousness?

Answer

Yes, universal Consciousness is not understood properly. It is confused with consciousness as in a specific and particular sense, which manifests as a mode of mind after the mind comes into contact with a given object, as in saying that the tape recorder is in my consciousness or a thought is in my consciousness. That type of consciousness is a mode of mind, a state of mind. By Consciousness, we mean that because of which a mode of mind or a state of mind is known. It is that because of which our mind comprehends and perceives. The confusion arises because the difference between ‘general or universal Consciousness’ and the ‘specific particularized consciousness’ is not understood.

Question

I would like to understand the concepts of *cetanā* and *caitanya* better. Vedānta says that I have a consciousness, and inanimate objects have consciousness manifesting in them as well. How do you say that the *cetanā* is a reflection of the universal *caitanya*? It seems to me that this is a leap of faith and belief! *Cetanā* could manifest as an effect of the biological phenomena; it arises in us when we are born and it passes away

when we die and we don't see it. So, with a biological model, *cetanā* can be explained. To say that the universal *caitanya* manifests itself through this instrumentality is yet another model, at the very best. We cannot necessarily say that it is the only model, because the biological model seems to explain the apparent creation as well.

Answer

By 'biological model', do you mean that the *caitanya* or consciousness is produced by a combination of chemicals? And that it is a matter of faith if we say that there is anything other than the chemicals? And that it is a matter of belief if we say that there is something called 'universal Consciousness' which is above and beyond the manifest consciousness?

Question

Yes. That is what I mean.

Answer

The scientific view is that Consciousness is a biological phenomenon. It says that Consciousness arose or evolved when there was a combination of matter in the so-called 'primordial soup'. Consciousness is looked upon as a property of matter, that when matter is combined in a certain way, Consciousness is created.

We perceive it differently, at the level of the very premise of these fundamental principles. We say that matter by itself is inert. It does not have will, volition, deliberation etc. Then, how can any mixture of insentient elements of inert matter give rise to Consciousness or *caitanya*? No material product, howsoever refined it may be, can lose its inherent insentient materiality. In our view, the word *caitanya* is not used in a narrow sense. By the word *caitanya*, we mean awareness. As you know, it is awareness, because of which the external world is perceived, and because of which a harmonious action can be performed and, furthermore, it is because of awareness that a human being is aware of his self and the world around him. We say that matter is not self-aware and that it is not aware of the world around. It does not complain, "I am cold, or please do not mix me with hot things, it hurts, etc". Matter lends itself to being manipulated and maneuvered without deliberate retaliation.

Sentience is a manifestation of *caitanyam* in the form of life. *Caitanyam* manifests as life, i.e. sentience, wherever there is a subtle body. Sentience is what we call *cetanā*. Wherever a subtle body is not present, there, Consciousness manifests as an inert thing. We call that *jada*, inanimate and insentient. Now, *caitanyam* cannot be confused with life or *cetanā*. *Caitanyam* is the fundamental principle that manifests itself everywhere and it is the only thing there “is”, and whatever is, is the manifestation of *caitanyam*. It is inclusive of inanimate and animate things. So then, *caitanyam* is not a matter of faith. *Caitanyam* is the existence. It is ‘*sat cit ānanda*’. Every object has five aspects to it, ‘*asti*’, (is-ness), ‘*bhāti*’ (shining), ‘*priyam*’ (attractiveness), ‘*rupam*’ (form), and ‘*nāma*’ (name). So, associated with every name and form, is *asti bhāti priyam*. It cannot be denied, that a thing is, that the thing becomes an object of my awareness, and that it has an inherent attractiveness or the capacity to give happiness. The fact that every name and form has these five aspects cannot be denied. It is a matter of everyone’s experience. It is in this sense that we say that *caitanyam* is *asti bhāti priyam* and not in the sense that it is a resultant of combination of insentient elements etc.

Question

Is it true that *bhāti* depends upon my *cetanā* and *asti* does not depend upon *cetanā* and whether I am alive or dead, and that the ‘being-ness’, the ‘is-ness’ is always there?

Answer

Yes.

Question

What about the *bhāti* aspect of it?

Answer

Well, how do you say that something is there? Only when you can become aware of it! *Bhāti* means that a given thing becomes an object of my awareness. Everything has the capacity of revealing itself. So it is existence (*asti*), which reveals itself. It is not that shining (*bhāti*) is a separate entity. *Asti* alone is *bhāti*. You say that something is, only when you become aware of it. But you can only become aware of it when it actually exists. Therefore, ‘to be’ and ‘to shine’ always go together. *Asti* and *bhāti* always

accompany each other. It is the *priyam* aspect, which becomes veiled and which has to be brought to manifestation. But *asti bhāti* is always experienced.

Question

But is it not that it does not shine if I am not aware of it?

Answer

It always shines. But it does not shine to your individual mind. For it to shine to your individual mind, it is necessary that your mind should come into contact with it. That means your sense organs, the mind and the intellect should come into contact with the object in order for it to shine to your individual mind. But, it has the capacity to shine to your individual mind, unlike a nonexistent thing like the horn on my head, which does not have the capacity to shine, will never shine and can never become the object of your awareness!

This tape recorder, an existing object, has the capacity of becoming an object of your awareness. Whether you are aware of a given thing or not, is a different matter. All we say is that it has a capacity of becoming an object of your awareness, that it reflects existence, that it reflects intelligence and that it reflects the potential for happiness.

Every name and form reflects *asti bhāti priyam*. And that is the truth about every name and form. Our definition of truth is, *abādhitam* or ‘that which cannot be negated’. Regardless of what happens to the name and form, *asti bhāti priyam* can never be negated, it cannot be that it is not. That is the abiding truth. And that is what we mean by *caitanya*, Consciousness. The idea is that the name and form becomes the vehicle for the manifestation of *asti bhāti priyam*. Our tenet is that the *caitanya* is not a product of a combination of matter. The *caitanya* is not created; it becomes manifest. It is always there. But for it to become an object of a mind’s awareness, it requires a reflective medium, a name and a form, with which the mind has to come into contact.

Question

If *sat cit ānanda* is the truth, what should we do with it in our day-to-day life?

Answer

We should live a life in keeping with that truth. To be able to live that truth some day, I start by molding my life now and in the present, to be in keeping with the truth. Therefore, I commit myself to *sat cit ānanda* which is existence, knowledge and happiness. I help others to achieve their existence, knowledge and happiness too. What the Bhagavad Gītā teaches us is that in order for us to do something for ourselves, we should first begin to do it to others. Then it automatically gets done to us. Thus when you love somebody, you automatically get loved. When we make somebody happy, we automatically become happy, if not today, maybe tomorrow. The rule is that when you help somebody, you get helped. Whatever it is that you radiate, gets reflected back to you. If you shout “*Om*” into the mountains, the mountains will echo it back to you. Therefore in order for me to live a life that is in tune with *saccidānanda*, what I should attempt to do is to help others live, attain or benefit from *saccidānanda*. Since the truth of our self is *sat cit ānanda*, everyone has a natural love for *saccidānanda*.

Sat means existence, to be, and to be is to live. I am, as long as I am alive. Therefore my love for being or my love for existence gets translated into my love for living. I want to live. Recognize that everybody wants to live. Love for existence is love for life and every living being loves life. Therefore I should do what I can to help others to live. Therefore I make a commitment that I will not violate life. I provide whatever it is that I can, to nourish and prolong life. I help others to sustain and enjoy life. That help or facilitation can vary depending upon the situation. If they are hungry, I can give them food. If they are thirsty, I can give them water. If they are suffering from illness, I can provide them health services. Or I can help in the efforts of other people who may be doing that. I may not be able to do things directly. I may not be able to build a hospital or I may not be able to serve patients directly. I can support the efforts of those who are doing it. That is our commitment to *sat*.

Cit means knowledge. I have a natural love for knowledge since it is my very nature. Nobody wants ignorance. Everybody wants to be wise. There is a natural love for wisdom. When there is a love for *sat*, I respect, sustain and nourish my life and at the same time, I respect the life of others and help sustain or prolong their life. So also, in the case of *cit*, there should be love for knowledge in my life, and at the same time, I

should also support any efforts of making that knowledge available. I can myself learn. That is why in our tradition there is an emphasis on learning. I myself learn the scriptures and become the link in passing that knowledge to the next generation or to others who are interested. I do it to whatever extent it is possible. There may be limitations to what I do because of my other commitments, but I can support the effort of learning and teaching. There are people who are committed to knowledge, and I support their effort in perpetuating this knowledge. That is *cit*.

Ānanda is happiness. I am happiness. I have a natural love for happiness. Therefore I want to be happy. I also know that everybody wants to be happy. Therefore, I do what I can to help others become happy. I do not violate others by making them unhappy. I can do what I can in order to spread happiness or do something, which can help other people to be happy.

Saccidānanda. In every situation there is an opportunity for me to make somebody a little more comfortable, or offer a little consolation by my words or by my actions. Every situation offers me an opportunity to try to make somebody happy. Or share a little bit of knowledge or help them live longer. It is not that we need to do big things. What is important is the very spirit. What is important is the recognition of the fact that if I live a life that violates *saccidānanda*, I can never know it and I can never own up to it. If, even after studying the scriptures, I violate other peoples' right to live, or violate other peoples' right to know or violate other peoples' right to be happy, I am going against the very thing that I am seeking!

A way of life, which is in keeping with what I am studying, is called *yoga*. Such a way of life is taught in the Bhagavad Gītā. Lord Krishna deliberately calls it *yajña* or sacrifice, an attitude of offering. Thus, I live a life of *yoga* or alertness, to ultimately own up to the truth, *saccidānanda*.

Question

In the Bhagavad Gītā Home Study Course, Pujya Swamiji asks us to develop the habit of meditating upon the Self. Otherwise, we will have a tendency to meditate upon our likes and dislikes. Could you please elaborate on that?

Answer

Meditation upon the Self requires that we disengage our mind from its occupation of meditating on likes and dislikes. Chapter 2 of the Bhagavad Gītā describes the nature of the Self. Therefore it is very important that we take some time in our day-to-day life to meditate upon the realities of life. What is the reality about my Self? What am I by nature? “*Ajo nityaḥ śāśvato ’yam purāṇaḥ.*” [BG 2-20] ‘This (self) is unborn, eternal, undergoes no change whatsoever, and is ever new.’ The Self or I is *purṇa*, whole, and free from birth, free from death, free from change, free from doership, free from enjoyership, free from hurt and free from guilt. This is the truth about my Self. So let me meditate upon the reality of my Self. If I don’t do that, I end up meditating upon the unreal, the ego, which is actually the superimposed reality. This habitual meditation on the non-Self will happen whether I want it or not. Therefore I deliberately meditate upon the true nature of my Self. I meditate upon the fact that there is an order in this world, that there is a harmony. It is necessary to bring the mind to focus on the right thing. The mind has a tendency to wander away from its focus because it is influenced by events. Therefore I require time to make the mind free from the influence of events and focus it upon the nature of reality. There are three things in my life, the *jīva* (individual), the *jagat* (world) and *īśvara* (the Lord). Each has its own reality. I can meditate upon the reality of these three. I can meditate on the reality of my Self, and of the world. The world is a manifestation of God. What is God? God is the nature of order in this universe. He is the nature of fairness or the nature of *saccidānanda*.

Such meditation on the Self is required so that our mind maintains the focus. My mind, being what it is, is subject to the influence of what is around me and therefore I can lose my focus very easily. I can be provoked easily; people can provoke my anger; they can provoke my lust; they can provoke my greed. They can push buttons in me. Therefore it is necessary that we provide focus to the mind during meditation. Hopefully that focus will remain even in the day-to-day activities. May I remain anchored to what I understand is right and may I not get distracted or swayed. Thus it is very important to develop the habit of meditating upon the Self.

Question

How can one make progress in spirituality?

Answer

One cannot become better spiritually, unless an attempt is made. There is a scheme in the creation, such that you will be given enough lessons in life and enough opportunities to learn from these lessons. The capacity to learn is given. Therefore the potential of recognizing the need for spiritual growth is there. And the means for the spiritual growth are also given. But with the help of freewill one has to recognize it and initiate it. It is not given and automatic that everyone will grow spiritually.

Question

Will I realize myself? Is a lot of education required for this realization?

Answer

You have to recognize who you are. Your search will go on until you recognize your true nature. This search goes on, but without an understanding about what the search is for. First comes the understanding that I am searching for something; then comes the understanding that I am searching for the Self. Finally comes the understanding, that the search will be complete by knowledge. This is the methodology of studying and following the scriptures. This is how you are slowly led to the realization of the self. Yes, it definitely happens. What is the use of learning if it does not happen?

No, we do not need a lot of education to achieve self-realization. For the common person, following a life of *dharma* has the effect of self-purification. If you want to live with truthfulness and honesty, the impulses of untruth and dishonesty have to be subdued. In order to live a life of *dharma*, one has to keep on subduing *adharma*. This is how following the life of *dharma* becomes a process of self-purification and because of this, you will some day recognize your true nature.

You will start performing actions more for helping others, rather than yourself. This is also a method of self-purification through which the mind becomes *sāttvik*. As long as there is a predominance of *rajas* in the mind, there is ambition, activity and

success. While the mind has *rajas*, there is love for pleasure. As the mind becomes *sāttvik*, there arises the desire for knowledge.

“*Sattvāt sañjāyate jñānam*” [BG 14-17], knowledge is born from *sattva*. When the mind becomes *sāttvik*, the love for knowledge arises. To know, you do not have to study Sanskrit, the scriptures and all that. The mind that is pure is able to see what is being taught. Basically, the teaching is that you are whole. We pursue this study all the time because we want to expose our mind to this teaching. The mind then starts thinking along the same lines as what the scriptures teach us and we start looking at things through the eyes of the scriptures, as it were. Being exposed to the method of scriptural teaching is also a process of self-purification. Our pattern of thinking gets transformed. The process of reasoning and decision-making is purified by a constant exposure to the teaching. Self-purification happens through leading a life of *dharma*, listening to the scriptures and also by the worship of God. All the means can be pursued and everybody has a chance to attain their true nature.

Knowledge

The Importance of Knowledge

When you drive from one place to another, you need a map to make right choices, or you could wind up someplace else. To make the right choice on the road, you require the right map. There are many maps: The New Jersey map, The Pennsylvania map etc. Which map should you use? It depends on where you need to go. You need to have a map of Pennsylvania and New Jersey when you are going between Pennsylvania and New Jersey. For this trip, you do not need a map of California. A map becomes meaningful, provided you know your destination. Many choices need to be made, e.g., ‘Take route 78 to route 287(S), then take exit #9 to Route 18 and make a right turn...’ etc. These choices can be made provided you know what your destination is, and what the route is. Thank god that the Internet has provided us with these directions. Similarly, the Internet in the form of our scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gītā, the Upaniṣads and other texts, has provided us the map for our lives. We have been given guidelines as to how to make these choices.

Intelligent living is making the right choices. Making the right choices requires you to firstly, have knowledge of the destination, then, the knowledge of which map to use to get there, and finally, the skills to utilize them to make the right choices. It is important to understand that you should have the right map. If you happen to have the wrong map, you can have everything else such as the best of the cars, a tank full of gasoline and good driving skills, and still not reach your destination.

Sometimes, it happens that the map is incorrectly labeled. You may think you have a map of New Jersey but in fact, it is a map of Illinois. If you have a wrong map, you can never reach your destination! If you do not have the right map, simply driving and making choices does not mean that you are necessarily moving in the direction of the destination. Mere driving, as in covering distance, is not enough. Mere speeding is not enough. You think that you are living a very fast life. You think that you are running very fast. You think that you are covering a lot of distance. You may be doing that. But then if you do not have the right map, merely covering distance is not enough. You should have the right map.

What map are we talking about with reference to our lives? How can we have a wrong map? This is also a part of creation. As children, we used to play a very simple blindfold game. A pot full of sweets would be hung someplace and you were given a stick in your hand. With the blindfold, you are supposed reach where the pot is, break it and get the sweets. They would turn you around after covering your eyes with the blindfold, so that you lose your sense of direction. Actually on the previous evening, we would go to that location and measure the number of steps to that pot from where the game is supposed to start. Typically it used to be about 52 steps. After being blindfolded, we would measure exactly 52 steps. We were very smart; we would poise ourselves in that place and attempt to break the pot. But nothing would happen because we would have walked in the wrong direction! If we could see that path, then it would be so easy for us to get there and hit the pot, and get whatever is inside it. But unfortunately, we cannot see the path due to the blindfold!

This is possible in human life. With animals there are no such problems. They don't have many ways. As far as animals are concerned there is just one way. No streets, no choices, no exits, no entries, nothing. They don't need to choose. But we, the humans, have to deal with all these things.

Human being is born with a blindfold as it were. We all seem to be born with the ignorance of not knowing what it is that we are searching for and not quite knowing what direction we should take in order to reach our destination. If this ignorance were not there, this kind of lecture and discussion would not be necessary. If we knew exactly what we wanted, and we knew how to get it, we wouldn't require the scriptures and we wouldn't require the Swamis. Cows don't require the Bhagavad Gītā. They know exactly what they have to do. But here, in our case, there is something called self-ignorance. Why this ignorance? I don't know. But it is there. As we all know, each one of us is born ignorant. Therefore, we have to keep on shedding the ignorance by acquiring knowledge.

Question

I understand why human beings want to be immortal and live happily always. But why do we want to be all-knowing?

Answer

We had said that there are three desires based on *sat cit ānanda*. *Sat* is the desire to be, because there is love for life. *Cit* is the desire to know, because there is love for knowledge. *Ānanda* is the desire to be happy because there is love for happiness. How much happiness do I want? I want all the happiness. How much existence do I want? I want all the existence. How much knowledge do I want? I want all the knowledge.

Why is there a need to know everything? This is a very interesting question. More than one Upaniṣad, in fact, deals with this question. In the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, the student comes to the teacher and asks this classic question.

kasmin nu bhagavo vijñāte sarvam idam vijñātam bhavati

Oh, revered Sir, what is it knowing which everything becomes known? [Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1-1-3]

This desire is there in us. We want to make sense of everything. It is not that we want to know everything in the sense that we want to know how many grains of sand there are, or how many stars there are, or how many cells there are! It is not that kind of knowledge, which we mean by all knowledge. Instead, it is that I want to understand everything. I want to make sense of everything. I want to get clarity about everything. When I confront something, I want to be comfortable. I can be comfortable only when I understand what I am confronting. Is it not so? When I do not understand what it is that I am confronting, I am at a loss. When you are in front of me, and I do not know or remember who you are, then there is confusion in my mind. What we mean by gaining all the knowledge is being clear about everything.

From a Vedāntic standpoint, knowing everything means knowing that everything is *brahman*, knowing that everything is a manifestation of God. When there are thousands of golden ornaments, what is meant by ‘knowing’ all the ornaments? It means knowing that every ornament is made of gold. The other way of knowing the ornament is in terms of its size, its shape and maker, but that is not important. What is important is to

know is that the ornament is made of gold. Similarly, it is important to know that you are *brahman*, that I am *brahman* and that the whole universe is *brahman*.

All there exists, is *brahman*. The truth or God is one non-dual reality. God is the very material cause who himself manifests as everything in the universe. That is how we have to know. Having known that, we as well know everything. Having known one particle of gold, we have known everything that is made of gold. Having known one particle of clay, we have known everything that is made of clay. Similarly, knowing *brahman* as our own Self, we will have known essentially everything. That knowledge is what our mind, our intellect, is seeking.

Question

Please comment on Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati's opening statement in the lecture this morning, "Vedānta teaches us that each one of us is whole, and it is something to be understood, rather than believed in. Wholeness is a result of an insight rather than an experience."

Answer

This is a very important and profound statement. Wholeness is something to be understood, rather than believed. Something that is already there only needs to be understood; if something is not there, then it needs to be created, and experienced.

I see a beggar in front of me and I am told that he is a millionaire. This is to be understood. "This fellow looks like a beggar. How can he be a millionaire?" Thus arises the *vicāra*, enquiry or deliberation. Then we understand that the beggarliness is false or *mithyā*; it is a superimposition on the actor, who is a millionaire. That is how we understand the millionaire, not that we believe. What will belief do? Belief is required for something which is not a matter of experience right now, and which is yet to happen. But for that which is a matter of experience right now, belief does not help. That is where understanding comes. Knowledge is with reference to that which is already there, which is already accomplished. Belief is with reference to something that is not accomplished.

Wholeness is already my nature. It is already accomplished. And I still find myself searching for wholeness. Is it because I *am* not whole and am therefore searching for wholeness? Or is it because I *think* I am not whole and am therefore searching for wholeness? Is the desire for wholeness there because it is something that I do not have or is it something I *think* I do not have? Desire for wholeness is a desire, for that which I think I do not have. Wholeness is my nature. It is not to be believed in. It is to be understood. We have to understand how smallness or insignificance of the self is false, and how wholeness is the truth of the self.

That I am whole, is not a matter for subsequent experience because I am already experiencing myself! Understand that the Self is always a matter of experience. It is not that I do not experience wholeness. It is just that whatever I experience, I interpret as smallness. In the example of the rope and the superimposed snake, it is not that I am not experiencing the rope, but only that I interpret it as a snake. It is not that the rope needs to be experienced, because it is there in front of me, but that it needs to be understood. Similarly, it is not that I do not experience wholeness. What I experience *is* wholeness. “But Swamiji, how can it be?” That is what is to be understood. It is not that I do not experience God. What I experience is God. How can that be? That is what is to be understood. What Vedānta reveals is the realities of life. Realities that already exist! Therefore, they have to be understood, rather than believed or experienced.

With reference to what there is and what you are experiencing, belief is not required. You do not have to believe that it is nighttime right now, because you are experiencing it. But for some reason if you believe that it is day, and I say that it is night, then you require some degree of *śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* is the trust that since Swamiji says it is night, it must be so. Why do I think it is day? Thus I question my own conclusion and understand that I am making some mistake. Similarly I am the whole. Wholeness is already experienced here and now. If I have to become whole in the future, then I have to believe that. Suppose someone says, “Swamiji, invest this money in stocks and you will become a millionaire in a year”, it is a matter of belief, because it is not an existing fact right now; it is something that can happen in the future. But if somebody says, “Swamiji, you are wearing glasses”, then I will say, “Yes, thank you”. Suppose I think I do not

have my glasses and somebody says I am wearing my glasses, then that needs to be investigated, as opposed to being believed.

Therefore experience is necessary for something that is not being experienced now. If we have a wrong interpretation about something that we are already experiencing, then what is required is right understanding, which is called insight. Insight is required for something that is already being experienced. For example, it happens sometimes, in mistaken identity. I think I am talking to Krishnamoorthy, an old friend, who I have not met in the past 15 years. I am chatting away. Someone comes along and points out that it is not Krishnamoorthy, but Ramamoorthy. Then it is a matter of recognition and understanding, and not a matter of belief. The person already is. I do not have to believe him; I have to understand him.

Wholeness being an existing fact and a fact that is already being experienced, we have to understand it, rather than create new experiences. Therefore, Vedānta takes our day-to-day experiences and explains how every experience can reveal the all-pervasive nature of this truth.

Action versus Knowledge

Question

You said that to solve problems not within you, requires *karma* or action, but to solve problems within you, requires *jñānam* or knowledge. But to do action without knowledge is not very effective. Similarly acquiring knowledge requires action; that is, knowledge cannot be acquired without effort. Please explain.

Answer

There are two things in life. One is *prāpta* or that which is already acquired and the other is *aprāpta* or that which is not already acquired. The means of acquiring that, which is not already acquired, is action, and the means of owning up to that, which is already acquired, is knowledge.

For example, if I don't have money, I have to perform some action to acquire it. It is true that to perform an action also, we require knowledge. That is a kind of knowledge, which is a means of action. That kind of knowledge is what we acquire in

schools and universities so that we can perform our actions towards achieving our material wants and needs. I would go to an engineering college to become an engineer. I would go to a medical school to become a doctor. In this manner, knowledge and action go together.

What about acquiring happiness, *mokṣa* or liberation? This is already acquired and we have only to discover that we are already liberated! This process of discovery is to recognize that we are the person and not the personality, and to create a distance between the Self and the non-Self. The person is *sat cit ānanda*. It is this knowledge that enables me to see myself as I am and recognize the fact that what I have been seeking is what I already am, and thus the search is complete. This is the other kind of knowledge, one that enables us to achieve a desirable state of mind called the *sāttvik* mind, a state of emotional maturity, which is conducive to knowledge.

Acquiring a *sāttvik* mind also requires action performed in the spirit of *yoga*, *karma yoga* or the spirit of worship and devotion. Such action also becomes a means of knowledge or awareness of the Self. So there are two kinds of knowledge, the knowledge of the Self and knowledge of the non-Self.

Knowledge pertaining to the realm of the non-Self is a means of action towards our worldly existence. Action that is performed in a spirit of devotion as a prayerful offering to the Lord, leads to knowledge of the Self.

Question

People say that *karma* and *jñāna* are separate paths. Please guide us on this.

Answer

The Bhagavad Gītā says that there is only one path. It is the path of self-growth, which is the path of freedom. So there is only one path of attaining the freedom. *Karma* and *jñāna* become stages on this path. *Karma* means *karma yoga*. It enables me to acquire freedom from my *rāga-dveṣas*, or likes and dislikes. *Jñāna* is the subsequent stage of acquiring freedom from the remainder of obstacles.

Basically, my mind consists of three *guṇas*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Rajas* and *tamas* result in *rāga-dveṣas*. As the likes and dislikes get subdued, my mind becomes

sāttvik. It enjoys poise and equanimity. *Karma yoga* helps me achieve a *sāttvik* mind, a cheerful mind, and a contemplative and thinking mind. It is a mind where there is desire for knowledge. *Jñāna* removes ignorance and enables me to attain my true nature. It thus gives me the ultimate freedom, freedom from ignorance. So freedom becomes a two-step process. The first step is *karma yoga*, which gives freedom from *rāga-dveṣas*, and the second step is, *jñāna*, which gives freedom from ignorance and sense of doership or ego. So we do not look upon *karma* and *jñāna* as separate paths. We look upon them as one path.

In doing *karma*, it is not so much the actions that count, as the attitude behind the actions. This attitude is also of the nature of knowledge. We have to know what the sense of duty is and how there is harmony between the world and ourselves. We have to be aware of how the universe is supporting us, and thus our actions should become a means of returning this favor. All this requires understanding. In *karma yoga*, there is a progressive growth in our maturity and understanding. When *karma* is performed with the right attitude, it becomes a means of knowledge. So *karma yoga* is not merely the performing of action, or even the right attitude. It is also knowledge; the knowledge by which I progressively grow in my understanding of myself and the realities of life. *Jñāna yoga* is the next stage of this knowledge of the true nature of my self. Each stage serves to bring me closer to my awareness of my true self. *Karma yoga* removes the bigger obstacles in this quest and *jñāna yoga* removes the finer obstacles.

It is like the tuning of a transistor with a big knob and a fine-tuning knob. *Karma yoga* is the big knob, as it were, and you hear the music near your desired frequency, and *jñāna yoga* helps in fine-tuning, so that you can hear it properly. *Karma yoga* makes the mind *sāttvik*, contemplative, so that I can experience my self, which is happiness. Progressively there is a desire to understand this Self. This is when *jñāna yoga* helps with the fine-tuning, to reveal that the happiness is the very nature of my true Self. Therefore, just as the two knobs of the radio serve the same purpose, so also, *karma yoga* and *jñāna yoga* are not two separate paths, but stages along the same path of self-realization.

Question

In the Bhagavad Gītā, what is Śrī Śaṅkarā's point of view on *jñāna-karma-samuccaya* (combining knowledge and action)?

Answer

Śrī Śaṅkarā argues that we cannot have knowledge and action simultaneously. He shows that what we are searching for in our lives, namely *mokṣa*, can be attained by *jñānam* or knowledge alone, and not by performing *karma*. Knowledge is a means of attaining what we already have or discovering what is already attained, as in '*prāptasya prāptih*'. *Karma* or action is a means of accomplishing what we do not have, '*aprāptasya prāptih*'.

The nature of the self is *mukta*, liberated. That is my nature. The Vedāntin's answer to the question, "How do you say that liberation is my nature?" is, "Because that is what you love." "I find myself bound. How can you say that freedom is my nature?" "You find yourself bound, but would you like to remain bound? You don't! You love freedom. Therefore, that must be your nature." Freedom is a matter of discovery and not something to be achieved. Knowledge is the means of making that discovery.

Then why do *karma*? Śrī Śaṅkarā had to deal with two strong schools of thought in his days, the Pūrva Mīmāṃsākās⁶ and the Bauddhas. Who are the Pūrva Mīmāṃsākās? They are those who maintain that *karma* is the means of *mokṣa*. What is their definition of *mokṣa*? To them *mokṣa* is reaching *svarga*, the heavens, where there is unsurpassable happiness. It needs to be reached, and the *nitya karma* prescribed in the Vedas is a means for attaining *svarga*. This is why they say that *karma* is a means for *mokṣa*. According to them, the main teaching of the Vedas is *karma* and the related *vidhi* and *niṣedha* or do's and don't's. According to them, *vidhi-niṣedha vākhyas* are the *mahāvākhyas* or great dictums of the Vedas, and you are obliged to perform your duties as long as you are alive! How do they look upon the role of the Vedas in our lives? They believe that the Vedas are meant to impel us to action. So as long as you are alive or fit, you must necessarily perform the *nitya-karmas* or your daily duties like the *agnihotra*

⁶ The name *mīmāṃsā* means proper or rational investigation (in to the meaning of Vedic texts). Pūrva Mīmāṃsā means "prior investigation" since it dwells on the first portion (the *karma* portion) of the Vedas. This school of thought is also known as Karma Mīmāṃsā.

etc., and the *naimittika-karmas* or occasional duties. Why? If you do not perform your duties, there is harm; you will go to hell. This is their interpretation of the Vedas. For them, *mokṣa* is *aprāpta*, an accomplishment and therefore it has to be accomplished. All of this is based on taking the self to be limited and bound and unhappy. We have to become happy and therefore doing action will help us become happy. That is how Pūrva Mīmāṃsākās argue that you cannot give up action.

For us Vedāntins, the significant statement is “*tat tvam asi*”, ‘You are *brahman*’; ‘You are whole’. If you are already whole and don’t feel it, then knowledge will lead to *mokṣa*, not action. The Pūrva Mīmāṃsākās then make a concession, that even if you require knowledge, you cannot give up *karma*. You must combine action with knowledge, ‘*jñāna karma samuccaya*’. After gaining the knowledge you will enhance the effectiveness of your knowledge by performing your daily duties. Only then will knowledge be capable of giving you *mokṣa*. Even though knowledge gives you *mokṣa*, it does not give you *mokṣa* by itself. But knowledge, whose effectiveness is enhanced by doing your duty, can give you *mokṣa*. To this, Śrī Śaṅkarā says that knowledge and action cannot go together.

How is it that knowledge and action do not go together? What is knowledge? It is the knowledge that I am whole. What is being whole? Wholeness is something that is not subject to change. It cannot be improved upon. You can’t take anything away from it. It can neither grow nor decline. Whole must be changeless. That the Self is whole means the Self is changeless. It being changeless, means that it cannot be a *kartā*, a doer or a *bhoktā*, an enjoyer, because a *kartā* is a changing entity and a *bhoktā* is also a changing entity. So if the Self is changeless, then this self or I can neither be a doer nor an enjoyer. The nature of the Self is necessarily action-less. The performance of a ritual, on the other hand, requires me to be an agent of action. When can I perform an action? Only when I assume the role that I am the doer of that action. *Karma* requires *kartṛtvam*, doership. Knowledge reveals *akartṛtvam* or actionlessness. Knowledge that the Self is actionless, destroys the very edifice upon which action is based because action is based on taking oneself to be the doer. When can I speak? Only when I assume the role of a speaker! When can I walk? Only when I am the one who walks! When can I chant? Only when I become the chanter! An action can be performed only when I become an

agent of that action. Knowledge or actionlessness cannot go with action, which requires doership. Therefore knowledge and action cannot go together. Śrī Śaṅkarā argues that a wise person is not obliged to perform his duties. The Pūrva Mīmāṃsakās do not have the concept of actionless Self. According to them, doership and enjoyership is the nature of the self and hence, everyone has to perform their duties.

The Vedas prescribe obligatory duties for everyone. *Sannyāsa* means the renunciation of those duties. That is *vividisā sannyāsa*, taken by choice, to pursue knowledge. Śrī Śaṅkarā's argument is that even a *vividisā sannyāsī* is not obliged to perform duties since he is pursuing the knowledge of the self as being actionless. His life must be compatible with what he is searching for and not opposed to it. He cannot simultaneously remain an agent of action and arrive at the actionless self. Therefore, even for a *vividisā sannyāsī*, duty or *nitya karma* is not there. Otherwise you cannot justify *vividisā sannyāsa*.

Before Śrī Śaṅkarā, there was a great Pūrva Mīmāṃsakā called Kumārila Bhatta. He was the guru of Maṇḍana Mishra. Kumārila Bhatta was a very strong person and a great *karma kāṇḍī*, devoutly committed to the Vedas. His work had a great contribution in driving away the Buddhism from India. In those days, Bauddhas were very strong in India. They were called *nāstikas* because they did not accept the authority of the Vedas. They were strong, and very smart in their debates. Kumārila Bhatta wanted to confront them and defeat them in debates. How could he do that unless he knew their tradition properly? Therefore, he assumed the guise of a Buddhist monk. He went to a Buddhist school and he learnt the principles of Buddhism. Every day he would hear his teachers condemning the Vedas, ridiculing and humiliating them, and there would be tears in his eyes. Ultimately, they found out that he was an imposter and he was caught. As a punishment he was asked to jump off a hill. He closed his eyes and jumped, saying in his mind, "If the Vedas are true, nothing should happen to me." This shows how much *śraddhā* he had in the Vedas. He fell and nothing serious happened to him, except that he lost one eye. Why? Because he had said, "If the Vedas are true..." Kumārila Bhatta was a very strong person and did a tremendous amount of work to re-establish the Vedic tradition. So, in Śrī Śaṅkarā's time, the Mīmāṃsakās were very strong.

Śrī Śaṅkarā confronted them to establish the supremacy of knowledge and assert that the human being is already whole and does not require *karma*, to become whole. By *karma* you can only accomplish what you have not hitherto accomplished. Wholeness, however, is to be discovered. *Karma* cannot give you wholeness. So he argued against *karma* as a means for *mokṣa*; that there cannot be *jñāna karma samuccaya*.

It is not as if *karma* has no role in pursuit of knowledge. It does play a role in terms of purifying the mind and in preparing the aspirant for knowledge. Once the desire for knowledge (*jijñāsā*) arises, *karma* has fulfilled its role. “*Athāto brahma jijñāsā*” [Brahma Sūtras 1-1], thereafter, hence a deliberation on *brahman*. *Atah* means thereafter. It implies that something has happened previous to this. What is it that has happened? “*Sādhana catuṣṭaya*.”⁷ It implies the attainment of the purification of the mind and hence, the attainment of the four-fold qualification, the last qualification being *mumukṣutvam*, ‘May I be liberated; May I get the knowledge!’ This is what is achieved by *karma*.

Living intelligently brings about an emotional maturity, brings about purification of the mind and results in a desire for knowledge. That desire can be fulfilled. What should the seeker do? He should go to the teacher. Since the desire for knowledge arises, it can be fulfilled. When there is a desire for knowing *brahman*, one should enquire into the nature of *brahman*. Since there is a desire for knowledge, *karma* now becomes an obstacle. Otherwise why would we dismiss *karma*?

If you are going to a teacher and listening to the scriptures, is it not *karma*? Yes it is *karma*, but not *karma* in the sense of an enjoined duty. It is a means of knowledge. *Śravanam* or listening to the scriptures, *mananam* or reasoning and analysis, as well as *nididhyāsanam* or contemplation, are a form of activity, but not part of the obligatory scriptural duties such as *nitya* and *naimittika-karmas*.

⁷ The seeker is expected to acquire four-fold qualification which includes: *viveka* (discrimination), *vairāgya* (dispassion), *śamādi-ṣaṭka* (6-fold qualifications beginning with *śama*), *mumukṣutva* (desire for liberation).

The Wise Person

Question

Can you please summarize the characteristics of a wise person as described in the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā?

Answer

In the last section of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, Arjuna asks a question, “What are the characteristics of a wise person who enjoys an abidance in wisdom or knowledge?” Lord Krishna replies, “*ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ.*” [BG 2-55] ‘He is the one who is happy with himself by himself.’

This is all we are all seeking in our lives! We all want to be comfortable with our own selves. If I am comfortable with myself, I will have no difficulty in being comfortable with everybody and everything else. When I am not comfortable with myself, I cannot be comfortable with anybody else, regardless of what they do to me. Very often people try to provide me comfort. I cannot be comfortable because I am uncomfortable with myself. Regardless of what they do, I cannot be pleased. But when I am comfortable with myself, I find comfort in everything else. The wise person is one who is totally comfortable with himself, and therefore, comfortable with everything.

Lord Krishna presents a wise person as being a totally non-demanding person: “*prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha manogatān.*” [BG 2-55] ‘He is the one who is free from all desires obtaining in the mind, O Arjuna.’ When you are not demanding anything, you are automatically giving. Therefore, he is totally a giving person. This is how Lord Krishna describes a *sthitaprajña* or a wise person. “*Duḥkheṣvanudvigna-manāḥ sukheṣu vigatasprhaḥ.*” [BG 2-56] ‘He is neither totally overcome by sorrow nor totally overwhelmed by happiness.’ He is “*vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhaḥ*”, [BG 2-56] he is free from *rāga* (demands), free from *bhaya* (fear) and free from *krodha* (anger), and because of that, he is not overcome by sorrow or elation. A wise person is one who has become free from all the demands, as well as free from all needs. When there is a demand, there is always a possibility of anger because when the demand is not met with, it gets transformed into anger. When there is demand, there is fear also because I always have the apprehension of whether my demand will be fulfilled or not. So the possibility

of the non-fulfillment of the demand causes fear. Actual non-fulfillment of the demand causes anger. So *rāga*, *bhaya* and *krodha* are the products of ignorance. When ignorance is dispelled by knowledge, a person becomes totally free from *rāga*, *bhaya* and *krodha*. That is called *mokṣa*, freedom. It is freedom from fear, freedom from anger, and freedom from demand. A demanding person is a dependent person who is at the mercy of those from whom demand is made. He is miserable if his demands are not fulfilled. *Mokṣa* is total freedom from any kind of demand or dependence, fear or anger. A wise person abides in his own fullness like an ocean, which abides naturally, in its own fullness. This is the nature of the Self that is full and complete. The only difference between the wise person and others is that the wise person knows the Self to be full and complete, while others do not. So the one who abides in the Self is full and complete and therefore there is no need to demand. This is how the last section of the second chapter describes the *sthitaprajña*, the person of abiding wisdom.

Question

Is it possible for a common man affected by *saṃsāra* to be a *sthitaprajña*, as described by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gītā?

Answer

What does ‘a common man affected by *saṃsāra*’ mean? It means being a person who is ignorant. Because I am ignorant, I have an ego. Whenever I have an ego, I am vulnerable. People can manipulate me. By pleasing me or gratifying my ego, they can always get what they want out of me, and by attacking my ego they can always hurt me. Ego is vulnerable and therefore I become vulnerable. I become subject to hurt and guilt. So is it possible to become a *sthitaprajña* if one is a common man, an ignorant man affected by *saṃsāra*, a vulnerable man? The answer is yes. That is the purpose of the teaching.

What is meant by *sthitaprajña*? *Prajñā* means wisdom, and *sthitī* means abiding. So *sthitaprajña* means a person of abiding wisdom. What is this wisdom? That ‘I am *brahman*’ or ‘I am limitless’, is the wisdom, which is the truth about myself. One who has a spontaneous or an abiding knowledge that he is limitless, he is free, he is *brahman*

and he is complete, is called a *sthitaprajña*, a man of abiding wisdom. It is possible for a person to become that because, to be *brahman*, is everybody's birthright. Nobody can deny that.

If I have to become *brahman*, then there is a distance between the seeker and the sought. If I am not *brahman*, then in order to become *brahman* I must undertake certain means and it is possible that I may not be successful. But I do happen to be *brahman* and therefore it is a matter of discovery. God has given me the intellect with which this fact can be discovered. We are also given the scriptures wherein this teaching is provided. With the help of learning from the teachers and by following the instructions given by the scriptures, we lead a certain way of life, which is called *yoga*. In this way we initiate a process of self-growth or emotional maturity while exposing ourselves to the teaching. Yes, we can gain the knowledge, and we can gain abidance in the knowledge by continuing the pursuit.

Can we become *sthitaprajña*? The point is that there is no choice and we have to become that. I cannot accept myself and I cannot be happy or comfortable unless I become *sthitaprajña*. Unless I abide in the knowledge that I am whole, complete and free, I cannot be happy with myself. Therefore, nobody has the choice but to become *sthitaprajña*, if not today, then tomorrow. That's what we want. Since we are limitless, there is no avoiding the fact that there is a natural love for the limitless. Therefore, I cannot be satisfied with anything less than limitless. Since I cannot be satisfied, I will be driven by my own desire to be limitless, which is to be discovered by knowledge. We have to discern what it is that we are seeking and understand that there is a method and a process to fulfill that desire. This must become clear. Then our life becomes a pursuit of inner growth and learning, and a process of attaining the goal of limitlessness.

Advaita

Question

What is *advaita*?

Answer

Advaita says that the seeker is the sought. It says that the *mokṣa* or liberation that I am seeking is really my own self, like the search of the 10th man for himself, in the famous story of The 10th Man. Even though you are searching for happiness, you already are of the nature of unsurpassable happiness! This is *advaita*.

A limited one cannot be the nature of limitless happiness. Vedānta tells us that we are limitless. Traditional limitations are those of time, space and object. That you are limitless implies that you are not limited in time, you are not limited in space and that you are not limited in qualities. It means you include all time, the entire space and every object or quality. Therefore, whatever there exists, is you, the Self. This is *advaita*.

How do we then account for the duality that we see? I see that you are different from me. How can I be limitless if I am different from you? For me to be limitless means that you really cannot be different from me, otherwise I cannot be limitless. If you are different from me and I am different from you, then I am limited and you are also limited. So what do I make of the differences that I see? It means that these differences cannot be real. It means all these differences; all of this duality and all of this creation cannot be real! It is *mithyā*, an appearance or projection. Thus, starting with the one idea that we are limitless, we can arrive at all of these conclusions! That is why we require Vedānta as a *pramāṇa*, a means of knowledge. Vedānta alone can tell us that we are limitless because there is no way for us to discover this fact ourselves! We have taken for granted that we are limited! Vedānta says we are limitless, which implies that our sense of limitation and our sense of differences must be false. This is *advaita*.

How do we explain the creation, then? What is creation? Creation is nothing but a superimposition. For you to be limitless, you must be one and non-dual. Therefore, the truth must be one and non-dual. For the truth to be non-dual it must be both the material and the efficient cause of this creation! That is, it must be the creator and the creation too! That is why God is both the material as well as the efficient cause of this creation. He is the creator as well as the creation. This is *advaita*.

All traditions accept God as the creator of the world. Most traditions, however, view God as different from the creation! He has created this world and is said to be in the heavens or some place away from the creation. For creation, you require knowledge and therefore, the creator must be all knowing or omniscient. For creation, you also require the power or the skill to create, so the creator must be all-powerful or omnipotent. Therefore God, the creator of the universe, is omniscient and omnipotent. “Obviously I cannot be that! I know that I am limited in power, limited in knowledge and limited in every way! God has to be different from me!” When God is looked upon as merely the efficient cause and as the creator of the universe, which is how most traditions or theologians understand Him, He has to be different from me! Then, if you are a devotee of Lord Krishna, going to *Gokula* and being in the presence of Lord Krishna is *mokṣa*. That is *dvaita* (duality).

The Upaniṣads say that God is not just the creator, but also the creation. If God created the world, where did he get the material with which he created this world? If he got the material from somewhere else, then, must not whoever provided him the material be another God? That cannot be and therefore the material also must come from him. He is not only the efficient cause but he is the material cause as well. Viewed thus, the whole universe becomes the body of God. Therefore, the whole creation is not apart from God. It is a manifestation of God. You are a part of the creation and therefore, you are also a part of God. Therefore, you are a part and God is the whole. This is *viśistādvaita*.

What we call creation is in truth, not real. Therefore God is not the creator or the cause in the primary sense. In fact, He transcends the very idea of cause and effect. Thus when you recognize that God transcends both the efficient and the material cause, and the causality, you see then, that he is your own Self. Then there is non-duality. This is *advaita*.

This is how the philosophies of *dvaita*, *viśistādvaita* and *advaita* are explained. Swami Vivekanandaji used to say that it is going from one truth to another truth, meaning that it is a progression from a lower truth to a higher truth. That God is different from me

has some truth, as long as I look upon myself as a limited individual. There is a statement that is attributed to Hanumān when he says to Lord Rama:

deha-budhyā tu dāso 'ham jīva-budhyā tvadamśakaḥ
ātma-budhyā tvamevāhamiti me niścītā matiḥ

When I am identified with my body, then I am your servant. When I look upon myself, as a conscious being, then I am part of you. When I look upon myself as *ātmā*, then I am not separate from you. This is my firm conviction.

Deha-budhyā tu dāsoham. ‘When I am identified with my body, then I am your servant. You are my master and I am your servant. You are you and I am I.’

Jīva-budhyā tvadamśakaḥ. ‘When I look upon myself, as a conscious being, then I am a part of you. Because you are the totality of consciousness, I am a small consciousness. I am a part of you.’

Ātma-budhyā tvamevāham. ‘When I look upon myself as *ātmā*, the Self, then I am not different from you. I am you.’

As long as there is a strong identification with body, God is separate from us. Lord Krishna says in the 12th chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā that it is very difficult for those who are devoted to *avyakta*⁸ to arrive at the truth, when they are identified with the body. A strong body-identification creates a strong sense of limitation and an acceptance of the experiential duality.

The Vedāntins worship God not to perpetuate duality, but to gradually eliminate the reality given to this apparent duality. In our prayers to the Lord, we pray for the removal of the duality, which we feel.

Means of Knowledge

Question

What do you mean when you say that the words of Vedānta are a means of knowledge?

⁸ Lord as beyond all the attributes

Answer

When we say that the words are a means of knowledge, we mean that the scriptures like the Upaniṣads are the means of knowledge. The Upaniṣads are in the form of words. An Upaniṣad is a verbal testimony of those who are experienced and reliable. That is why their words, in the form of verses, become the means of knowledge. Only the words of those who are trustworthy and knowledgeable are accepted as a means of knowledge, not just any words! In science too, if a teacher is trustworthy and well-informed, his words can be a means of knowledge. When we say ‘*śabda pramāṇam*’ or verbal testimony, we specifically mean the words of the Upaniṣads. *Vedānto nāma upaniṣad pramāṇam*, Vedānta itself means the Upaniṣad, which is the means of knowledge, the *pramāṇam*.

The Upaniṣad ultimately is *brahmavidyā*, or the knowledge, “*aham brahmāsmi*”, ‘I am *brahman*’. When knowledge takes place, the *vṛtti* or cognition created by the teaching becomes a *pramāṇam* or means of knowledge. The ultimate *pramāṇam* is that which reveals the final truth, and therefore the *vṛtti*, that “I am *brahman*” is called Upaniṣad. The Upaniṣad texts are also called Upaniṣads because they become the means of creating that understanding or that knowledge.

Question

Can you please explain the importance of the Bhagavad Gītā?

Answer

The Bhagavad Gītā can be said to be the essence of the Upaniṣads and the Vedas. Broadly speaking, the Vedas can be divided into two sections, the *karmakāṇḍa* and the *jñānakāṇḍa*. The *karmakāṇḍa* deals with *karma* or actions performed in keeping with the order called *dharma*, or the right way of living. It teaches us the basic values of *dharma*, what we should do to reach a certain end and how we should do that. The *jñānakāṇḍa* deals with knowledge. Thus the subject matter of Vedas is basically *dharma* and *brahman*. Śrī Śaṅkarā says in his introduction to the Bhagavad Gītā, that it is the “*samasta vedārtha sāra sangraha*”, to mean that it is a *sangraha* (collection), of the *sāra* (essence) of the *artha* (subject matter) of the Vedas. Thus the teaching in the Bhagavad Gītā can be said to be the essence of the knowledge of the Vedas.

The Bhagavad Gītā includes both, *brahma-vidyā* as well as *yoga-śāstra*. In his introduction to the Bhagavad Gītā, Śrī Śaṅkarā also says, “*sa dvivido hi vedokto dharmah pravṛtti laksano nivṛtti laksanaśca*”. ‘The Veda teaches us the two-fold *dharmā* characterized by *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*.’ *Pravṛtti* is *dharmā* characterized by engaging in action, and *nivṛtti* is *dharmā* characterized by the withdrawal of action. Thus, there are two lifestyles, *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*. *Karmakāṇḍa* is a life of engagement or a life of activity, and *jñānakāṇḍa* is a life of contemplation. Both the Veda and the Bhagavad Gītā, teach us these two life-styles.

It is said, “May you sing the Gītā well! May you study the Gītā well! May you reflect upon it and assimilate it!” The Bhagavad Gītā alone is enough for us. There is no need to study any other scripture. Listening well and adhering single-pointedly to the Bhagavad Gītā is enough for us. That is why the Bhagavad Gītā is an extremely important text for a seeker.

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Swamiji answers these questions, however diverse or repetitive, with great patience and deliberation, and provides clarification in his characteristic style of undemanding simplicity. His responses illustrate how discerning he is, of the workings of the modern mind, as he guides us with compassion through the process of reconciling the ancient wisdom of our scriptures, with the realities of modern life. This booklet is a compilation of all the weekly emails in an effort to synthesize them so that all seekers can benefit from Swamiji's pragmatic answers.

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