

Vedanta Darshanam

Salutations to all.

Kabir says that whatever has to be done has to be done today itself because tomorrow never comes and something else will come up tomorrow (or later). This deep insightful words is apt for moksha as the ultimate goal of life as well. Moksha is that which we all are seeking either knowingly or unknowingly. And therefore all efforts should be in order to achieve this goal of moksha here and now itself. He who says that I will seek moksha after 50 years is a fool as after 50 years there will be only time to think about whatever happened from now till 50 years. Vasanas or latent tendencies that have been added in the past itself are huge and since for next 50 years more vasanas will be added therefore moksha is definitely out of the question in the future.

Hence we find Kena Upanishad saying that if we attain moksha here (and now) then it is true else it isn't true. It isn't true means it will not fructify. The chain of birth and death continues (goes on without any end). And depending on one's knowledge and actions, the next birth is determined. Therefore we cannot be sure that we will get a good or conducive birth (that which will help in realization). Since we aren't even sure how long we will live therefore it is essential to start seeking moksha here and now itself. No time is to be wasted for this goal of moksha. The person who says there is no time is one who doesn't want moksha as we have time for each and everything in the entire world. If our son or daughter or parents are ill, then we will find time to take them to the hospital and be with them, caring for them, until they are hale and hearty again. Thus a person who says there is no time really doesn't want moksha.

Chinmaya therefore used to define mumukshutva as burning desire for liberation. The adjective of burning is very valid. If our house is burning how we will run from everything and run towards the house, similarly we should run towards the goal of moksha. This is possible if we learn the shastras properly and understand that this world is temporary and sorrowful. That the world is temporary and sorrowful is easily known to each one of us through our own experience and learning the shastras is not required for the same.

Many people think that moksha is very tough to attain and knowledge of the shastras is also very tough hence they don't strive towards the same. Magazines such as Vedanta Darshanam and Vedanta Madhuryam is an effort to show to sadhakas that jnaana is very simple. And as the Lord says, implementation of jnaana is very simple (simpler than jnaana itself). What is required is just the desire for moksha, desire to get rid of all sorrows and desire to achieve this goal here and now itself, without any delay.

We find now that many states in the United States as well as other western countries have been affected by the hurricane named Sandy. This is also a call to all sadhakas that life is so volatile; one moment a person is living and the next moment this birth ends. We cannot be sure of what will happen even the next moment. Hence the necessity to attain moksha as soon as possible.

Through the articles of this magazine we will find that jnaana and implementation of jnaana is very simple indeed as it all revolves around the truth that Brahman alone exists; this Brahman isn't something far but the Consciousness which pulsates inside us as I-exist, I-exist alone is Brahman. Thus Brahman is our very nature of Consciousness that has been temporarily forgotten and through knowledge of the shastras we will be able to get rid of this forgetfulness and will be able to realize Brahman. The world that seems to pose an obstacle is not an obstacle at all as it doesn't really exist. It is just an illusion like the dream world. Remembering this we will be able to set aside anything and everything in the world that obstructs progress towards moksha. Thereby constantly remembering that Brahman alone exists (as the substratum of the illusory world) we will be able to progress quickly towards moksha and thereby will be able to ever rejoice in bliss.

May the ultimate reality of Brahman guide us towards the goal of moksha through the very simple jnaana and implementation of it through constant contemplation of the ultimate reality of Brahman alone existing at all times so that we will be able to ever rejoice in bliss here and now itself.

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Upanishad Vivaranam

Mundaka Upanishad – 1-1-1

ॐ ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः संबभूव

विश्वस्य कर्ता भुवनस्य गोप्ता ।

स ब्रह्मविद्यां सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठामथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह ॥१-१-१ ॥

om brahmā devānām prathamah sambabhūva

viśvasya kartā bhuvanasya goptā

sa brahmavidyām sarvavidyāpratiṣṭhām atharvāya jyeṣṭhaputrāya prāha ||1-1-1||

Brahma was born first among devas, he is the creator and protector of the world; he imparted Brahma Vidya, that which is the basis or essence of all vidyas, to his eldest son Atharva.

Greatness of BrahmaVidya

Knowledge or science about Brahman is called Brahmavidya. It is essential to call knowledge in the shastras brahmavidya because there are so many other vidyas derived even from the Vedas. These vidyas all are very great in their own aspect but when it comes to the most supreme of vidya, it is brahmavidya alone.

What is so special about brahmavidya?

In order to understand this we have to first analyze about Brahman. Brahman (as would be explained by the Upanishad in a later mantra) is something from which this world has come. The world hasn't just come from Brahman but the world resides in Brahman and the world merges unto Brahman after its destruction. Thus it isn't wrong to say that the world appears in the substratum of Brahman. Considering that the world is constantly changing, it is just an illusion in the changeless entity of Brahman. This is akin to various gold ornaments being mere illusions of names and forms in gold and the dream world being just an illusion in the dreamer.

What is the nature of Brahman?

Brahman is Sat Chit Ananda in nature. Brahman is Sat or existence in nature as it always exists and never ceases to exist. Before creation, Brahman alone existed; during creation Brahman alone exists as the world and after destruction Brahman alone exists (without the illusion of world in it). Sat cannot exist of its own without any light falling upon it. This light

is the light of Consciousness, the light of all lights. Without Consciousness, absolutely nothing exists and for Brahman to be Sat in nature, Chit also has to be very nature of Brahman. Hence Ramana Maharshi beautifully says that what can illumine Sat other than Chit? That which is Sat is also ananta or unlimited in nature – any limitation would make Sat asat (as that which is limited will cease to exist at one point of the time or other). That which is unlimited is also ananda or blissful in nature. Thus Brahman is also ananda or blissful in nature. Thus Brahman is Existence, Consciousness and Bliss in nature.

Brahman being blissful in nature itself elevates the science of Brahman as it is bliss untainted by sorrow that we all constantly seek (irrespective of all discriminations). Brahman also by being Sat or eternal existence in nature makes the science of Brahman great. Lastly since Brahman alone really exists therefore the science of Brahman is great indeed (as nothing apart from Brahman really exists to be spoken about or taught about or explained).

Brahma Vidya – most secretive

It is very simple to understand that that which is secretive is very great indeed. Brahma Vidya is very secretive in that it isn't taught that easily. Hardly any knower of Brahman are present in the entire world. And even if such knowers are there, hardly they impart knowledge to others (for fear of misinterpretation) – only when an apt sadhaka, with proper qualifications, arrives the knower of Brahman imparts knowledge of Brahman to the sadhaka (shishya). Even if somehow somebody attains this knowledge, only very few are able to apprehend this knowledge in their intellect. Even if some are able to apprehend in their intellect, fewer are those who are able to progress towards realization of Brahman (or fulfillment of this science). As a result we find that this science of Brahman is secretive – secretive in that it is not known easily by all.

Though today the scriptural texts along with various commentaries and translations in almost all languages are available readily (either in print or in some cases even online), still those who are able to understand and implement it are very few indeed. Thus we find Gurus earnestly seeking for shishyas even as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to give a lot of attention to Narendra in order to ensure that Narendra is attracted to him more and more (as Narendra had apt qualities of a shishya – and one who is set to realize Brahman).

The Lord himself claims in the 15th chapter of Gita that I have explained to you knowledge which is very secretive indeed. At the end of Gita also the Lord says that I have given you knowledge which is secretive than the most secret, meaning that there is nothing secretive than this knowledge.

Brahma Vidya thus is secretive in nature because it is sacred, less given, less understood, less implemented and less realized.

Brahma Vidya – encompasses all knowledge

The Upanishad beautifully mentions as to why Brahma Vidya is the greatest of all vidya. This is because brahma vidya encompasses all other vidya. This means that if brahma vidya is attained, then all other vidyas are attained (essentially). This doesn't mean that a brahma jnani will know about computer programming or nuclear physics but just that once brahma vidya is attained then there is no need at all for any other vidya.

Generally vidya in the world are achieved for many reasons. One is money or in order to earn (or for one's livelihood). Second is for progressing in life (living life happily or peacefully from a worldly perspective). Third is for name and fame which are essential in order to survive in our own house (or amidst relatives), amidst friends and in office itself (where constant evaluation are made and the job itself depends on these evaluations). All these reasons constantly keep changing (or they become different or stronger), hence vidya also has to be constantly updated.

Thus from day one till day end of this life, a person keeps learning and therefore the age-old saying that knowledge never ends. Such knowledge which never ends will not lead to eternal bliss as there will still be some sort of yearning (or incompleteness). Thereby seeking or wanting more and more, a person ever is discontent. And the moment a person tries to be content, the contentment vanishes and therefore discontentment again creeps in. This goes on and on without any end at all.

It is definitely a wrong statement to say that knowledge never ends; worldly knowledge never ends and we have to keep learning from experiences in life (in order to ensure that we are able to deal with life in the future in a better way). But true knowledge ends all other knowledge and all other seeking. This true knowledge is knowledge of Brahman. Thus the science of Brahman puts an end to knowledge. Hence this science is called Vedanta or that which puts an end to Veda or knowledge.

How does Vedanta put an end to all knowledge?

Vedanta puts an end to all knowledge because Vedanta is knowledge of Brahman. Since Brahman is the very essence of the entire world therefore knowing Brahman, the entire world becomes known (essentially). Thereafter nothing else remains to be known. Thus knowledge literally ends after knowing Brahman. Though worldly perception, worldly experience and worldly actions still continue they don't affect the mind. Irrespective of any of the external situations, a person who has gained knowledge of Brahman ever rejoices in bliss in the mind.

Though such a jnani might perform actions in the world like any other person, still the person is eternally blissful in the mind. Actions thus are similar to actions performed by an actor in a movie or a dreamer performs in the dream world – neither of these actions taints in anyway the person; similarly actions don't taint the jnani.

Thus once Brahman is known, then everything becomes known. Thereby ends all seeking, all sorrow and all suffering. Thereby a person ever rejoices in bliss at all times. Since science of Brahman encompasses knowledge of everything (essential knowledge of everything as Brahman) therefore it is great. If it be argued that everything is not really known but only essentially then the answer is that since everything is just an illusion of names and forms in Brahman therefore essentially knowing everything is enough; it is knowledge of names and forms that causes sorrow and makes us want to know more and more. The moment essentially everything is known as Brahman, knowledge itself ends.

Thus science of Brahman is great in all aspects (and if any aspects have been missed out here, then it is great in that aspect as well because its subject-matter is Brahman).

The Upanishad also sets forth (in this and the next sloka) the tradition of Brahma Vidya (as to from whom and all this vidya has passed). This is to prove the validity of this vidya (it isn't something newly created by somebody but it has been passed down from generation to generation).

The first of the devas was Brahma. And Brahma had this knowledge (as attained from Brahman in the form of Vishnu or Devi as per different puranas). Thus Brahma's knowledge is valid and this is clearly known through Brahma performing his activities without any fail

irrespective of whatever happens in the world (or his creation). Brahma is equivalent of mahatmas or mahattattva or mukhya praana – the cosmic Ego or first creation; therefore mahatmas are able to consider the entire world as their own world and the people of the world as their own children (because they act at the level of Brahma from a worldly perspective).

Since Brahma Vidya is handed down from Brahma therefore this vidya is sacred and faultless. This is because it has stood the test of time by many acharyas in the past. That which is tested and proven to be right again and again by people is definitely faultless.

Such a faultless science therefore can be followed by any person (even though lacking faith). The tradition of brahma vidya also proves that any sadhaka who has the desire to realize Brahman will be able to realize Brahman through brahma vidya as has been proven by the tradition itself (more about the tradition in the next sloka in the next edition).

May we all strive to gain great, sacred and faultless brahma vidya through knowledge of Brahman as pervading the entire world so that we will be able to realize Brahman and thereby will be able to ever rejoice in bliss here and now itself.

Gitaamritham

Bhakti Yoga

This chapter of Bhakti Yoga is one of the shortest chapters and there are only 20 slokas in it. The chapter can be split into four sections – the first, slokas 1 to 7, explains bhakti by defining it in very beautiful terms; the second, slokas 8 to 12, defines the means to bhakti and the compassionate Lord giving easy tips (or short-cuts) for those who aren't able to directly implement bhakti; the third, slokas 13 to 19, beautiful describes a true bhakta (a realized master); the fourth, sloka 20, talks about the phalasaruthi or result of understanding and implementing bhakti in one's life.

Lord – Nirguna Brahman

Shaastras very clearly mention that the Lord is nirguna Brahman or the ultimate reality which is beyond all qualities or attributes. Such a Brahman by being the substratum of the entire world and one's own indwelling Self (subject of everything) isn't objectified by any means that we can find in the world. These means include our own sense organs, mind and intellect; since the various external equipments like telescope, microscope etc. still require sense organs so it is clear that Brahman cannot be objectified through any of these.

That which is the witness or illuminator of everything cannot be illumined by anything. This doesn't mean that such a Brahman is shoonya or void. That it isn't subject to any objectification doesn't mean that it is void because it is a matter of direct experience for every person. If it is argued that ignorant people don't experience Brahman it is wrong as they too experience in the deep sleep state. And Vidyanaraya says that Brahman is generally known by everyone but not specifically; this general knowledge is what attracts each and every person towards realization thereby making them feel that something is lacking in life even when everything external is available. A father who listens to a group of students chanting the Vedas is able to generally hear his son's voice but isn't able to specifically hear – here the reason for lack of specific identification is mixing. In the case of Brahman, the reason for lack of specific knowledge is termed as ignorance or ajnaana. And this is not knowing Brahman distinctively from the external world. Brahman is not known because it isn't an object to be known and all knowing has to stop in order to know Brahman. When all knowledge is stopped, the knower will shine as Brahman.

This Brahman as one's very nature of pure blissful Consciousness is directly experienced in the deep sleep state and therefore we cannot say that it is shoonya or void.

In order to realize Brahman we have to get rid of ignorance (and since sense organs, mind and intellect are effects of ignorance, therefore they cannot illumine Brahman) and this is through knowledge of Brahman. Knowledge of Brahman is found only in Vedanta, there is no other means to knowledge of Brahman and realization of Brahman is only through knowledge. Knowledge of Brahman as found in Vedanta is attained through sravana or listening, manana or reflecting and nidhidhyasana or contemplation.

All the above concepts was known by Arjuna even as many people of today talk about Brahman or claim that "there is something called Brahman which is everything as the essence".

Lord – Vishwaroopa

Arjuna knew that Brahman or Lord is beyond all apprehensions or forms and qualities. But still the Lord gave Arjuna vishwaroopa darshana or vision of the Lord as filling the entire world. This vision contradicts Arjuna's very knowledge about Brahman being beyond all forms. Therefore the 12th chapter starts with Arjuna's doubt to Krishna about form-worship and formless-worship (form-devotion and formless-devotion). Since the Lord gives vision to Arjuna therefore it asserts to Arjuna that form-devotion also exists.

When focus is on the form or formless instead of being on the Lord, doubts will arise in the mind. As long as focus is on the Lord we will find that the Lord just exists at all times. Even as water exists without form and with form as ice, similarly the Lord exists with form and without form. The with and without form depends on the viewer's or devotee's perspective. What matters is remembrance or vision of the Lord.

But whenever we find duality or difference existing, immediately we enter into comparison. And comparison is in order to find out which is better; the better one obviously is being embraced by people. Since we all are nourished with difference or duality being real from birth therefore it is very tough to get rid of this vision. Thus Arjuna asks Krishna in the very first sloka of the chapter as to whether form-devotion is better or formless-devotion is better.

Sloka 1 – Arjuna’s doubt

अर्जुन उवाच

arjuna uvāca

एवं सततयुक्ता ये भक्तास्त्वां पर्युपासते ।

ये चाप्यक्षरमव्यक्तं तेषां के योगवित्तमाः ॥१॥

evaṁ satatayuktā ye bhaktāstvāṁ paryupāsate |
 ye cāpyakṣaramavyaktaṁ teṣāṁ ke yogavittamāḥ ||1||

1. Arjuna said: Thus, ever steadfast, those devotees who worship you (as endowed with all-pervasive form) and those who worship non-decaying and unmanifest (Brahman); among these who are the greatest.

Form-devotion and formless-devotion

Many times we only look at the peripheral aspect of things. In this we lose deep insight into things. This is costly in that we tend to miss out on things which are not just important but decisive to our life itself. The story about few blind people trying to figure out an elephant can be remembered here; few blind people heard that an elephant had come to the area and they wanted to know as to what the elephant was. All went and touched the elephant. One person touched the tusk and said that elephant is soft and hard. Another person touched the leg and said that elephant is like the trunk of a tree. Another person touched the hair in the tail and said that elephant is hairy. None of these were able to know the elephant in its entirety.

In order to know devotion we have to become devotees or merge ourselves into devotion. Then we will be able to find that though there are different types of devotion, what is common to all of them is devotion. And that devotion is remembrance of Ishwara. This remembrance of Ishwara alone matters for devotion, nothing else matters. Then will end all comparisons. Comparisons have two perspectives to them – one is a good perspective in which we want to follow that which will lead to a higher goal quickly and easily; other is where we try to just compare in order to criticize. Arjuna’s doubt here is in order to implement that which will take him quicker to the goal (of moksha).

But even such doubts are unwarranted from a seeker as a seeker who once knows that Brahman is the ultimate reality will easily understand that this same Brahman becomes a subject-matter of the mind. Thereby Brahman takes up form in order to be apprehended by the devotee.

Lord – essentially formless but all-pervasive form to capture the mind

Though the Lord as Brahman is formless being the substratum of the entire world and by being the non-dual reality, one without a second, still the Lord appears with form in order to make the mind of seekers contemplate on it. The Lord himself will explain in the fifth sloka as to why this is needed. But the mind requires something to focus on, other than this world. And therefore a deity depending on one's own desires is given for the sadhaka. Since there are different types of sadhakas therefore we have 33 crore devatas. Depending on one's vasanas, one can choose a form that will stick on to the mind. The more and more this form is remembered in the mind, attachment to the world and worldly thoughts will slowly reduce.

All problems are due to considering the dual world to be real. Once the world is considered as just an illusion in the Lord, attachment to the world has to be removed through pervading the mind with the Lord. In order to help the mind merge unto the Lord, remembrance of the Lord has to be succeeded by making the Lord pervade the entire world. This is through seeing everything as the Lord, hearing everything as names of the Lord and doing everything as an offering unto the Lord. Then slowly the world itself will vanish from one's mind. Instead of the world, the Lord as pervading the names-forms of the world will be remembered in the mind.

That Lord who pervades the entire world is blissful in nature and through remembrance of the blissful Lord, a devotee will thereby become blissful. This bliss is the same bliss that a worshipper of nirguna Brahman too gets.

Thus ultimately what matters is devotion or pervading the mind with the Lord – irrespective of whether the Lord is form or formless, we will find that the Lord alone ultimately remains behind. Therefore there is no need, for a seeker seeking true devotion, to analyze on this. But since the mind always requires answers, therefore the Lord will answer Arjuna's questions slowly.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa beautifully explains through analogy of water that the Lord is both with form and without form. Lord is formless like water, essentially. But due to the cold of devotion of the devotee, the Lord takes the form of ice. And once the devotee's devotion culminates in knowledge (that the Lord alone exists) then the Sun of knowledge melts the ice to reveal formless water as the Lord.

Thus though essentially the Lord is formless, whatever is with form also has to be the Lord alone as nothing apart from the Lord exists. The Lord himself says in the 7th chapter that there is nothing apart from me here. Ishavasya Upanishad begins by saying that the Lord pervades the entire world. Narayana sookta says that the Lord pervades in and out everything – this means the Lord alone exists. Katha Upanishad goes one step further after saying that there is no duality here that whoever sees duality as if existing goes from death to death (or experiences sorrow alone due to vision of ignorance).

Before we see the Lord's beautiful answer to Arjuna's doubt, may we all strive to remember the Lord at all times as the substratum of the entire world as either formless or as pervading the entire world (our ista devata form) so that through focusing on non-dual Lord we will be able to realize the Lord by merging unto the Lord and will be able to ever rejoice in bliss here and now itself.

Prakarana Prakaashah

Dakshinamurthy Ashtakam - 1 - Explanation of the world

विश्वं दर्पनदृश्यमाननगरीतुल्यं निजान्तर्गतं

पश्यन्नात्मनि मायया बहिरिवोद्भूतं यथा निद्रया ।

यः साक्षात्कुरुते प्रबोधसमये स्वात्मानमेवाद्वयं

तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥

viśvaṁ darpanadṛśyamānanagarītulyaṁ nijāntargataṁ
paśyannātmani māyayā bahirivodbhūtaṁ yathā nidrayā |
yaḥ sāṅsātkurute prabodhasamaye svātmānamevādvayaṁ
tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṁ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye ||

The world which is like a town reflected in a mirror and is inside (the mind),
And seen in the Self but like dream seen as if outside due to Maya,
He who realizes, after dawning of knowledge, himself alone to be non-dual,
Unto such a form of Guru, Dakshinamurthy, my prostrations.

Chandrashakha nyaaya

In order to know the unknown, Vedanta uses the chandrashakha nyaaya. It is essential to remember that the ultimate goal of life as realization or moksha as knowledge of one's very nature of Brahman is unknown even as Brahman itself is unknown. And since the perspective that we have generally in the world is worldly (just perception of the world of duality) therefore directly shifting focus unto Brahman is impossible. Those who try to direct their focus directly unto Brahman thus often find themselves struggling to gain focus while experiencing the dual world (and Brahman being non-dual). Therefore Vedanta uses this logic to direct focus from the known world to the unknown Brahman.

A mother when making her child eat food points out to the moon. But since the child is young and cannot directly focus on the moon, therefore the mother points to a nearby branch of tree. And through this branch (tip of the branch) the mother points out the moon to the child. Thus from the nearby branch to far moon, the child is able to easily see the moon. Similarly in Vedanta, focus is initially given to the external known nearby world and then slowly directed unto the internal/essential unknown far Brahman. This is called

chandrashakha nyaaya. This technique is also sometimes called arundhati nyaaya - similar to a newlywed girl is shown arundhati star through pointing out of nearby stars.

Thus Vedanta initially begins with the world through explanation of its nature (before finally taking the sadhaka to Brahman which is the cause-underlying substratum of the world).

World - like town reflected in a mirror

The world is like a town reflected in a mirror. As reflection of one's own face in a mirror appears very real, similar is this world. The world, its objects-people and activities all appear as very real. But reflections aren't the same as original - even as one's left hand appears as the right hand in a mirror, similarly reflection of world isn't the same as original (as to what is the original, we will come to it). The reflection of the world, like any other reflection, exists only as long as there is reflection medium. But since it is a reflection it constantly changes (and ultimately undergoes death or destruction upon which time it merges unto its own source from which it came).

That the world is a reflection should make sadhakas not crave behind the world. Since majority of people are generally craving for the world therefore unless this craving ends, we cannot progress to the unknown Brahman. By saying that the world is just a reflection, Sankara beautifully tells us to develop dispassion towards the world (thus renouncing the world or renouncing attachment/association to the world in the mind). True dispassion ultimately isn't just renouncing the world externally but renouncing the reality-status of the world. We generally consider the world as real and this is the reason for most of the problems we face in life. For example, considering our friend as real we depend on the friend and have expectations. But since our friend constantly changes therefore one day our expectation will not met and thereby we will experience sorrow. Imagine that this expectation is upon the world which consists of so many objects and people; now we can imagine as to how sorrow we experience, all because of considering the world to be real. Once we know the world to be a mere reflection we will be able to develop dispassion (knowing the world to be not real) - thereby even though being in the world and performing activities we will not be affected by the world at all.

Now, where is this reflection situated? What is its medium and the original from which it is reflected?

World - inside oneself

The reflection of the world is perceived inside oneself - this means it is an imagination of the mind. This is easily understood through the age-old saying that as the thinking, so the person. Depending on our perspective (or thinking in the mind), the world also appears similarly. Thus for a business-man whose mind is filled with thoughts about business, the world is a playground for business and profit. For a bhakta, the world is filled in and out with Ishwara (as his mind is also filled with Ishwara). For a fame-oriented person, this world is a place where fame can be achieved. Thus it is very clear that the world is something conceived in the mind.

Ok, the world is inside oneself or in one's mind but since the mind is also constantly changing, the changing world cannot fully depend on the changing mind (any changing entity requires a changeless substratum - one changing entity cannot depend on another changing entity, in which case there should be a third changeless entity upon which the two changing entity depends). What is the changeless entity upon which the changing world depends?

World's substratum - one's own Self

When we analyze everything (absolutely everything) we find that there are just two entities - these are that of subject or seer and object or seen. Seen or object is the world. And this world is seen by the subject of Seer. This seer is called Self as it is one's own very nature. This Self is the very basis of the world as worldly experiences depend on this Self. If Self decides not to perceive the world, the world will not be perceived. If Self decides to let the world be perceived then the world is perceived. This is to just show that the world depends on the Self. The Self remains ever changeless at all times while the world constantly changes. Thus it is clear that the changing world has the changeless Self for its substratum. This changeless Self by being changeless in nature is kutastha or witness to the entire world (and its changes). Thus though earlier we said that if the Self perceives the world, the world exists; the Self doesn't interfere with the perception of the world. The Self by being changeless is ever blissful in itself.

It is in this blissful Self that the changing world is perceived. Now it can be questioned as to how the world is perceived in the changeless Self?

World - caused due to Maya

The world is perceived in the changeless Self due to Maya. Maya is the fictional illusory power of the Self through which the world is created. Due to one's own ignorance, the world is considered as real. And as a result, "I" or the real Self is veiled and the not-Self of "I" as body-mind-intellect is superimposed on the real Self. This is termed as adhyaasa or superimposition. Lack of knowledge of one's very nature of Self (and that the Self alone exists) leads a person to superimpose the not-Self on the Self; along with this the world is considered real (reality of the Self is superimposed on the world) and the Self is considered unreal (unreality of the world is superimposed on the Self).

Maya itself is something which doesn't really exist (yaa maa saa maayaa - that which doesn't exist is called Maya). This Maya or power of the Self (Ishwara) makes a person believe that this external world is real. This world, as has been explained earlier, is just a reflection of the Self.

World - its uniqueness

There are two unique features of this reflection-world - one is that though it is internal, still is perceived outside; two is that it doesn't really exist in the Self (there is no original from which the world is reflected).

Though the world which is in the substratum of the Self is internal (in the mind) still it appears external or outside. Thus we see objects and people as if outside (though they are just in our very mind). And since it is perceived as outside therefore we generally think as if the world has been created and thereby is perceived outside (or external).

The world also doesn't really exist in the Self. If the world really existed then it would not change. The fact that the world constantly changes itself shows that the world isn't real. And even if there is a possibility for the world to exist in the Self, it is impossible because the substratum of Self is changeless. In such a changeless substratum there cannot appear as changing entity. The only way the changing entity can appear is due to illusion and hence the world is said to be mithyaa or an illusion. Any illusion is ultimately unreal or not existing; thus the world doesn't really exist in the Self.

While proving anything it is required to support logic with examples (in which the logic is perceived). Is there any such example for logic relating to the world?

World - like dream world

The example we experience directly which proves all the logics about the world to be real is the dream world. The dream world is like a reflection in the medium of our mind (we can understand this clearly as the dream world is perceived with the mind alone). This dream world is in the mind but due to Maya or illusion, it appears as if outside. The dream world obviously is in the Self or "I" (the I which is the basis of both the waking and dream world - and is the substratum of the changing I we identify or associate with in both the waking and dream state). Thus dream world clearly shows that the waking world we experience is similar to the dream world - really not existing but appearing as existing. Hence Sankara says that even as the dream world appears very real while experiencing it but is known to be an illusion after waking up, similarly the waking world appears very real while experiencing it but is known to be an illusion after waking up from the sleep of ignorance).

To summarize, the world

- is a reflection
- is in the mind alone
- appears as if outside
- is in the substratum of Self
- doesn't really exist but is just an illusion

Self - non-dual in nature

The substratum of the world is the Self of the nature of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. This Self is non-dual in nature - this means that nothing apart from the Self exists. Since the world alone is that which is apart from the Self and since the world is just an illusion therefore it is very clear that the Self alone exists at all times. The scriptures also prove this through saying that before creation of the world, Self alone exists; this means that after creation, the Self alone exists. Thus it is clear that the world during creation also doesn't really exist. Therefore only the Self exists at all times.

Also by being of the nature of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss the Self is non-dual in nature. This is because there cannot be two existences or two consciousness as then there has to be some relation between both which would make them limited (and not blissful - unlimited alone is blissful). Moreover Consciousness is the light which illumines everything but isn't illumined by anything else. Therefore there cannot be two Consciousness as then one would illumine the other and the other would illumine the one thereby making both

non-Consciousness. Thus beyond doubt, the Self is non-dual in nature or the Self alone exists.

This is clearly also known through the analogy of dream. In dream there appears to be duality but once the dreamer wakes up he realizes that he alone exists; similarly during the waking state duality appears as if real but after waking up from this long sleep it is realized that the Self alone exists.

How does one wake up from this sleep of waking world?

Knowledge of Self - means of waking up from the world

Knowledge of the Self as that which alone exists is the only way to wake up from this world. The Self is Brahman by being of the nature of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss (Brahman's and Self's nature is the same and therefore both are the same). Knowledge of Brahman is obtained only from Vedanta as all other means are worldly in nature and only deal with the world. Vedanta on the other hand talks about Brahman as one's own very nature of Self (that Consciousness which pulsates inside as I-exist, I-exist). Therefore Vedanta is the only source of knowledge of Brahman. Once knowledge is gained a person wakes up from the sleep of the waking world.

The specialty of this sleep is that in this the waking world is considered as real. After gaining knowledge a person realizes that the world which was perceived (and might be perceived) is not real but just appearing as if real (like dream world). Even as after waking up from dream, the sorrows of dream vanish similarly after waking up from this waking world sorrows completely vanish and a person will be able to ever rejoice in bliss.

Self alone in bondage and liberation

Sankara beautifully says that the Self alone exists at all times. The Self alone appears as bondage and Self alone is liberated - ultimately the Self is ever-liberated. Sankara points this out beautifully through saying that whoever after waking up through knowledge realizes one's own non-dual Self. This truth that Self alone exists at all times is something a sadhaka should always remember. This is essential in order to not get dejected into thinking that I am in bondage and I am struggling for liberation etc. Though a sadhaka should strive for realization through knowledge, the thought that I am the Self which alone ever exists should be always there in the mind. This will help remain focused on the Self at all times -

this focus on the Self is essential as this is higher dispassion (passion towards truth of Self). Mere dispassion towards the world might lead us to alternative solutions and also might be temporary in nature. Along with dispassion of the world, there should arise passion towards the Self. This is possible easily through remembering that I am the ultimate reality of Brahman-Self which alone exists at all times - even while appearing as bondage, even while appearing to strive for liberation, whatever exists is the Self or I alone.

Knowledge through Dakshinamurthy - one's own Self

Ramana Maharshi beautifully tells that though the Self alone exists, due to a sadhaka's strong desire for moksha the Self (one's own nature) appears outside in the form of a Guru and through giving knowledge makes one introverted and realize one's very nature of Self. Guru is thus one who gives knowledge and this Guru isn't different from one's own Self as the Self alone exists at all times. Whether we call this Self as Self or Brahman or Ishwara or Atman, it doesn't matter as this entity is non-dual in nature and that which pulsates inside as I-exist, I-exist (Consciousness in nature).

When considering bondage-liberation, the Self appears as Guru and shishya. But ultimately and essentially the Self alone exists. This is beautifully brought out by Sankara who says that in whom the world appears and who realizes his own non-dual nature after waking up through knowledge, unto that Dakshinamurthy my prostrations.

Here we can remember the dhyana sloka for Dakshinamurthy:

ईश्वरो गुरुरात्मेति मूर्तिभेदविभागिने ।

व्योमवद्व्याप्तदेहाय श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये नमः ॥

īśvaro gururātmeti mūrtibhedavibhāginē
vyomavadvyāptadehāya śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye namaḥ ॥

I offer prostrations unto Dakshinamurthy who has body which is all-pervasive like space and who appears three-fold as Ishwara, Guru and Atman (Self).

May Dakshinamurthy as the substratum of the unreal world, giver of knowledge about the unreal world and who is one's own very nature of Self give us knowledge so that we will be able to wake up from this long dream and will be able to ever rejoice in bliss here and now itself.

Madhuraamritham

Hanuman Chalisa - Invocation

श्रीगुरु चरन सरोज रज निज मनु मुकुर सुधारि ।

बरनौ रघुबर बिमल जस जो दायकु फल चारि ॥

śrīguru carana saroja raja nija manu mukura sudhāri |
baranaum raghubara bimala jasa jo dāyaku phala cāri ||

With a mind purified through the dusts from the feet of Guru, I now am going to describe the pure (faultless) glory of Hanuman who is a great in the raghu's clan and capable of bestowing the four fruits (purusharthas).

बुद्धिहीन तनु जानिके सुमिरौ पवनकुमार ।

बल बुद्धि विद्या देहु मोहिं हरहु कलेस बिकार ॥

buddhihīna tanu jānike sumiraum pavanakumāra |
bala buddhi vidyā dehu mohim harahu kalesa bikāra ||

Knowing myself to be without intelligence I pray to you, Hanuman who is the son of Vayu, to bless me with strength, intelligence and knowledge; thereby remove all my afflictions.

Prayer - focus on the Lord and a right of sadhaka

We find that any work generally begins with prayer or invocation of Ishwara. And this prayer isn't like any normal prayer where each and everything in the world is sought out; instead in this prayer real strengths, real qualities that will lead us to the ultimate goal of life as moksha is sought out. This invocation is essential in order to ensure that we have the attention of Ishwara - another perspective to look at this is that through invocation we gain focus on Ishwara (the mind which is distracted into the external world starts bringing focus back unto the Lord).

As Chinmaya very beautifully points out, prayer isn't a meek calling out for help from Ishwara. But it is a right of the sadhaka as Ishwara is our very father (mother). Thus anything that we need from Ishwara has to be rightfully asked - with respect but not meekly. As it is said, we will not get anything unasked therefore a sadhaka has to ask anything and everything unto Ishwara.

But asking is also an art where we should know as to what to ask. Going to Bill Gates and asking just a dollar is not intelligent; similarly to this is asking worldly things from Ishwara. From Ishwara, we should ask nothing but moksha and moksha alone - as this alone will put an end to all our desires and this is what the coveted treasure with Ishwara (which alone should be sought out).

Prayers also help in getting rid of the ego. Generally people are egoistic in nature that they think they can control their own lives and they don't help from anybody else. It is through knowledge and experience that a person realizes that it is exactly opposite - in order to cross over this ocean of samsara characterized by sorrows and sufferings, we have to seek Ishwara (as Ishwara alone can get rid of sorrows completely).

Dust of guru's feet - purifying

Sanatana dharma often talks about activities through symbolism rather than literally mentioning something. Not understanding this many people literally implement activities only to find out that it doesn't serve the real purpose of taking us towards the goal of moksha. All activities prescribed in the sanatana dharma lead directly or indirectly to the goal of moksha (and if this purpose isn't served then either the activity isn't performed correctly or there is misunderstanding of the activity or essence of the activity).

The Guru's feet and the dust from Guru's feet all signify an individual's surrender unto the Guru. This surrender is so completely that one is equivalent to the dust under the Guru's feet; even as the dust is insignificant similarly a sadhaka who surrenders unto the Guru is nothing at all. Only when ego or individuality gets destroyed, can a person start progressing towards the goal of moksha. As AMMA always says, only a child can grow as the child knows that it knows nothing and therefore there is sincere desire to know whereas an elderly person thinks he knows and therefore will not let any knowledge or advice pass to him from others (even if the adviser is one's own Guru).

That which obstructs a sadhaka to gain knowledge (and thereby progress to the goal of moksha) is the impurities of the mind. Impurities of the mind can be put into just two of likes and dislikes. These likes and dislikes when strengthened get converted into attachments and aversions. And as the Lord points out in Gita, these will eventually lead to destruction of the person through loss of memory and intelligence. The entire world which is perceived through a mind filled with likes and dislikes is tainted and therefore will lead to

only sorrows. In order to see the world as filled in and out with Ishwara, a person has to first purify the mind of likes and dislikes. When individuality is lost through surrender unto Guru, automatically the mind is purified of likes and dislikes (only when individuality is there or differences are perceived will there be likes and dislikes; a person who has surrendered unto the Guru knows nothing apart from the Guru and therefore is devoid of likes and dislikes).

Purushaartha - four-fold goal of life

When a sadhaka attains purity of mind, then clarity of mind leads to understanding the four-fold goal of life. Though this is called four-fold yet it all focuses on the one goal of moksha which is the ultimate purushaartha (object or fruit for humans). The first three of dharma or righteousness, artha or objects and kaama or desires all focus around moksha and they should guide a sadhaka slowly to progress towards moksha. Even as a driver with focus on his destination, drives a car while interacting with friends, stopping for breaks etc. similarly a sadhaka should observe dharma, artha and kaama while always remaining focused on moksha.

Moksha isn't possible without the grace of a person who has attained moksha even as the path to destination can only be shown by a person who has already reached the destination. This person who has already attained moksha is the Guru who is abiding as a mukta purusha or as the ultimate reality of Brahman. Such a Guru is essential to guide a sadhaka and the Guru's grace is achieved only through surrender.

Guru and Ishwara

In Bhagavatham we find avadhoota talking about many of his Gurus. Thus we find that anything and everything in the world which has good qualities is a Guru from whom we can learn to imbibe the good quality. Who is a better Guru than the great Hanuman? The greatness of Hanuman is that he was a bhaktha of Rama but it wouldn't be wrong to say that he overshadowed Rama. People look upto not Rama but upto Hanuman as to how to attain the blissful state of moksha through devotion and knowledge.

Here we find that the Guru upon whom surrender happens is Ishwara himself (in one of his form or advent on Earth). This Guru of Hanuman is capable of bestowing the four purushaarathas. This means that anything and everything that we need in life can be bestowed by the Guru of Hanuman (it doesn't matter whether it is bhoga or moksha).

Though we may think that Hanuman is a monkey AMMA gives many reasons to show that even a monkey can be a Guru. Considering a monkey as a Guru shows the rich culture of considering everything in the world as Guru. Our mind is like a monkey jumping from one thought to another (about objects and people of the world). Who better to guide this mind than the great monkey who was ever-realized and focused on the ultimate reality of Rama? Thus Hanuman is worshipped as a Guru.

We also find Tulasidas realizing, as per stories through the harder way, that the way to reach Rama is through his devotees. And since Hanuman was the prime devotee of Rama therefore to reach Rama one has to go through Hanuman. Thus Tulasidas offers prostrations to Hanuman through praising Hanuman and requesting guidance to the purusharthas.

Knowledge of ignorance - first step to moksha

Though we can say that essentially everybody is blissful Brahman still this blissful Brahman isn't directly experienced. Thus knowing that one is ignorant of Brahman is the first step towards moksha (realization of the ultimate reality of blissful Brahman). Even as a person who realizes that he doesn't know mathematics alone will be able to learn mathematics, similarly only a person who has knowledge of his ignorance of Brahman will be able to progress towards realization of Brahman. Therefore Tulasidas beautifully says that I am devoid of intelligence - intelligence or buddhi is where knowledge dawns (or knowledge is valid or active).

Once a person knows that he is ignorant then his desire to get rid of ignorance is very strong and therefore he starts seeking the Guru more and more. This seeking more and more makes the sadhaka experience the ever-present grace of the Guru and thereby through knowledge makes him progress quicker towards the goal of moksha.

Removing obstacles and gaining qualities

A person who wants to attain any goal should observe the duo of removing obstacles and gaining qualities that will help in the goal. Obstacles are in the form of distraction from the goal. The goal of moksha is attained through non-dual vision or seeing everything as the ultimate reality of Brahman. So anything which emphasizes on duality is an obstacle and such obstacles have to be first removed in order for the sadhaka to progress in the path. Even as when there are ditches in the road we will not be able to drive the car similarly when obstacles are there a sadhaka will not be able to progress in the path towards

moksha. Thus a sadhaka prays to get rid of obstacles and then gain good qualities in order to progress quickly towards the goal of moksha.

Good qualities that are mentioned by Tulasidas here is strength, intelligence and knowledge - all of these are essential in order to move towards the goal of moksha. Strength is essential in order to survive the passions, obstacles of the world and remain focused on the goal of moksha. Intelligence is required in order to make right decisions in life which will not take one away from the goal of moksha and will take one closer to the goal of moksha. Knowledge is inevitable in that it is the only way to eternal bliss - knowledge of the scriptures that one Brahman alone exists as the substratum of everything and as our very nature of Consciousness is the direct way to moksha. Thus all of these good qualities are essential for a sadhaka in order to progress towards the goal of moksha.

Tulasidas also beautifully picks up qualities which are abundantly present in Hanuman; in other words Hanuman is an embodiment of these qualities and therefore Hanuman is capable of providing these qualities to a sadhaka who surrenders unto him.

May we all strive to surrender unto the great Hanuman thereby getting rid of ignorance and through attaining good qualities we will be able to progress quickly towards the goal of moksha and will be able to ever rejoice in bliss here and now itself.

Praadeshikam

Hari Naama Keerthanam - 1

Omkaaramaayaporul moonaay pirizhudane
 Aankaaramaayathinnu thaanthanne saakshi
 Ithu bodhamvaruthuvathinnaalaayi ninna
 Paramaachaarya rupa hari naaraayanaaya nama

That truth which is of the nature of OM (AUM) became split into three and immediately it become ahamkaara (the big ego of Brahma); and for this, truth alone was the witness; who is responsible to make one realize this truth, that supreme teacher-form Hari who is Narayana, unto him my prostrations.

Ultimate truth – the starting point

Whether it be Upanishads or Gita or any other scriptural text, we find that initially the ultimate reality of Brahman is praised in its true nature or as one's Guru or favorite deity. Thus we can say that the starting point of everything is the ultimate truth alone.

Why is it essential to start from the ultimate truth?

Because everything came from this ultimate truth. Thus literally the ultimate truth is the starting point of the entire world and existence as we find in the world. Without this ultimate truth, the world cannot exist nor will there any other existence also.

When a company's annual celebration happens, we generally remember and praise the owner or the founder of the company. The ultimate truth by being the founder of the entire world is remembered in all the scriptures. And those who follow the path set by the scriptures will also remember this ultimate truth in the beginning itself.

Remembrance of the ultimate truth at the beginning also ensures that our focus is on this ultimate truth from the beginning itself. This ultimate truth by being the starting point is also the ending point as well – as it ever remains the same. And each moment we praise this ultimate truth, we move further towards this ultimate truth – when we reach the starting point, all seeking ends even as the search ends when we return back to our home. That the ultimate reality is where everything ends is clearly shown through the experience of deep sleep where we all merge unto this ultimate truth.

Ultimate truth of Brahman – denoted by AUM

The ultimate truth is defined in the scriptures as Brahman – that which is biggest or pervades the entire world and that which appears as this world. It is also denoted by the word of AUM. The Lord says om ithi ekaaksharam brahma – the one word of om is Brahman.

AUM consists of three parts generally (along with a fourth part which is the basis of the three). Akaara, Ukaara and Makaara. Akaara denotes start of things or creation; Ukaara denotes sustenance or protection of the world; Makaara denotes end of things or destruction. Thus in this one word of AUM is mentioned the nature of Brahman as that from which the world is created, that in which the world resides or is protected and that unto which the world merges after its destruction.

Any entity requires a name in order to call or even remember. And more essential name is in order to call out to an entity. The word of AUM is used for upaasana in order to remember Brahman. Thus all mantas start with AUM and people who are used to dhyana will understand the greatness of chanting of this word (it gives great focus to the mind during dhyana).

One to Three

The letter of AUM or the entity of Brahman is one alone but for creation it gets split into three. Thus from Brahman comes Brahma, Vishnu and Siva performing respectively the activities of creation, protection and destruction. This one to three or many denotes the start of creation or duality.

Vedanta generally follows the sankhya way of creation process – it isn't necessary to get into the details of this as that would only lead to confusion for sadhakas. What is important is to remember that the one entity of Brahman became many. Brahman didn't become many through any external help but Brahman itself became many through thinking that "let me multiply".

Mundaka Upanishad says that creation of the world from Brahman is like web weaved by a spider. Even as the spider is both the material and efficient cause for its web, similarly Brahman alone is the material and efficient cause for the world. If we argue that spider creates web for its selfish purpose then the Upanishad says that Brahman creates the world

like herbs come out of earth; earth or prithvi doesn't have any selfish motive as herbs/plants etc. are for others only. Thus Brahman has no selfish purpose for creation of the world. Now if it is argued that prithivi or earth is insentient whereas Brahman is sentient and the creation of Brahman, the world, is insentient; and as to how insentient can come from sentient, the Upanishad says that creation of the world from Brahman is like hair coming out of the body of a human being. Hair is insentient whereas the human being is sentient; similarly from sentient Brahman, insentient world is created.

Now if it is argued as to what is the purpose of this creation, the answer is that this creation is just a divine play of Brahman. This means that there is no creation at all. Creation is just an illusion in Brahman.

How can we say creation doesn't exist?

Brahman - the only witness to creation

Ezhutthacchan says that Brahman is the only witness to creation or one becoming many. Since it is mentioned that Brahman alone exists, before creation and it is said that Brahman is mere witness to creation process therefore creation has to be just an illusion. The creation from Brahman will affect Brahman unless this creation isn't there at all. Hence it is said that creation is a play of Brahman. Play has no reality at all. Even as the dream world is created out of the dreamer, similarly this world is created out of Brahman. But the world doesn't really exist in Brahman though it is perceived; this is similar to the dream world perceived as real at that time but known to be unreal after waking up.

Thus in the very first sloka it is beautifully mentioned that Brahman alone exists irrespective of whether creation is perceived or not. This ultimate truth that creation doesn't exist at all is to be remembered at all times. This is one of the fundamental concept of Vedanta and once we remember this we will not fall a trap to the world (and its passions). Thereby we will be able to go beyond this world and realize the ultimate reality of Brahman.

But is it that simple to go beyond the world?

No, in order to go beyond the world we need a master who will guide us to the goal of Brahman or moksha. This master has to be one who is ever realized (or has already attained the goal and is abiding as the goal) for if not then it will be a drowning person being helped by another drowning person or a blind person leading another blind person.

Brahman – Guru

The Guru who is the supreme acharya is the Lord or Brahman himself. Ramana Maharshi hence used to say that the Self of Brahman appears in front of oneself as Guru when there is strong desire for moksha in the sadhaka's mind. Guru is acharya because Guru just doesn't preach theoretical knowledge but sets standards along with theory in order to make theory a practical direct experience; and rather than just preaching for others, the Guru also lives these principles.

Such a Guru is Brahman and therefore any devata that we consider as the ultimate truth. Some puranas claim Siva is ultimate; yet others claim Devi as ultimate; others claim Vishnu as ultimate. In all these cases these devatas are Brahman alone as they are the head of trinities who control the activities of creation, protection and destruction.

Guru – giving knowledge

This Guru gives us knowledge of Brahman. The words of Guru are resonances of the scriptures but they have immense power in that they are the direct experience of the Guru (rather than being mere theoretical words). Even as the description of Taj Mahal given by a person who has seen Taj Mahal will be very effective, similarly the words of the Guru will be effective. But in order for the Guru's words to be effective, the sadhaka has to become a shishya through surrendering unto the Guru. This surrender is beautifully denoted through namah or prostration. Prostration or surrender is nothing but constant remembrance of the ultimate reality of Brahman as alone existing at all times.

The Guru of Brahman is Vishnu or all-pervasive by being the very essence or substratum of the entire illusory (unreal) world which appears in him. He is Hari in that he attracts everything by being blissful in nature. He is narayana in that he is the goal of nara or human beings (the ultimate goal of human beings); he is also narayana as he is one who resides in knowledge (by being knowledge in nature). Each and every names of the Lord directly or indirectly point us towards Brahman alone – though there may be attributes to various names, they all are directed towards Brahman or realization of Brahman alone.

To this Brahman who alone existed before creation, who became the creation, who was the unchanging witness to creation and who gives us knowledge in the form of Guru for realization, unto this Brahman my prostrations.

Essence of scriptures

We find the great master of Ezhutthacchan giving the essence of the scriptures in the very first sloka of Hari Naama Keerthanam. This is following the rule that beginning and end of a work should be about the subject-matter (as that denotes the subject-matter or import of a work).

It would be good to remember the truth of Vedanta that Brahman alone exists, the world is just an illusion in Brahman and the Consciousness which pulsates inside as I-exist, I-exist is Brahman alone. Effectively, Brahman alone exists. Constant remembrance of this ultimate reality of Brahman as narayana is implementation of knowledge and this will take us direct to the goal of moksha, thereby making us ever rejoice in bliss.

May we all prostrate to the ultimate reality of Brahman so that we will be able to surrender unto Brahman through constant remembrance and thereby through realization will be able to ever rejoice in bliss here and now itself.

Acharyasmrithi

Sureshwaracharya

Great masters are often found out through the great shishyas they leave behind. Even as only a lit lamp can lit another lamp, similarly only a realized master can spread the realization (and knowledge) to others (including shishyas). In this aspect we cannot find any better great master than Sankara (Adi Sankaracharya). Not only was his works peak in themselves, he left behind four great giants each distinct in their own aspect. Even as there are four Vedas, similarly Sankara left behind four great masters entrusting an ashram established in one of the four directions of India and allocating one Veda to be looked after. And since then the tradition of Sankaracharyas has continued from these four giants (shishyas of Sankara).

Among these four shishyas of Sankara, one hand there was Hastamalaka well established in Brahman and there was learnt Padmapada; and there also was Totaka who through devotion to Sankara began well-versed in Vedanta and Sanskrit as well. And last but not the least, there is the great Sureshwara who cannot be ignored either by students/scholars of Advaita Vedanta nor by other systems of Vedanta. This is because he has many masterly works under his name. The depth of his knowledge along with clarity of thoughts is what sets his works aside as great by themselves.

That it is tough to even do research on his works itself shows the greatness of these works. This isn't due to his works not clearly conveying concepts but because they are deeply filled with concepts and also because some of his works are voluminous in nature.

May we all offer our prostrations to this great master of Sankara so that we will be able to understand the import of the scriptures as Brahman and through constant contemplation of Brahman as pervading the entire world and as our very nature of Consciousness we we will be able to ever rejoice in bliss in the state of moksha here and now itself.

Vartikakara

Vartika is a very special type of commentary. It is a commentary in which ukta, anukta and durukta are provided. Ukta is detailed explanation or mere explanation of whatever has been already said in the original work. Anukta is whatever has been missed out in the original work. And durukta is whatever has been wrongly mentioned in the original work.

Thus in this type of commentary the author can go against the original work providing his own views or interpretations of the subject at hand.

Generally vartikas are in verse form (though they can be in prose form as well). Thus they are tougher to write than other commentaries. Vartika since can go against the original work is therefore rarely taken up as the reason for differing from the original work has to be strong or valid enough lest vartika itself will become invalid (or void for lack of clarity in differing from the original work).

Vidyaranya's Madhava Sankara Digvijaya says that Sankara asked Sureshwaracharya to write vartikas; though many claim that these statements may be just fictitious and just from the imagination of Vidyaranya, there is nothing wrong to assume that Sankara might be asked Sureshwaracharya to write vartikas. This is because vartikas are commentaries which go against the original and by being a traditionalist Sureshwara wouldn't go against Sankara unless instructed upon by Sankara (this being the main reason).

Since all of Sureshwaracharya's works are vartikas (and he being almost the sole vartika writer in the times around Sankara) therefore he is called vartikakara in Vedanta (similar to Kumarila Bhatta being called vartikakara in mimamsa for writing slokavartika and tantravartika).

Works

Sureshwaracharya wrote Vartikas on Sankara's Brihadaranyaka Upanishad Bhashya and Taittiriya Upanishad Bhashya, Vartika titled Maanasollasa on Sankara's Dakshinamurthy astakam, Panchikarana Vartika and Naishkarmya Siddhi, an independent work on Vedanta.

Though the number of works is very less, few of the works are voluminous. The main two works of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad Bhashya Vartika and Naishkarmya Siddhi themselves can be said to be the major works of Sureshwaracharya. Both are exhaustive in nature and have been commented upon by other acharyas as well (showing that the works are not just voluminous but deep in concepts that writing commentaries are essential to bring out the meaning properly).

Concepts

Various concepts mentioned in the works of Sureshwaracharya can definitely be said to be very true to Sankara's works (or true to Vedanta itself). Thus Sacchidanandendra Saraswathi says that Sureshwara is the only acharya after Sankara who is true to Sankara and all other acharyas have misinterpreted Sankara's words in one or the other way.

It is almost impossible to mention even few parts of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad Bhashya Vartika but there are few places which stand out and one among them is criticizing of the concept of bhedha (or difference). Though later acharyas like Sri Harsha, Chitsukha and others have vehemently criticized the concept of bhedha, we can say that the seed was set in Sureshwaracharya's work. And a proper understanding of this work will ensure that parts of works like Vyaasa Teertha's Nyaayaamritam and Madhva's three khandanam works are all directly wrong (or countering them is not at all required as they are faulty and can be proven so through Sureshwaracharya's work itself).

When coming to Naishkarmya Siddhi we find Sureshwaracharya explaining the various main concepts of Vedanta in four chapters (three chapters as the fourth is just a summary). Sureshwaracharya proves beyond doubt that karma cannot ever lead to liberation and thereby criticizes karma thoroughly. Along with criticism of karma Sureshwaracharya also explains the neti neti concept (that I am not the body, I am not the mind etc.) along with explanation of mahavakya. Amidst all these we also find Sureshwaracharya criticizing the view of jnaana karma samucchaya vaada – the theory that jnaana and karma go hand in hand (Ramanujacharya loosely follows jnaana karma samucchaya vaada).

Though all of the above can be easily accomplished through any independent work the greatness of Naishkarmya Siddhi lies in that it is true to Sankara's words. This means that Sureshwaracharya doesn't really bring up new concepts or concepts which haven't already been addressed by Sankara. And Sankara being a true traditionalist doesn't bring up his own views but only the views of traditionalists (and the views of Vedanta), we find that through Sureshwaracharya the age-old tradition passed down from Guru to shishya is maintained without any break (or fault).

Beyond doubt thus we can say that this great shishya of Sankara continued the tradition of Vedanta through his beautiful works. These works themselves are monuments and even

glancing of such monuments is enough to lead sadhakas towards the goal of moksha, let alone mastering these works.

May we all offer our prostrations unto this great acharya so that through his grace we will be able to cross over this ocean of samsara and thereby through realization of our very nature of blissful Brahman will be able to ever rejoice in bliss here and now itself.

Vedanta Pariksha

This month all questions are on Vishnu.

- 1) How many avataras are commonly considered for Vishnu?
 - a) 24
 - b) 10
 - c) 1
 - d) 5
- 2) How many avataras of Vishnu are mentioned by Bhagavatham?
 - a) 25
 - b) 23
 - c) 24
 - d) 22
- 3) Which avatara is mentioned by Bhagavatham as the purna avatara?
 - a) Rama
 - b) Vaamana
 - c) Krishna
 - d) Narasimha
- 4) In which avatara did Vishnu forget knowledge and thereby had to gain it again?
 - a) Krishna
 - b) Matsya
 - c) Narasimha
 - d) Rama
- 5) Vishnu helped Siva by getting rid of this asura who was given a boon by Siva. Name the asura
 - a) Jaya-Vijaya
 - b) Mahishasura
 - c) Bhasmasura
 - d) Tarakasura
- 6) Who all came from the navel of Vishnu?
 - a) Brahma
 - b) Brahma and Siva
 - c) Siva
 - d) Indra

- 7) Which avatara of Vishnu is called upendra?
- a) Matsya
 - b) Vaamana
 - c) Krishna
 - d) Varaaha
- 8) From whom to whom was Vishnu Sahasranama instructed?
- a) Krishna to Arjuna
 - b) Vishnu to Brahma
 - c) Bhishma to Yudhisthira
 - d) Vyaasa to Shuka
- 9) How many times did Vishnu take birth as the son of the father-mother of Devas?
- a) 2
 - b) 1
 - c) 0
 - d) 3
- 10) As per Sankara's bhashya on the Vishnu Sahasranama, what is the meaning of the word Vishnu?
- a) One who is beautiful
 - b) One who is powerful
 - c) One who is all-pervasive
 - d) One who is invincible

Watch out the next magazine for answers to this quiz. Email your responses to admin@vedantatattva.org and find out how good your scores really are.

Answers to previous months' quiz

1. d Jnaaneshwar
2. c Mata Amritanandamayi
3. b Madhusudana Saraswathi
4. c Madhvacharya
5. b Ramana Maharshi
6. c Venkataraman
7. c Poonthaanam
8. b Veda Vyaasa
9. d Rama Tirtha
10. c Tapovan Maharaj

Marks for quiz

Aparna - 10

Sunanda Amma - 10

Congrats to Aparna (interestingly only one person attempted the quiz; hopefully we will find more people interested in testing their own knowledge; irrespective of whatever marks we score, what matters is trying to find out where we stand with respect to our knowledge in our own cultural heritage).

Correction: Very sorry for missing out sunanda amma's answers. Sunanda amma also has scored 100% in this not-very-easy quiz. Congrats to amma too. And thanks and appreciation in attempting this quiz.

Anukramaanika Nirdesham

1. Editorial – a general message
2. Upanishad Vivaranam – verse-by-verse explanation of Upanishad (Mundaka Upanishad)
3. Gitaamritham – verse-by-verse explanation of a chapter of Gita (Bhakti Yoga, 12th chapter)
4. Prakarana Prakaashah – illumination of a prakarana grantha (Dakshinamurthy Ashtakam)
5. Madhuraamritham – a devotional/song work explained verse-by-verse (Hanuman Chalisa)
6. Praadeshikam – detailed explanation of a regional work (Hari Naama Keerthanam)
7. Acharya Smrithi – remembering an acharya through brief life-history and works
8. Vedanta Pariksha – Q & A

1. Comments
2. Suggestions
3. Corrections (word, sloka, content etc.)
4. Would like to see specific content
5. Would like to contribute (through research from websites, don't need to write up the content yourself)

Mail admin@vedantatattva.org.

Feel free to forward this to anyone who might be interested.

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